# Original Paper

# Unleashing Competitive Advantage through Digital Marketing:

## Expanding Customer Access and Social Platform Development

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#### Abstract

Digital marketing represents a modern approach to marketing. This type of marketing is an important tool for gaining a competitive advantage. The primary benefits of digital marketing for the business sector include providing personalized attention to each customer and cultivating a sense of uniqueness and added value for the company. To effectively apply digital marketing in business practice, it is essential to develop a framework for evaluating digital marketing functions that consider the market's regional socio-cultural characteristics. Based on this premise, the present study has identified the functions of digital marketing and its role in the development of competitive advantage. To achieve this goal, 71 active marketing experts in the American food industry were selected, and a standard questionnaire was distributed to them. The data was analyzed using the least squares linear regression model. The research results indicated that website development, expanding customer access, utilizing social platforms, and leveraging email for digital marketing all contribute to gaining a competitive advantage.

### Keywords

digital marketing, competitive advantage, website expansion, customer access expansion, social platform development

## 1. Introduction

In the present day, businesses are increasingly acknowledging the importance of establishing digital connections with customers, as opposed to previous years. (Abirou & Abghour, 2022) Moreover, digital technologies and devices such as smartphones, smart products, and artificial intelligence hold the promise of significant changes in consumer lifestyles in the near future. The advancement of digital technology is reshaping marketing processes and strategies, with substantial implications for research in the domain of digital marketing. (Arora & Sahney, 2019) This evolution has paved the way for a new

trajectory for marketing managers of organizations (Rashid et al., 2021). Additionally, digital technologies are redefining the concept of products and services, enabling the provision of new value propositions to customers and enhancing products and services through digital tools. These trends offer opportunities for customizing customer service (Bhatti & Rehman, 2020). Scholars such as Suh and Chow (2021) have identified the relatively low cost and minimal financial investment required as the reasons for utilizing digital marketing as a communication and marketing tool in these organizations. Consequently, marketing managers are exerting significant efforts to promote interaction, establish online relationships, and ultimately achieve digital marketing objectives (Suh & Chow, 2021).

Conversely, in today's fiercely competitive environment, one of the most critical strategies for service organizations to attain a sustainable competitive advantage is to enhance communication and advertising through digital platforms. Therefore, implementing digital marketing strategies in market activities facilitates and cultivates the strategic behaviors of marketing managers in the digital realm (Bowden & Mirzaei, 2021). Consequently, digital marketing is regarded as a crucial component of strategic assets and new marketing tools. The gathering and assessment of information about rival companies are pivotal for formulating a new digital marketing approach. The development of digital marketing capabilities necessitates providing requisite training and skills with a digital approach. Furthermore, the growth of commercial enterprises should be aligned with societal needs at all levels. (Busca & Bertrandias, 2021) Additionally, the development and expansion of businesses in the digital sphere require identifying and eliminating barriers and creating conducive environments for advancing service activities (Amira & Nermine, 2020).

The adoption of digital and social media approaches has gradually emerged as one of the most crucial marketing strategies for organizations. Particularly in the context of contemporary trends such as Industry 4.0, artificial intelligence, and the metaverse, digital and social media play a pivotal role in expanding people's social lives and comprehending consumer behavior. Consequently, for marketers and individuals aiming to stay abreast of market trends, "digital marketing" has become an indispensable paradigm in the realm of business (Vidal-Tomás, 2021).

The efficacy of digital marketing has been demonstrated across various business sectors, yet its application in financial markets presents distinct challenges. Financial institutions' marketing teams encounter a significant obstacle in the form of digital transformation. The digital landscape offers numerous opportunities for the financial services industry in terms of customer acquisition and retention (Yoga et al., 2019). Within each economic entity, a close correlation exists between its capacity to generate operational cash flows and its requisite capital needs for the subsequent period (Abirou & Abghour, 2022). Analogous to other behavioral phenomena, the adoption of digital marketing in the capital market can be examined through the principles delineated in behavioral theories. Notably, the theory of planned behavior stands out as a robust framework for forecasting user behavior. This theory elucidates the rationales behind the acceptance or rejection of a phenomenon, subsequently influencing the type of behavior exhibited by individuals based on various components (Soomro et al., 2022).

Digital Marketing. In contemporary business operations, effective and efficient management is crucial for success. (Das & Mishra, 2022) Among the various management concepts, "marketing management" stands out as particularly impactful. In the current competitive landscape, effectively selling products and services is paramount. (Goic, Rojas, & Savvedra. 2021) Traditional sales methods are no longer sufficient in the modern, technologically advanced world, as evidenced by the challenges posed by the COVID-19 crisis. (Gole, 2021) Businesses that neglected to invest in their virtual sales infrastructure suffered significant losses; some even faced complete failure. Digital marketing, which leverages Internet-based tools to facilitate buying and selling on online platforms, has emerged as a powerful strategy in response to these challenges. (Lewandowski & Schulthei. 2022)

Consumer buying behavior is a critical aspect of marketing, as it encompasses the decision-making process and the desire for a personalized connection with brands. (Lung Wu, & Ki Ma, 2022) Consequently, businesses are shifting their focus from traditional sales approaches to innovative methods that maximize influence and customer engagement through digital tools. This shift has led to the fragmentation of mass markets into diverse sectors, emphasizing the importance of personalization and customized products for different customer segments. Therefore, closely monitoring consumer purchasing behavior in digital environments is essential for businesses. (Patrick & Choon hee, 2021; Pebrianti, Tanwira, & Ahmadi, 2021)

The concept of "digital marketing" has allowed businesses to align their sales strategies with modern technology and cater to the evolving needs of consumers. Various digital marketing channels, such as email, mobile, and content marketing, significantly influence consumer behavior. (Uperti, Uhtala, Henrikki, & Pekka, 2021) Understanding consumer behavior is crucial, as consumers are the primary drivers of organizational success. Ultimately, the goals of marketing and sales departments revolve around consumer purchase decisions, repeat purchases, and the creation of loyalty and satisfaction.

## 2. Research Background

The internet, social media, mobile apps, and other digital communication technologies have become essential aspects of daily life for billions of people globally. (Wang, Xiong, & Olya, 2020) Recent statistics from January 2020 show that 4.54 billion individuals are active internet users, representing 59% of the world's population. (Yasin, Li´ebana-Cabanillas, Porcu, & Kayef, 2020) Social media usage is also widespread, with 2.95 billion active users in 2019, projected to increase to nearly 3.43 billion by 2023. Digital and social media marketing offer cost-effective ways for companies to achieve their marketing goals. For instance, Facebook has over 50 million registered businesses, and more than 88% of businesses use Twitter for marketing purposes. (Statistica, 2020) These technologies are also utilized for public service awareness and political promotions. Organizations have adapted by integrating digital and social media into their marketing strategies as people spend more time online for information, products, and services. (Rai, 2020)

Herredia et al. (2022) conducted a study entitled "The Influence of Digital Capabilities on Organizational Performance: The Mediating Role of Technological Capabilities." The study aimed to propose a model that elucidates the impact of digital capabilities on company performance at the organizational level. Additionally, it sought to explore the mediating role of technological capabilities and the Human Development Index (HDI) in elucidating company performance. The study utilized data from the World Bank's organizational surveys in 2020, encompassing 999 companies from 27 countries. The researchers employed the partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) method to test the proposed model. The findings revealed that digital capabilities positively affect company performance solely through technological capabilities. Furthermore, the study empirically demonstrated that digital skills have a more indirect impact on company performance in economies with low Human Development Index (HDI) compared to those with high HDI.

Similarly, Liu et al. (2022) conducted a study titled "The Influence of Digital Marketing Capabilities and Blockchain Technology on Organizational Performance and Psychology," posited that digitalization plays a pivotal role in transforming the Omni structure. The study aimed to investigate the impact of Digital Marketing Capabilities (DMC) and blockchain technology on customer communication capabilities (CLC), market sensing capabilities (MSCS), customer brand engagement (CBE), and company performance in China. This quantitative study utilized random sampling to collect data, employing a structured questionnaire and a 5-point Likert scale. A total of 311 questionnaires were distributed to employees in omni-structure industries. The research hypothesis was tested using the structural equation modeling (SEM) technique. The results revealed a significant correlation and direct impact between MSCS, CLC, DMCS, and company performance. Notably, the impact of DMCs on CBE was found to be significant. The mediating effect of MSCs and CLC on the relationship between DMCs and company performance was also significant. The study concluded that the performance of organizations within the Omni structure depends on the level of DMCs, which in turn affects the level of MSCs, CLCs, and CBE.

Han and Gu (2021) conducted a study titled "The Relationship Between Inclusive Digital Finance and High-Tech Enterprise Innovation Performance: The Role of Debt and Equity Financing." The study investigated the association between financial inclusion, digital technology, external financing, and innovation performance of high-tech firms in China. The choice of corporate financing methods is a critical aspect of organizational behavioral psychology, and different financing models are likely to impact organizational performance, particularly in the digital economy context. Therefore, drawing on resource dependence theory and financing constraint theory, the current study utilized panel data from the China Stock Market and Accounting Research (CSMAR) database, covering the period from 2011 to 2020 and encompassing 112 companies in the Yangtze River Delta region. The results indicate that the Digital Financial Inclusion Index (DFIIC) is positively and significantly correlated with the innovation performance of high-tech companies. The study found that greater debt financing has a more significant impact on promoting innovation performance through digital financial inclusion. However, the depth of

use of DFIIC did not significantly promote innovation performance. The interaction effect between the extent of coverage and external financing aligns with the findings of DFIIC. The study also demonstrates that equity financing enhances the depth of DFIIC usage in public companies, while debt financing promotes the coverage of private companies.

Chinakidzwa and Phiri (2020) conducted a study titled "The Effect of Digital Marketing Capabilities on the Performance of Small and Medium Enterprises," which examined the influence of digital marketing capabilities on the performance outcomes of small and medium-sized agricultural processing enterprises in the middle and final market segments. To achieve this objective, a survey of 298 managers and owners of small and medium enterprises in Harare, Zimbabwe, was conducted using a quota and stratified sampling approach. The survey distributed a closed-ended questionnaire through elimination and selection and interview-based methods. Statistical analysis was conducted using STATA version 15. Multiple logistic regression was employed to assess the impact of digital marketing capabilities on market performance. The findings revealed that developing and implementing a digital marketing strategy, digital market innovation, e-marketing, and leadership capabilities positively affect mid-market outcomes such as customer awareness, customer attitudes, availability, and brand associations. However, only the ability to develop and execute a digital strategy is positively associated with end-market performance outcomes, including sales growth, market share, and related profitability. These results suggest that agro-processors must develop digital marketing capabilities that enable them to move beyond average market results to achieve core business objectives such as profitability, sales growth, and market share rather than just focusing on market results. The middle ground is not sufficient for business sustainability.

#### 3. Research Method

The main aim of this article is to examine and explore the competitive advantage obtained through the use of digital marketing to enhance customer reach and foster social platform development. It seeks to offer recommendations for more efficient implementation of digital marketing strategies by businesses operating within the American food industry. The article involves presenting the theoretical framework and analysis of digital marketing from the perspective of scholars. Drawing from the analysis and findings of a questionnaire survey, the study underscores the significance of digital marketing functions in attaining a competitive edge. A questionnaire survey was carried out to collect the viewpoints, attitudes, and satisfaction levels of selected managers within a population aged between 18 and 80 years. The study utilized a confidence interval of 5% with a confidence level of 95%, making an error rate of 5% acceptable. The sample size was determined to be 71 respondents. A quantitative assessment method was employed to analyze the data. The survey analysis of the role of digital marketing functions in achieving a competitive advantage comprises four sections. The first section focuses on the overall demographic profile of the respondents. The second section discusses the development of websites in the digital landscape. The third section is dedicated to assessing the impact of expanding

customer access for seeking or receiving services. The fourth section concentrates on the development of social platforms. Various scientific methods such as extraction, description, comparative analysis, inference, and induction, along with mathematical and statistical methods, were used in the data processing to evaluate survey data using IBM SPSS statistical software. Research hypotheses were formulated based on the theoretical framework and survey results to accomplish the article's primary objective.

Hypothesis 1: Web expansion does not affect the competitive advantage of the US food manufacturing industry.

Hypothesis 2: Web development affects the competitive advantage of the US food manufacturing industry.

Hypothesis 3: Expanding customer reach through digital marketing does not affect the competitive advantage of the US food manufacturing industry.

Hypothesis 4: Expanding customer reach through digital marketing affects the competitive advantage of the US food manufacturing industry.

Hypothesis 5: The creation of email does not affect the competitive advantage of the US food manufacturing industry.

Hypothesis 6: E-mail development affects the competitive advantage of the US food manufacturing industry.

Hypothesis 7: The quality of social platforms does not affect the competitive advantage of the US food manufacturing industry.

Hypothesis 8: The quality of social contexts affects the competitive advantage of the US food manufacturing industry.

### 4. Research Findings and Discussion

The research sample consists of 71 people. The responses are on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5. Therefore, the minimum value for each variable is 1 when all responses for the items within that variable are 1, and the maximum value for each variable is 5 when all responses for the items within that variable are 5. According to the 5-point Likert scale, the midpoint of the scale is 3. Therefore, if the average value of the variable is less than 3, it indicates that most of the responses are in the range of 1, while an average value greater than 3 indicates that most of the responses are in the range of 3 to 5. According to the results obtained, the average value of the variables falls within the range of 3, indicating the average level of importance of digital marketing in industrial companies. According to the obtained results, the standard deviation of the research variables is a small number, indicating a lack of dispersion among the respondents' opinions. The skewness and kurtosis of the variables fall within the range of -3 to 3, suggesting that the variables may follow a normal distribution.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	mean	Std.	Skewness	Kurtosis
					Deviation		
website_development	7	1	4.77	2.22	.9	.56	.20
	1						
Expand_customer_access	7	1	5	2.36	.99	.49	031
	1						
Development_of_social_p	7	1	5	2.60	1.036	.24	18
latforms	1						
Create_Email	7	1	4.83	2.32	.94	.38	28
	1						
Competitive_Advantage	7	1	4.85	2.30	.91	.32	13
	1						

Correlation analysis is a statistical tool used to determine the relationship between the magnitude and type of one quantitative variable and another quantitative variable. The correlation coefficient is a criterion used to determine the correlation between two variables, indicating the strength and nature of the direct relationship, or vice versa. This coefficient has a value in the range of -1 to 1, and the closer its absolute value is to 1, the stronger the relationship. In order to gain a clearer understanding of the research variables and their relationships, the Spearman correlation coefficients for the sample variables are presented in the table below.

The results indicate a positive and significant relationship between the components of digital marketing. This indicates that companies that prioritize digital marketing take into account all aspects of digital marketing. Additionally, enhancing one aspect of digital marketing can also strengthen other dimensions. Furthermore, enhancing digital marketing efforts can enhance competitive advantage.

	website_	$Expand_{\_}$	Development	Create_	Competitive_
	developmen	customer_	_of_social_	Email	Advantage
	t	access	platforms		
website_development	1	.980	.985	.985	.989
Expand_customer_access		1	.977	.987	.985
Development_of_social_p			1	.975	.985
latforms					
Create_Email				1	.985
Competitive_Advantage					1

To test the hypothesis that the development of a website is a function of digital marketing that affects

gaining a competitive advantage, the impact of website expansion on gaining a competitive advantage was evaluated using regression modeling. Surveys have shown that expanding the website, with a standard coefficient of 0.984 and a statistic of 45.694, is effective in gaining a competitive advantage. Therefore, the hypothesis under consideration is accepted. According to the obtained results, a website designed not only to reflect the basic information of the company's activities and the executive duties of the internal institutions but also to establish interactions between businesses, customers, and suppliers can effectively connect to global information sources and reflect the opportunities of the global market. It can also showcase the organization's status in relation to competitors, provide the possibility of exchange, offer multilingual support for easy communication, allow users to express their opinions about products, and enable the organization to use the received information to solve problems and improve performance. Additionally, it can utilize artificial intelligence systems to visualize data and provide graphic images for better decision-making. Therefore, it can increase the competitive advantage of the organization.

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t	Sig
С	.83	.053	1.57	.121
Website	1	.022	45.694	0.0000
development				
$\mathbb{R}^2$	.968		F	2087.923
Adj R <sup>2</sup>	.968		P-Value	0.0000

To test the hypothesis that expanding customer access, as one of the functions of digital marketing, affects gaining a competitive advantage, the impact of expanding customer access on gaining a competitive advantage was assessed using regression modeling. Surveys have shown that expanding customer access by a standard factor of 0.991 and a statistic of 62,096 has an impact on gaining a competitive advantage. Therefore, the hypothesis under consideration is accepted. According to the results obtained from a study on digital marketing systems designed to target global platform users, the information about products shared on social networks should be easily accessible to people from all social groups. The system is designed to facilitate user interaction and information sharing within the user group on social networks. The aim of enabling users to share their product experiences and simplifying the system design is to enhance user understanding and usage. This, in turn, can boost the organization's competitive advantage.

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t	Sig
C	.146	.038	3.88	0.0000
Expand	.914	.015	62.096	0.0000
<b>Customer Access</b>				

$\mathbb{R}^2$	.991	F	3855.935
Adj R <sup>2</sup>	.982	P-Value	0.0000

To test the hypothesis that the development of social platforms is a key function of digital marketing that can lead to a competitive advantage, the impact of social platform development on gaining a competitive advantage was assessed using regression modeling. Investigations have shown that the development of social platforms, with a standard coefficient of 0.971 and a statistic of 33,794, significantly impacts gaining a competitive advantage. Therefore, the hypothesis under consideration is accepted. According to the results obtained, when an organization utilizes Telegram, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Twitter advertisements, it should establish a customer club on Telegram and Instagram and employ experienced individuals for social media advertising and account management. This approach can enhance the organization's competitive advantage.

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t	Sig
С	.072	.071	1.005	.319
<b>Social Platform</b>	.86	.025	33.794	0.0000
$\mathbb{R}^2$	.971		F	1142.015
Adj R <sup>2</sup>	.943		P-Value	0.0000

To test the hypothesis that utilizing email as a function of digital marketing affects gaining a competitive advantage, the impact of developing email usage on gaining a competitive advantage was assessed using regression modeling. Investigations have shown that the development of e-mail usage, with a standard coefficient of 0.991 and a statistic of 61.036, significantly impacts gaining a competitive advantage. Therefore, the hypothesis under consideration is accepted. According to the results obtained, when an organization uses an email-sending system for digital advertising, the advertising email should be designed to avoid being marked as spam and maximize audience visibility. The organization should strive to accurately target the audience, select and send promotional e-mails effectively to increase positive feedback, design the graphic format of e-mails to be of high quality and to attract the audience, and ensure that the e-mail contains sufficient contact information for communication. The organization should engage the audience using appropriate language and standard e-mail format to influence their opinions, thereby enhancing the organization's competitive advantage.

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t	Sig
С	.064	.04	1.61	.11
Create Email	.967	.016	61.086	0.0000
$\mathbb{R}^2$	.991		F	3731.451

**Adj R<sup>2</sup>** .982 **P-Value** 0.0000

Continuous innovation in digital technology and its applications exemplify the digital age we live in. Digital technology has transformed the way people communicate, behave, and make decisions. Marketing activities are inseparable from the influence of digital technology. Currently, the Internet is a decentralized global public network that is utilized by millions of users worldwide. In total, it is not owned by anyone and is not controlled by any authority. Its appeal as an effective advertising medium is attributed to the large number of users and the evolution of services and tools in the Internet market. Originally an alternative medium, it has gradually evolved into a dominant platform in marketing campaigns. Get flexible with high-quality services. There is no doubt that the Internet has transformed the world we live in. It has made accessing information, communicating with people, and sharing content easier than ever before. The increasing use of digital media has led to the decline of traditional media such as television, radio, newspapers, and magazines.

Due to the saturation of advertisements, consumers are looking for something unique in the digital world to catch their attention, and only in this field is the development of digital marketing amazing. The term digital marketing has evolved from the initial marketing of goods and services using digital channels to a broader definition, namely the process of attracting consumers, establishing consumer preferences, promoting brands, nurturing consumers, and increasing sales. Digital is an activity, institution, and process that is facilitated by digital technology in creating communication and conveying values to consumers and other interested parties. In addition, digital marketing can be defined as the use of technology to assist marketing activities that aim to increase consumer knowledge by tailoring it to their needs. The development index of websites, social networks, and e-mail measures digital marketing variables. This system allows marketers to fully focus on their creativity and create something new and progressive with added value. Marketing in an environment full of mutual communication and their use in the Internet market is called digital marketing. Digital marketing is an integral part of marketing communications for almost any business. Since its formation until now, it has undergone fundamental changes, which are mainly signed by scientific and technical progress and the development of new technologies. Digital marketing represents a modern marketing approach that is an important tool for gaining competitive advantage because it is not limited to the region; it is a suitable tool for any business and can be used to achieve a wide range of goals. The main advantages of digital marketing for the business sector are the possibility of individual care for each customer and instilling a feeling of uniqueness and added value for the company. Many scientific articles and surveys are aimed at digital marketing as a source of competitive advantage.

### 5. Conclusion

From the perspective of researchers, the most common sources of competitive advantage are specific advantages related to elements of the marketing mix and relationship advantages with consumers,

employees, vendors, distributors, and supply chain partners. A strong company image and extensive marketing experience will provide a competitive edge for promotion. As a result of gaining competitive advantages, companies can enjoy a variety of benefits. These include higher barriers to entry for new entrants, lower costs, and increased revenues, which subsequently lead to enhanced profitability and a greater market share. Today, technology is developing so rapidly that it is becoming increasingly difficult to keep up with its continuous advancements. Companies with advanced technology are setting a new standard for conducting business across the entire industry. Society is undergoing a digital transformation, so leveraging new technologies for marketing activities can provide a strong competitive advantage for the company. Future technology trends are expected to significantly alter consumer behavior compared to what it is today. The future of integrated multi-channel marketing communications will involve seamless company communications through interconnected channels. In the next decade, marketing innovations, technological revolutions, and advancements that have not yet been developed will significantly impact society's behavior and consumer lifestyles. Today, mobile technology significantly impacts marketing communications and purchasing decisions. The mobile channel is emerging as the primary communication channel because it facilitates direct two-way communication between companies and consumers in real-time. In addition to engaging with the brands they care about, consumers are seeking a distinctive brand experience. Companies that excel in delivering a memorable user experience through any marketing channel will undoubtedly secure top positions in consumer perception. Companies must ensure genuine brand recognition, with numerous brands competing for consumer attention. To achieve this, they need to differentiate themselves and improve every aspect of their business, particularly their consumer approach.

The findings of this study indicate that a well-designed website should provide basic information about a company's activities and internal institutional responsibilities and facilitate interactions among businesses, customers, and suppliers. Such a website can effectively tap into global information sources, reflect global market opportunities, showcase the organization's standing vis-à-vis competitors, enable exchange, offer multilingual support for seamless communication, allow users to express their product opinions, and empower the organization to leverage received feedback for problem-solving and performance enhancement. Furthermore, the integration of artificial intelligence systems for data visualization and graphic representation can aid in informed decision-making, thereby bolstering the organization's competitive edge.

The study also suggests that digital marketing systems targeting global platform users should ensure that product information shared on social networks is easily accessible to individuals across diverse social groups. The system should be designed to facilitate user interaction and information sharing within social networks, with the goal of enhancing user comprehension and utilization, ultimately contributing to the organization's competitive advantage.

Moreover, the research findings propose that organizations leveraging advertisements on platforms such as Telegram, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Twitter should establish customer clubs on Telegram and

Instagram, and enlist experienced individuals for social media advertising and account management. This strategic approach is anticipated to elevate the organization's competitive advantage.

Additionally, the study recommends that organizations employing e-mail marketing for digital advertising should focus on designing non-spam promotional e-mails that maximize visibility to the target audience. It is crucial to accurately target the audience, send promotional e-mails effectively to elicit positive feedback, ensure high-quality graphic formatting to captivate the audience and provide ample contact information for communication. Employing appropriate language and standard e-mail format to engage the audience and influence their opinions can further enhance the organization's competitive advantage.

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