

Application of AI technology in modern digital marketing environment

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore the various application of artificial intelligence (AI) to social media and digital advertising professionals and agencies to specialize to an advanced degree and maintain collaboration and creativity to bring a better return on investment.

Design/methodology/approach – Digital marketers are still oblivious to the importance of AI application, while some others simply do not know how to implement it. AI is currently acting as a significant disruption in digital and social media marketing worldwide.

Findings – Based on the literature review, the paper identifies the various AI applications in the field of digital media marketing.

Originality/value – This paper can serve as a useful guide for social media marketers to implement AI applications to impact digital marketing strategies better.

Keywords Artificial intelligence, Content curation, Propensity modeling, Machine learning, Predictive analytics, Lead scoring, Dynamic pricing

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Have you ever conceived the idea of designing ads based on millions of customer data in minutes? Or literally, understand the innate feelings of your target audience via their data? All of these looked like impossibilities, till the birth of artificial intelligence (AI) technology. Adopting AI can help digital marketers build intelligent systems that can analyze and respond like human beings. AI has offered an exceptional opportunity for digital marketers to identify, analyze, convert and retain customers.

AI technology (Basu, 2020) provides more room for agencies and professionals to specialize, collaborate and explore their creativity as they evolve simultaneously with machines. Nowadays, organizations have multiple options for collecting customer data. AI revolutionizes how to analyze this data and processes it to provide valuable customer insights.

AI is gaining traction in the digital marketing industry, and it is for the right reasons. The technology is such a broad term that encompasses several other technologies. Putting things in perspective, AI technology speaks about any technology that simulates human intelligence. Its application cuts across semantic search, machine learning and image and voice recognition. It is not uncommon to see marketers speak so highly of the latest technologies and their application. Most of these folks do not fail to talk about the various AI applications, including high-security capabilities like preventing data leaks.

These techniques are applied to propensity models, AI applications and machine learning techniques. Machine learning is the production of propensity models based on lessons learned from historical data sets using algorithms. Applied propensity models, as the name suggests, is the application of these models in predicting given events. AI applications refer to



all other AI forms that fit into the roles meant primarily for humans, e.g. customer support service, etc.

The use and potential of AI has grown tremendously in the last decade. However, there is a lack of understanding in terms of the depth of the use of AI and its application in the digital marketing sphere. Though there are researches done to explain the importance and growth of AI in the field of marketing, much needs to be revealed and explained about the application of AI in terms of end to end use in the digital marketing field. This paper aims to evaluate the new AI applications that organizations can adopt for efficiency, effectiveness and improved productivity. The various AI applications discussed in the paper can help design a digital marketing process that adopts AI at various stages of planning and execution.

AI applications and their potential in digital marketing

The various AI applications discussed in this section are best suited for a particular role in the customer journey. While one is more suited for attracting customers, another is ideal for re-engaging former customers. Below are the 15 top AI applications that are already revolutionizing the digital market.

AI smart content curation and content creation

Content creation (Geng *et al.*, 2020) powered by AI has pushed the limits of personalization. You can engage your site's customers using only the content relevant to them. This is a very useful way of engaging your content, especially on e-commerce sites. Based on previous searches, you can recommend items to consumers. Take, for example, "customers who bought *X* also purchased *Y*." It has also turned out to be very helpful in subscription businesses. Here, continuous use of the service translates to a greater data need for the machine learning algorithm and, by extension, better recommendations.

Content curation with AI. Content curation (Feng and Richards, 2018) talks about promoting your authority and boosting your engagement levels using high-quality and relevant content from external sources. Curation, much like content creation, can be automated using machine learning and AI. Basically, content creation is the consistent collection, organization and sharing of relevant digital information on a particular topic to a target audience. Through algorithms, you can collect data on what questions they need to be answered, what they should read and whatever concerns they might have for your business. The use of this data to make relevant content answering these questions is content curation. It is one of the most effective methods of boosting not only engagement but also conversion. Some of the best content creating solutions are Wordsmith, Word AI, TubeBuddy and Articoolo.

Voice search

This is another important application of AI technology. However, rather than developing your own voice search technology (Kendall *et al.*, 2020), you can use those developed by the major tech players like Amazon, Apple or Google. Voice search will, without a doubt, disrupt the SEO world. Therefore, brands need to keep themselves abreast of this evolving technology to avoid being left behind.

Getting yourself acquainted with this technology can boost your traffic and purchase intent. This is because there has been a recent increase in voice search traffic driven by virtual personal assistants, a trend unlikely to stop anytime soon. Voice AI in 2021 is something to look forward to.

In 2020, we will potentially see smarter voice assistants. Through simple interaction, it will be able to collect your thoughts and take action on your behalf. It can potentially give you more control over your scheduling, actions and the likes.

Using voice-based searches. A report by Gartner says that more than 30% of searches will be voice-based. As of today, voice assistants like Alexa and Google Home are already used for ordering cab rides, food, etc. The AI strategy of these tech brands uses conversational audio AI-OS together with the visual media integrations.

More and more digital marketers now realize that adopting voice search technology can help them increase their leads. Do not be left out.

The advent of voice persona and its cultural implications. Voice persona is the mix of text AI and some personality. It ushers in a whole new level of speed, pitch and tone. Take, for example, Voice AIs like Google assistant is already designed to make easy switches from male to female voices or sometimes assume Australian or British accent. Some voice personas will simulate the exact way a human will think or behave in a particular situation. Although text AI has proven to be useful over the years, voice AI is a lot more personalized and convenient.

In a soon to be a voice-dominated ecosystem, you must adopt voice AI to make it easy for your customers to search for products. This is particularly needed if you run an e-commerce store. While using voice contents, ensure that you incorporate long-tailed keywords and mimic natural speech patterns as much as you can.

Although voice AI is only at its earliest stages, you can gain a first-mover advantage and differentiation, by tapping into its potential. This would keep you well ahead of your competitors.

Programmatic media buying

This is the use of automated technology (Davenport *et al.*, 2020) for media buying, as different from using more manual or traditional methods. Media buying itself talks about buying advertising space. The programmatic system of media buying applies data results and analysis to furnish a site's user with the right data, at the right cost and at the right time.

There are several terminologies to study if you must get the whole idea of programmatic media buying.

- (1) *Real-time bidding (RTB):* Here, we talk about deciding inventory prices via auction in real-time. Open to any publisher or advertiser, it is seen as a very cost-effective means of expanding your audience reach.
- (2) *Private marketplace (PMP):* They are typically like RTB, known in some quarters as open auctions. However, a significant difference is that there is a limitation on the people who can participate in this case. Unlike RTB, only selected advertisers get access here. It is strictly based on an invite-only basis. In some cases, the publishers may give advertisers a chance to join in by allowing them to apply for an invitation. The publisher then makes selections from the application list.
- (3) *Programmatic direct:* This is the passing of auction and selling of media inventory at a fixed cost per thousand impressions (CPM) to an advertiser or multiple advertisers, whatever may be the case.

Programmatic media buying is also composed of three main components:

- (1) *Sell-side platform (SSP):* With this software, publishers can sell mobile and video ad impressions to prospective buyers through an automatic system in real-time. This gives publishers more significant control of their inventory and CPMs.
- (2) *Demand-side platform (DSP):* Through this platform, advertisers and agencies can buy their ad-inventory across different cross-platforms.

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- (3) *Ad exchanger*: This is the process by which supply-side feed inventory into the ad exchange. It enables agencies, advertisers, networks and publishers to buy and sell ad space.

The automatic system of programmatic media brings more speed and better efficiency – some of the missing elements in traditional media buying. The latter is slowed down by manual tasks like human negotiations and manual input of orders.

Propensity modeling

Propensity marketing (Markus and Wang, 2020) is the targeting of customers who are the most likely to see through the buyer's journey and convert. This approach reduces media costs and improves the overall ROI ensuing from a media campaign.

Propensity marketing: Brands that use this approach single out consumer segments based on their likelihood of taking particular actions. They also target consumers who “look like” consumers from those segments, based on the assumption that their conversion rates are similar to consumers in those segments.

Propensity marketing requires the analysis of multiple data sets, often including:

- (1) *First-party historical data*: Through historical data, you can identify the most likely consumers to convert based on their conversion or retention rates from a previous time range.
- (2) *Third-party data sets*: Most often than not, the customers with a higher propensity to convert are determined using third-party demographic and behavioral data overlays.
- (3) *Second-party data sets*: This is used for media targeting. The data sets are used to establish a relationship between lookalikes and consumer segments across digital channels.

Predictive analytics

Propensity modeling can be used to determine the propensity for a customer to convert, the price he/she is likely to convert at and the customers who are likely to return. This application of the model is what is known as predictive analytics 7. This is because it used analytics data to forecast the behavior of customers. It spots trends and future likelihoods based on big data. The primary ways of applying predictive analytics in digital marketing include:

Improve your knowledge of your customers. As a digital marketer, you must offer only relevant content to your customers. Failure to do so will lead to low email click rates and bounce rates. With a model based on your customers, you can help boost these metrics.

Single out what online actions can trigger offline decisions. Through predictive analytics, you get a better idea of what unknown events are the likeliest to happen. Predictive analytics can help you determine what online content can trigger offline actions.

Optimizes email frequency. Customers can be irritated by too frequent emails, and you will also not get into their minds if the frequency is too low. Predictive analytics help you determine the optimal frequency needed to ensure conversion.

Improves lead scoring. In today's world, it is really easy to waste time and money, churning out content to buyers who are not ready to buy anytime soon. With predictive marketing, you get a better lead scoring. It is indeed another payoff marketers enjoy the adoption of predictive analytics.

Helps decide what social media influencers are most suitable. Before this time, you could boast of a high conversion by merely hiring a social media influencer with a huge following. That is no longer that case. Using predictive analytics, you can better understand what platforms are the best for advertising and how much of an improvement there was after

hiring a social media influencer for a particular product. It can be used to gather data on the influencer's post, such as engagement, clicks and impressions.

Hiring an influencer simply based on the number of the following can be a huge mistake. Through data from predictive analytics, however, you can determine who the best is for your audience.

Lead scoring

This is the process of assigning values to every lead you generate. Using a numerical scale, you can grade these leads based on accumulated points. Leads with the most cumulative points are typically the likeliest to convert. You score these leads on the type of information they submit or their level of engagement with your website.

When you use lead scoring, you score leads based on multiple attributes. You can score them based on the information they submit and how they engage with your website and brand.

Using this process, your marketing team can reduce marketing costs by prioritizing leads based on the part of the marketing funnel. They then channel their content creation into making content that can make standard leads, hot leads.

Three types of lead scoring models

Demographic model. This is a standard model used to score audiences. It is the most suitable model if you are targeting individuals from a specific group. Take, for example, your target is old individuals or teens. Through landing pages, you can collect their demographic data of your website's visitors and then make decisions on this data.

Online behavior model. Another favorite lead scoring model is the online behavior model. This model looks at leads who eventually converted and how they took the path to conversion. When you use the online behavior model, you will want to know:

- (1) What pages they visited on your site;
- (2) Number of pages visited on your site;
- (3) Whether or not they signed up for emails or followed your social profiles;
- (4) The offers they downloaded;
- (5) Number of offers they downloaded;
- (6) Time frame spent on your pages.

Engagement model. Although similar to online behavioral model, it strictly focuses on the manner of interaction leads have with your brand. Rather than emphasizing how people converted in the past, it is more concerned with their engagement with your brand. It is based on the assumption that high engagement leads to high conversion.

Ad targeting

Through historical data, machine learning algorithms can identify ads that performed best and during what stage in the buying process. Machine learning provides you with enough data to optimize your content and increase engagement as opposed to traditional digital marketing methods (Jarek and Mazurek, 2019).

Pixel your campaigns. The first step to enhancing your audience targeting is collecting data on your target audience. You can do this by placing small bits of code on your web pages (pixels), designed to gather information on the online behavior of your website's visitors.

It allows your web pages to place cookies that can collect anonymous information about these visitors.

Improve your audience targeting by identifying clickers and converters. Through pixels, you can see when visitors arrived on your web pages, which of them clicked your ads and how many of them converted. These data can help you organize your audience in your DMP or DSP into clickers and converters segments. Since these folks are the likeliest to convert, you can better channel your energy into making content to see them through the buyer's journey.

It is a better way of channeling your marketing efforts, ensuring better conversion at reduced costs. You are missing a lot as a digital marketer if you fail to hop onto this train.

Message personalization. The one-size-fits-all approach never works in digital marketing. Since you are looking to get the best value for money spent on marketing efforts, send personalized messages to your audience based on the data insights you must have gathered. It is a more effective approach than generic ads.

Churn high-quality contents. Producing high-quality content is as important as ad targeting. This is because low-quality contents and poorly designed ads are unlikely to spur interest even when directed at your target audience. The competition for people's attention is rife, and you need to produce quality content to catch their attention.

Expand your audience reach. You can expand your audience base using attributes from your current audience. Indeed, lookalikes are an effective way of expanding your audience reach.

Dynamic pricing

No matter how vital discounts are, they can hurt your bottom line. Take, for example, making twice as many sales with a two-thirds smaller margin will give you less profit than possible if you made no sale. Although discounts or special offers are significant, you do not want customers who could have paid higher pay less simply because you want to ensure sales (Li et al., 2020).

With a machine learning algorithm, dynamic pricing becomes very easy. You can easily direct your special offers at customers who are most likely to convert and those that will convert regardless of the special offer. Using this method of dynamic pricing, you can increase sales, yet, maximize profits.

Thanks to big data and data-driven marketing, full automatic analyses can be done in real-time.

In e-commerce, algorithms that analyze customer data can be used for dynamic pricing management.

Web and app personalization

The propensity model helps you serve the customer with the most relevant content depending on what stage of the buyer's journey they are (Curiei, 2020). Take, for example, a first-time visitor will be most interested in information that informs and engages them, while a regular site visitor who is interested in the product will be looking for more in-depth content on the features and benefits of the product. Using data insights from machine learning algorithms, you can personalize content, emails and images to ensure conversions and increase your ROI.

The following tips will help you get proper personalization.

Get as much data as possible. Brands that use personalization need lots of data to produce buyer personas for targeted ads and quality content. With these personas, you can determine the habits, behaviors and what your customers are looking for from similar brands.

Generate customer personas. Using data gathered, you can segment their audience based on factors, gender, location, income, age and shopping habits. You can then develop customer personas based on these data.

Map out your content. It is recommended that you map out what contents would be of immense value and of interest to each persona and then represent these interests in a diagram.

Create your personalized content. Personalized content like messages and emails can help brands deliver based on their initial objectives.

Personalize the whole experience. You can even enrich the personalization experience by creating customer's persona based on their past online behavior. In essence, different customers are given different personas, shared different contents and messages uniquely designed to appeal to them.

Chatbots

This AI-powered software is programmed to facilitate communication with your customers on specific subjects (Kaczorowska-Spychalska, 2019). They can be programmed to give specific answers to frequently asked questions (FAQ). Rather than spending time and energy, answering one and the same question all the time, chatbots can do the job for you. It is a right way of improving communication with your customers.

Chatbots automate part of the marketing process—which frees up your team to work on more critical projects.

Chatbots come in handy in the initial steps of the marketing process. This includes collecting contact information, answering FAQs and handling common tech issues.

Chatbots can help you improve marketing conversations volume.

Chatbots can automate a huge part of the marketing process, freeing up time for you and your marketing team to handle more creative processes and improve the volume of marketing conversations, leading to higher conversion.

Chatbots bridge the gap between marketing and sales. Chatbots help you blur the lines between sales and marketing. In general, incorporating everyone into your chatbot strategy can help you get strategy and marketing onto the same page.

Chatbots are causing an evolution in the digital marketing landscape. Mostly, they can be used for the following:

- (1) *Collecting initial leads information* – Initial leads information can help you gather information necessary to begin any meaningful conversation. This information may include contact information and areas needing support.
- (2) *Scheduling* – Chatbots can help you schedule a customer service call, sales call, or onboarding session with your customer.
- (3) *Answering FAQs* – Rather than waste time and resources answering the same set of questions, you can have chatbots to answer for you.
- (4) *Welcoming customers on their first visit to your website* – As it is with physical stores where there is staff responsible for welcoming customers, so also is it with online stores. Only this time, chatbots can fit into that role. They can be programmed to send personalized greetings to every customer who lands on your page.

Retargeting

With measures like ads targeting and producing quality content in place, some prospects still will not convert, at least not immediately. This is where retargeting comes in. Many leads will not convert on their first click. You can, however, bring them back to your site using retargeting.

Retargeting helps you channel your ads to your site's visitors who fail to convert. You can tailor these ads based on their actions or behavior on your site. Take, for example, if a customer leaves an item in the shopping cart, you can redirect them to your site by offering them a discount on the item.

This approach helps ad agencies and digital marketers increase their conversion rates by large margins. The focus is individuals who are already familiar with your brand or those who, at some point or the other, showed interest in your products or brand. It makes use of cookie technology. It chases customers even to websites or social media platforms they later visit. It reminds them of why they visited your website in the first place and encourages them to revisit. The following are some of the reasons why you should retarget your ads.

Improved user awareness. You can remind people of your website by increasing brand visibility. By continually staying in their face, you make your brand more memorable.

Cost-effectiveness. This is a cost-effective tool that can help convert leads that have already shown interest in your product or services at an earlier time. Since the focus is on customers looking to take any action, you will not be spending huge cash on unproductive digital marketing campaigns. This, by extension, increases your conversion.

Long-term campaigns. Long-term remarketing campaigns can provide advertisers ad networks with lots of insights to run even more campaigns. This helps you save costs and maximize profits.

Predictive customer service

It is common knowledge that it is easier to repeat sales with your existing customer base than to attract new customers, especially in subscription-based business. Here, a high churn rate can prove to be very costly. Using predictive analytics, you can determine what customers are likely to unsubscribe from a service and what features present in existing customers are missing from their service. Armed with this information, you can reach out to these run-away customers using offers and discounts to stop them from churning.

Marketing automation

This technique engages a series of rules that can trigger initiative interactions with customers. However, these rules are mostly decided by guesswork. Machine learning eliminates the guesswork by determining optimal times for communication with the consumer and what subject lines are the most effective (Csordás, 2020).

The most commonly used automation tools include:

- (1) HubSpot marketing (Erokhina *et al.*, 2018) and sales are a very useful tool for small and medium-sized businesses; By gathering data insights from social media marketing campaigns, SEO optimization and web analytics helps them develop productive marketing campaigns.
- (2) Many businesses and brands employ the use of Marketo in driving revenue with mobile marketing and lead management. The cloud-based marketing automation software offers personalized messaging across different marketing channels.
- (3) Using Pardot, brands can accelerate their pipelines and generate sales through sales intelligence, social media marketing and other marketing forms.
- (4) Oracle Eloqua: This cloud-based cross-channel marketing solution is designed to track customers through every stage of the buyer's journey. With this tool, you can design automated and personalized marketing campaigns.

- (5) With Ontraport, you get access to colossal marketing automation capabilities and an in-built CRM designed to manage contacts. Besides email marketing automation, you get access to a CRM system that tracks customers' interaction using visual maps.
- (6) Through AdRoll, you can retarget customers by re-engaging them on the web or social media platforms. Cross-platform retargeting capabilities also help you design customized experiences.

Dynamic emails

Just like marketing automation, the application of insights gotten from machine learning can produce 1:1 dynamic emails. A combination of the propensity model and predictive analytics can help you determine the likelihood of your leads to convert (Bulearca and Tamarjan, 2010). It determines this based on previous online behavior and presents the most relevant products in newsletters.

Practical implication for digital marketers

This paper explains the various AI applications available for digital marketing managers to use in their organization for a high return on investment on every dollar spend in the digital space. This paper also gives industry marketing practitioners an understanding of how technology can be used to engage, inform and delight their customers for a better customer brand engagement leading to purchase. The paper also provides detailed insights into the use of AI in every aspect of the digital marketing journey depending upon the organization's requirements and adopting these technologies to increase their marketing performance.

Recommendation

Gone are days where stakeholders of the small organizations believed that application of AI technologies needs a huge budget. The reality today is that AI technology has become so affordable that even a small business can access and adopt it, depending upon its requirement and budget. Almost every company working in the digital space has access to publicly available algorithms and machine learning services without much need of technical knowhow. Thus, it makes it easier for businesses, irrespective of their size, to gather information and insights for understanding customer behavior and create predictive models for analysis. By linking the business strategy with the right AI, the application can help digital marketers to garner the necessary approvals from the relevant stakeholders.

Limitations of the study

This paper is written with a view to provide relevant information from various technology and science journals and other publications and thus, lacks any empirical analysis. However, it brings forth many such applications of AI that are yet to see the light of the day as far as designing of digital marketing processes is concerned.

Conclusion

The application of AI in digital marketing strategy can bring immense benefit to marketers. AI is now moving to a new phase where it will enable improved productivity, organizational efficiency and higher profitability for organizations. It will help organizations gain, grow and maintain customer loyalty by having a better understanding of customer needs and behavior. AI technologies will be the most valuable tool for digital marketers, as technology is now getting more and more affordable and accessible. Such techniques will be a strong

influencing factor for customers in choosing the right brands and products for their requirements. Hence, markets need to adopt such technology for growth and meeting customer's expectations. AI technology applications are going to disrupt the digital marketing environment in the coming decade.

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