

Navigating the Digital Frontier of Marketing: The Intersection of Identity, Consumption, and Market Dynamics in Online Communities

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How to cite: Vieira, V. A., Dalmoro, M., Ferreira, M. C., & Aguiar, E. C. (2024). Navigating the digital frontier of marketing: The intersection of identity, consumption, and market dynamics in online communities. *BAR-Brazilian Administration Review*, 21(Suppl.), e250026.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1590/1807-7692bar2024250026>

Publication date: February 12, 2025.

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Editor-in-Chief: Ricardo Limongi  (Universidade Federal de Goiás, Faculdade de Contabilidade Economia e Administração, Brazil).

Editorial assistants: Eduarda Anastacio and Simone Rafael (ANPAD, Brazil).

INTRODUCTION

In this manuscript, we build upon previous Special Issues in marketing from the *Revista de Administração de Empresas* (Barcelos & Rossi, 2015; Rossi & Farias, 2006) and the *Revista de Administração Contemporânea* (Vieira et al., 2023), as well as research that has deepened our understanding of the role of Brazilian scholars and marketing themes (Brei et al., 2020; Mazzon & Hernandez, 2013). We are excited to contribute to this research body by proposing the first¹ *Brazilian Administration Review* Special Issue on digital marketing and consumer behavior. Digital marketing refers to the application of marketing in digital environments, including but not limited to omnichannel (Gasparin & Slongo, 2023), platforms, and technologies to promote and advertise products, services, or brands to a targeted audience. Consumer behavior in this area examines how, when, and where individuals consume across firms, communities, and peer-to-peer interactions, and it assesses the marketing orientation from firms. As a process, digital marketing involves identifying, understanding, and satisfying the needs and desires of customers when understanding and applying traditional tools to the digital field. Firms manage digital marketing through various strategies, including search engine optimization (SEO), content marketing, social media, owned and paid advertising (Vargas et al., 2025), influencer marketing, fan communities, engagement, analytics, artificial intelligence, and machine learning.

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From the advent of the internet (early 1990s – early 2000s) to the present, the internet has revolutionized marketing by introducing new ways to communicate, promote, and connect firms and public organizations with consumers, society, and communities. With the rise of online social communities and digital championships (e.g., simulators, e-sports, e-world cups, and leagues), firms are dealing with a new customer profile that is experiencing digital products and services. In this context, firms need to understand how to effectively implement new marketing tools at their disposal to reach and interact with their target customers in more efficient ways. Thus, the rise of the internet signifies a new chapter in society, and we now experience the digital marketing era.

In this *Brazilian Administration Review* Special Issue on digital marketing and consumer behavior, we received numerous papers from around the world, each focusing on different aspects of marketing, digital culture, consumer behavior, online communities, firm strategy, history of online purchases, and identity. Through a double-blind review process with leading marketing scholars, associate editors experts, and ad hoc reviewers, for whom we are grateful for their assistance, the final papers are listed here. Based on the topics of these manuscripts, we propose four avenues that marketing in the digital frontier is dealing with.

DIGITAL IDENTITY, SELF-EXPRESSION, AND COMMUNITIES

The first theme highlights how psychological and social mechanisms aid marketing professionals in understanding consumer behavior and consumption in the digital realm. That means that consumers seek various forms of identity, self-expression, self-confidence, being part of a group, and participating in online communities. Marketing uses different lenses and looks to analyze the experiences of self-disclosure (Leite & Baptista, 2022a), self-connection (Leite & Baptista, 2022b), self-extension and archetypes (Morais et al., 2024), motivations in online games, online communities (e.g., Reddit), the role of archetypes, and motivations within online communities (e.g., Swarm, Circle, and Disco). Theories such as social identity theory (Farivar & Wang, 2022), self-expression theory (Morais et al., 2024), studies grounded in symbolic interactionism, and identity narrative theory can be employed to better understand how consumers in online platforms construct their personal narratives toward consumption, anti-consumption, and activism (Souza-Leão & Moura, 2024). Consumers might be activists by using avatars, profiles, or posts that reflect their sense of self toward a specific marketing-related cause. Archetypes often function as storytelling devices, and consumers may align with, learn from, and express with specific narratives (e.g., a ‘rebel,’ a ‘hero’) as part of their self-expression (Assimos et al., 2019).

DIGITAL CONSUMPTION AND MARKET PRACTICES

In the second theme, we note that marketing goes toward consumption practices in the digital arena (Morais et al., 2024) and needs to consider a disrupted world. By disrupted companies, we mean firms that are looking for technology-edge products, such as Neuralink (brain-computer interface), Anthropic (artificial general intelligence), Vitalic (personalized nutrition and longevity), and Proteum (synthetic protein manufacturing). By consumption practices, we mean that individuals or groups engage with, use, and make meaning of the goods, services, or experiences they acquire, generating a market practice of social exchange (Medeiros et al., 2014). In a market consumption practice, firms explore the transformation and consumption habits in the digital world at the same time that individuals help shape this market, particularly considering when people consume social media (Floriano & Silva, 2023), web content, and digital audio and videos in a disrupted and hyper-connected world. Consumers incorporate these products or experiences into their daily lives, generating a periodic consumption practice, and shape their identities through social exchange, interacting with the broader social, cultural, and economic systems. Moreover, consumers use artificial intelligence (Gonçalves et al., 2024, 2025) to challenge stigmas and create content for a broad audience (influencers, private online channels, gamers, etc.). Research in marketing practices can use digital enclaves (for example, #MyBlackReceipt) to analyze tactics supporting the formation and sustenance of digital enclaves and how they support participation in markets (Brouard et al., 2023).

BEHAVIORAL ASPECTS OF DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT

Marketing has evolved and is looking at how consumers’ perceptions of value in the Steam community influence behavior (Barros et al., 2024), including buying decisions, engagement, and community interactions – behavioral aspects. The digital engagement that happens in marketplaces, such as e-sports events (e.g., PUBG, Honor of Kings, Free Fire), provides empirical evidence that the sponsor’s brand authenticity influences and raises the sponsor’s brand equity and purchase intention (Silva & Almeida, 2024). As consumers experience a new role of physical-sensory elements in the digital environment, they might have different levels of self-confidence (Lucena & Aguiar, 2024),

influencing behavioral decisions. Psychological aspects of digital content may include stigmatized contexts, environments, or situations that are either socially marginalized or viewed negatively by society. For example, domestic work has historically been undervalued and stigmatized in many cultures, especially when it's associated with women's roles (Fracalanza et al., 2024).

DIGITAL PLATFORMS AND MARKET DYNAMICS

Digital platforms (Alibaba, Magalu, Amazon, Shopee) and market dynamics (Castilhos et al., 2017) create an area where marketing provides tools for comprehending and interconnecting supplier network systems (small retailers and a marketplace) and the analysis of price dispersion, focusing on the economic and transactional dynamics of digital platforms (Camargo & Meirelles, 2024). Evidence suggests that price perceptions change market behavior within the Steam platform (Oliveira et al., 2024). Platform ecosystems theory (Cennamo & Santaló, 2019), two-sided markets theory (Rayskin, 2016), and theories of digital disruption (Skog et al., 2018) are useful for explaining the idea that digital platforms (like Airbnb, or Uber) are not just companies or services but ecosystems of various actors — suppliers, consumers, developers, advertisers, etc. — that interact in complex ways. Platforms act as intermediaries that facilitate these interactions and create value by connecting different groups. Marketing can understand marketplaces and market dynamics by recognizing how digital platforms and tools allow firms to shape, communicate, and perform their activities in ways that were not possible before. In the digital space, a firm's identity is fluid and multifaceted, shaped by market dynamics. How firms interact with brands, products, and online communities continuously evolves in response to competitors.

FINAL REMARKS

Marketing over the last 20 years has been navigating and shaping the digital frontier of business, generating a bridge connecting firms, groups, stakeholders, and communities in an echo-verse system (Scaraboto & Ferreira, 2022; Vieira et al., 2019). When marketing went to the digital field, it helped provide value by helping firms adapt their best capabilities and strategy for competing against online competitors, considering smartphones, data-driven, and social media. As smartphones and mobile internet use exploded, the digital marketing landscape became even more personalized, customized, and accessible as firms have access to real-time data and are able to track consumer behavior and preferences across multiple points and channels (Ramos et al., 2024). In the multi-channel integration era (Verhoef et al., 2015), where online, offline, and mobile experiences blend seamlessly, marketing provides value for firms, stakeholders, and society by creating a mutually beneficial exchange between companies and their customers that values ethical and moral relationships in the digital environment. We hope that this first BAR Special Issue on digital marketing and consumer behavior provides readers with valuable insights into market changes over the years and evolving consumption practices.

NOTE

1. The authors thank Professor Ivan Lapuente Garrido for approving this call for papers under his BAR EIC term, and Professor Ricardo Limongi for final support.

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