

The Use of Multi-Criteria Decision Making (Mcdm) Methods in Digital Marketing Strategy Selection: A Literature Review*

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Abstract

Marketing covers all tools and processes in reaching the right audience for products or services. Marketing strategy plays an important role in the success of businesses. In a world that changes over time, the concept of marketing has been subjected to certain changes with the change in customer wants and needs. In the digitalizing world, it has become inevitable for most businesses to adopt a digital marketing strategy. Especially for businesses that want to gain competitive advantage, it is critical to choose the right digital marketing strategy. Since Multi-Criteria Decision Making (MCDM) methods adopt an analytical perspective, they improve decision quality and are a powerful method for selecting the right strategy. This study reviews the scientific literature focusing on Multi-Criteria Decision Making (MCDM) methods used in the selection of digital marketing strategies and evaluates existing approaches. In this direction, 8 studies conducted between 2019 and 2025 were reached. The studies were categorized in terms of the application sector, the Multi-Criteria Decision Making method used, and the selected digital marketing strategy. According to the findings, social media marketing and viral marketing emerged as the primary digital marketing strategies. Swara was selected as the most widely used method. The reasons for the prominence of these strategies include low cost, short-term results, measurability and ease of analysis, the potential to create brand awareness, the opportunity for interaction and feedback, and high reach. Studies have generally used a single method, whereas stronger results can be obtained by using mixed methods.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Digital Marketing Strategy Selection, Multi-Criteria Decision Making.

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1. Introduction

Marketing 1.0 emerged with the industrial revolution. Marketing 1.0 is a product-oriented approach. Businesses have adopted strategies to achieve higher production capacity. In the Marketing 2.0 approach, consumer wants and needs started to gain importance. Marketing strategies focused on gaining consumer satisfaction. With Marketing 3.0, it is a human-centered approach that sees consumers as people with emotions. In the Marketing 4.0 perspective, digital tools and technologies came to the forefront and were integrated into marketing strategies. In Marketing 5.0, artificial intelligence supported marketing has emerged. Marketing 6.0 offers consumers immersive and personalized experiences through data-driven and technological advances. As in the development of marketing, the impact of technological advances in every field is increasing day by day.

Although the use of digital marketing strategies has been widely discussed in the marketing literature, a systematic synthesis of how Multi-Criteria Decision Making (MCDM) methods have been applied to digital marketing strategy selection has not yet been undertaken. Existing applications of MCDM to this problem remain scattered across sector-specific studies (e.g., tourism, textile, manufacturing) without a unifying synthesis of the methods used, the strategies prioritized, or the methodological patterns across sectors. This study addresses this gap by systematically reviewing and comparatively analyzing the existing literature on MCDM applications in digital marketing strategy selection, thereby providing researchers and practitioners with a consolidated reference point and identifying methodological gaps, such as the limited use of hybrid MCDM approaches, for future research.

2. Literature Review

Technology is changing the way people live at a high rate. In addition, the time people spend on digital media is increasing. For example, 75% of the population in Turkey are internet users. In terms of the number of internet users, Turkey ranks 31st in the world. For this reason, marketing activities are now largely carried out in the digital environment. Digital marketing has become even more popular today (Yüksel, 2020).

Digital Marketing is the whole of marketing activities carried out with the use of digital tools in the digital environment. Especially for businesses that want to gain competitive advantage, it is critical to choose the right digital marketing strategy. The choice of digital marketing strategies varies according to the sector in which businesses operate, the target audience to be reached, the mission and vision, the product offered to the market and the competitive conditions in the market (Utlu, 2023: 175). As a result of the literature review, it is seen that various and widespread digital marketing strategies are used to help businesses reach their target audiences quickly (Gibson, 2018:13-15). In this study, 10 different digital marketing strategies, including content marketing, search engine marketing (SEM), blogs, online advertising, social media marketing, viral marketing, e-mail marketing, text messaging, affiliate marketing and Pay Per Click (PPC), were discussed (Utlu, 2024).

Content marketing: According to the Content Marketing Institute, “content marketing is the marketing and Business Process of creating and distributing relevant and valuable content to attract, acquire and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience - with the goal of driving profitable customer action” (Content Marketing Institute, 2015). According to Rowley (2008), content marketing is a method by which a firm analyzes, identifies and satisfies consumer wants through the use of content to generate profit. Information is an important element of marketing. Through content marketing, firms can learn more about customers and potential customers. In addition, one of the most important elements of content marketing is to transfer the right information to the target audience.

Businesses have to promote themselves, get their products or services accepted in the market and gain consumer trust. Strong brands use storytelling to promote their values and communicate who they are. In fact, content marketing is an effective tool used not only to tell the company's story but also to build trust. In short, firms will gain consumer trust when they effectively use content marketing and storytelling to tell their stories (Denning 2011: 47).

Search Engine Marketing (SEM) is a type of marketing that aims to rank high in search engines and gain more visibility. Search engine marketing is a method that consists of comprehensive tools such as internet advertising, performance analysis and website optimization, and aims to directly reach the target audience (Scott, 2009: 254). In other words, search engine marketing aims to rank high organically by making the necessary arrangements on the website.

Blogs: Blogs are essentially internet diaries. In this diary, blog owners share articles, videos or images related to their fields of interest. Authors convey their views on a subject to users, while business owners see these platforms as a tool through which they carry out their marketing activities (Utlü, 2024: 343). There are five different methods of blog marketing. First, bloggers use their own blogs to share their opinions and make recommendations about products or services without any profit. Second, products are sent to bloggers for free and promoted without any specific instructions or directions. Third, bloggers are given gift vouchers or paid to make product recommendations (Patterson, 2012). Fourth, bloggers can increase traffic by directing users to a specific website or point of sale and receive remuneration in return. Fifth, bloggers earn money from the banners, links or advertisements they share in relation to the articles they write. In this step, the marketing message of businesses is clearly communicated to consumers (Liljander & Gummerus, 2015). Thanks to all these effective methods, blogs are highly preferred by businesses today.

Online advertising or display advertisements: advertisements of products or services appear as banners, banners or pop-ups on websites with a high number of visitors. Consumers can access the details of the advertisements by clicking on these banners (Elden, 2015: 540). In display advertising, consumers' interests, demographic characteristics or the digital traces they leave in the digital environment increase businesses' ability to reach the right audience and increase advertising recycling rates (Kotler et al., 2021). In short, online advertising increases brand awareness and helps to communicate the brand message effectively.

Social Media Marketing: social media is widely used by businesses. Businesses use social media platforms to promote themselves and their products and effectively manage customer relationships. Major brands such as Dell, IBM and Burger King make extensive use of social media tools to conduct their marketing activities (Saravanakumar and SuganthaLakshmi, 2012). The advantages of social media marketing are fast and effective as well as free membership.

Viral marketing: Viral marketing is also known as buzz marketing or word-of-mouth marketing, which enables the rapid spread of messages, information and content among consumers. In other words, the marketing of products or services by consumers influencing each other is known as viral marketing (Subramani & Rajagopalan, 2003). Social media tools accelerate word-of-mouth marketing by facilitating communication between consumers (Miller & Lammas, 2010). In short, consumers trust the comments of their peers more than advertisements, so they evaluate consumer comments on digital media before purchasing products or services. This method is advantageous for marketers as it is low-cost. Also, care is taken to ensure that there are many reviews about a product.

E-Mail Marketing: Today, e-mail has become a fundamental element of normal and business life. Therefore, it is used in marketing to communicate with customers and promote products (Gunelius 2018). According to Mailchimp (n.d.): "Email marketing is a form of direct marketing that uses email

to promote your business products or services. It can help your customers stay up to date with your latest products or offers. It can also play an important role in letting people know about your brand or keeping in touch with them." Businesses can send e-mails to existing and potential customers to promote promotions, inform existing customers about the status of orders, acquire new customers, and share up-to-date information about products or services (Vasudevan, 2010). As a result, e-mail marketing is an advantageous method for businesses both to strengthen customer relations and to carry out marketing activities.

Text messages: Businesses send messages to mobile phones to inform existing or potential customers registered in their databases about products or services (Utlü, 2024). Text messages or SMS marketing is an advantageous marketing method for businesses because it is affordable and reaches the target audience directly.

Pay Per Click (PPC) is one of the effective marketing strategies preferred by businesses today. In this method, ads are usually placed on websites with high visitor numbers and the business pays the website owner and search engine per click. Businesses can generate high revenues using this marketing strategy. For example, Google earns a high percentage of its profits from pay-per-click marketing (Kapoor, Dwivedi, & Piercy, 2016).

In affiliate marketing, sellers collaborate with a partner. For example, influencers refer consumers to the website of businesses and earn a certain percentage fee for each purchase made from these referrals. In this method, the aim of businesses is to reach effective partners with whom they can reach the right target audience (Tripathy & Das, 2020).

3. Methodology

In this study, studies using multi-criteria decision-making method in digital marketing strategy selection were systematically examined and classified. A literature review was conducted covering the years 2019-2025. Google Scholar open access database was used. The following keywords were used in Turkish and English:

“Digital Marketing Strategy”

“Digital Marketing Strategy Selection”

“Multi-Criteria Decision Making”

The studies obtained as a result of the review were examined in terms of the use of method and subject integrity in digital marketing strategy selection and 8 studies were considered for analysis. Some criteria were taken into consideration in the selection of the reviewed studies.

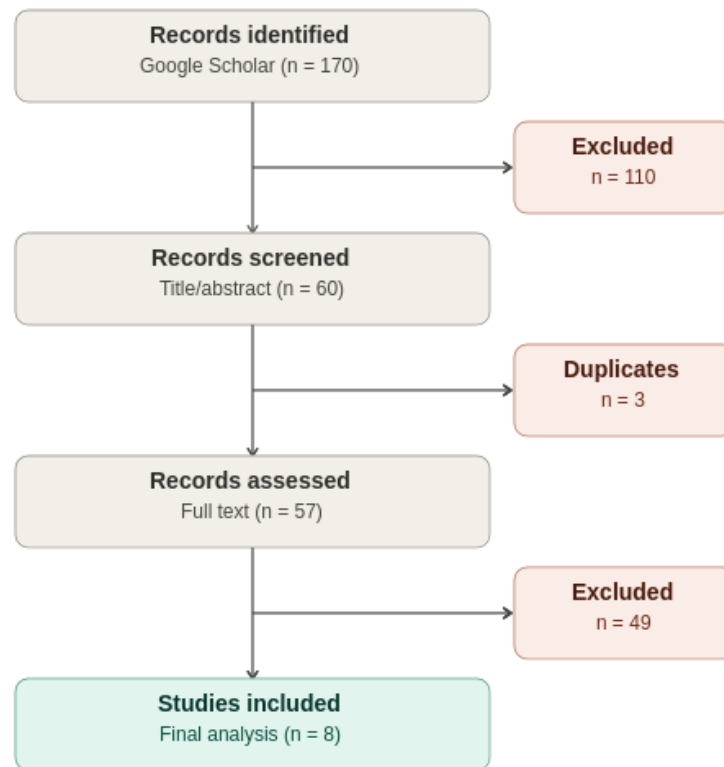
- To have evaluated, ranked or selected digital marketing strategies
- To be using one of the Multi-Criteria Decision Making methods
- Publication of the research to be after 2019
- Publication in an international conference or peer-reviewed journal

Scopus, Web of Science, and ScienceDirect were also searched using the same keywords during the review process. However, these databases did not return the specific set of studies matching the inclusion criteria of this review, whereas all studies meeting the criteria were accessible through Google Scholar, which also offers broad, cross-disciplinary coverage of both journal articles and conference proceedings (such as IEEE and ICFNDS conference proceedings). For this reason, Google Scholar was adopted as the primary database for the present review.

The review period was set to begin in 2019 because the earliest identified study applying a Multi-Criteria Decision Making method specifically to digital marketing strategy selection (Leung & Mo, 2019) was published in that year; the review was extended through 2025 to capture the most recent developments in the field.

The study selection process followed the identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion stages recommended by the PRISMA guidelines (Page et al., 2021). In the identification stage, two keyword-combination searches were conducted in Google Scholar: “Digital Marketing Strategy” AND “Multi-Criteria Decision Making” (157 records) and “Digital Marketing Strategy Selection” AND “Multi-Criteria Decision Making” (13 records), yielding a total of 170 identified records. Because Google Scholar ranks results by relevance and results diverge sharply from the review topic beyond the first pages, the 60 most relevant records were screened at the title and abstract level; the remaining 110 records were excluded as clearly unrelated to the scope of this review. During screening, 3 duplicate records were identified and removed, leaving 57 unique records for full-text eligibility assessment. Applying the inclusion criteria listed below, 49 records were excluded (e.g., not applying an MCDM method specifically to digital marketing strategy selection, not published in a peer-reviewed journal or conference proceeding). As a result, 8 studies met all inclusion criteria and were retained for the final analysis. This process is summarized in the PRISMA flow diagram presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram of the Study Selection Process.



4. Findings and Discussion

The analysis of the 8 studies is presented below, based on the information provided in Table 1.

Table 1. The analysis of the 8 studies that used Multi-Criteria Decision Making Methods In Digital Marketing Strategy Selection

Publication Year	Database	Research Title	Authors	Place Of Publication	MCDM Method Used	Industry/Application Area	Selected Digital Marketing Strategy
2019	Google Scholar	A Fuzzy-AHP Approach for Strategic Evaluation and Selection of Digital Marketing Tools	K. H. Leung and Daniel Y. Mo	The IEEE International Conference on Industrial Engineering and Engineering Management (IEEM)	Fuzzy-AHP	General Digital Marketing	Social Media Marketing and Influencer Marketing
2022	Google Scholar	Digital Marketing Strategy Selection: SWOT Analysis and Multi-Criteria Decision Making	Berk Can Saçan and Tamer Eren	JOURNAL of POLYTECHNIC	ANP	General Digital Marketing	Social Media Marketing
2024	Google Scholar	Digital Marketing Strategy Selection with Swara Method	Nilay Utlu	Journal of Dogus University	SWARA	General Digital Marketing	Search Engine Marketing, Social Media Marketing
2022	Google Scholar	Application Of Analytical Hierarchy Process Model In Selecting An Appropriate Digital Marketing Communication Technology: A Case Study Of A Textile Company	Ergashxodjayeva Shaxnoza and Mukhsinov Bekzod	ICFNDS 22: Proceedings of the 6th International Conference on Future Networks and Distributed Systems	AHP	Textile	Social Media Platforms
2023	Google Scholar	A Fuzzy Hybrid Approach To Analyse Digital Marketing Strategies Towards Tourism Industry	Danial Esmaelnezhad et al	International Journal of Tourism Policy	SWARA	Tourism	SMM, SEO, and SEM
2022	Google Scholar	A Research on the Evaluation of Digital Marketing Strategies in Tourism Sector: Swara-Copras Approach	Emine Elif Nebati	Journal of Business Innovation and Governance	SWARA	Tourism	Viral Marketing
2021	Google Scholar	Selection of Modern Marketing Strategy for Initial Digital Currency Offering (Ico)	Serkan Genç et al	Journal of Economics Business and Finance Research	TOPSİS	Digital Currency Offering (Ico)	Viral Marketing

		with Topsis Method					
2025	Google Scholar	Fuzzy Multi-Criteria Decision-Making Framework For Digital Marketing İntegration Evaluation Of Manufacturing Facilities	Adem Erik and Yusuf Kuvvetli	Journal of Gazi University Faculty of Engineering and Architecture	TOPSİS	Production / Manufacturing	Website Effectiveness, E-Mail Marketing and Information Technology

In this study, 8 studies using Multi-Criteria Decision Making method in digital marketing strategy selection were analyzed. The studies were categorized in terms of application area, methodology, publication year, MCDM method used and prominent marketing strategies.

The publication year of the studies reached is 2019-2025 and there was a concentration especially in the period 2021-2024. This situation has emphasized the need for decision support systems and analytical methods in the field of marketing in recent years. In the distribution of multi-criteria decision making methods used, Swara method was the most preferred method with 3 studies. The second most common method is TOPSIS with 2 studies. AHP, Fuzzy AHP, ANP and SWARA + COPRAS mixed methods have 1 study each. In the distribution of the studies according to the sector, there are 3 studies in general digital marketing, 2 in Tourism, 1 in Textile, 1 in ICO (Crypto Finance) and 1 in production/manufacturing.

In the ranking of digital marketing strategies, social media marketing (highlighted in 5 studies), Viral Marketing (highlighted in 2 studies), SEO/SEM (Search Engine Marketing), Email Marketing, and Website Effectiveness were the remaining digital marketing strategies, each highlighted in only one study. This distribution shows that Social Media Marketing is of critical importance among digital marketing strategies.

Although Social Media Marketing and Viral Marketing dominate the findings, a critical comparison of the reviewed studies reveals that the methodological choice appears to be influenced by sector context rather than a single superior technique. In tourism-related studies, SWARA and its hybrid extension (SWARA-COPRAS) were preferred, likely because SWARA's expert-weighting procedure suits the qualitative, experience-driven nature of tourism decision-making (Esmaelnezhad et al., 2023; Nebati, 2022). In contrast, studies addressing general digital marketing or manufacturing contexts favored TOPSIS or AHP-based approaches, which rely more heavily on quantifiable performance criteria (Saçan & Eren, 2022; Erik & Kuvvetli, 2025). This divergence suggests that no single MCDM method has emerged as a universal standard for digital marketing strategy selection; rather, method choice reflects the availability of expert versus quantitative data within each sector.

A further point of divergence concerns methodological rigor: only one of the eight studies (Nebati, 2022) combined two MCDM methods (SWARA-COPRAS), while the remaining seven relied on a single technique. This is consistent with the broader MCDM literature, which argues that hybrid approaches reduce the sensitivity of results to the weighting assumptions of any one method (Esmaelnezhad et al., 2023). The prevalence of single-method studies in this sample therefore points to a methodological gap: current applications of MCDM to digital marketing strategy selection have not

yet widely adopted the triangulation strategies recommended elsewhere in the MCDM literature, which represents a concrete direction for future research rather than a mere repetition of the most popular method.

5. Conclusion

In this research, studies that used Multi-Criteria Decision Making method in the selection of digital marketing strategies were systematically analyzed. As a result of the analysis, Swara method was selected as the most preferred method. Since the Swara method is weighting based on expert opinion, it can create a flexible structure. Studies have generally used a single method, whereas stronger results can be obtained by using mixed methods. Social media marketing and viral marketing were the prominent digital marketing strategies in the studies. The reasons for the prominence of these strategies are low cost, short time to results, measurability and ease of analysis, potential to create brand awareness, interaction and feedback opportunities, and high reach capacity. It is known that consumers spend most of their time on Social Media. Moreover, Social Media provides opportunities to communicate directly with brands and comment on products or services. Viral marketing and Social Media provide high returns at much lower costs than traditional advertising.

Thanks to these advantages, Social Media marketing and Viral marketing strategies have become attractive for businesses. Social Media marketing can be measured and analyzed, and Viral marketing is seen as effective marketing strategies by businesses thanks to the ability of campaigns to spread instantly or products to go viral quickly. Therefore, Social Media marketing advertising expenditures are increasing more and more. In short, the change in consumer behavior with the digital transformation and the development of technological infrastructure have enabled these strategies to come to the forefront both in literature and in practice. As a result of this research, it is recommended that companies prioritize social media to strengthen customer interaction and increase brand awareness.

This study is subject to several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, although Scopus, Web of Science, and ScienceDirect were also queried during the search process, the review ultimately relied on Google Scholar as the primary database, since it was the source that returned the specific set of studies meeting the inclusion criteria; a protocol that combines and deduplicates results from multiple databases within a single, uniformly applied search strategy would nonetheless offer stronger methodological rigor for future reviews. Second, because search results were ranked by relevance, only the 60 most relevant records were screened at the title and abstract level, which may have excluded a small number of eligible studies ranked lower in the search results. Third, the review yielded a relatively small final sample of eight studies, which limits the generalizability of the conclusions and precluded a quantitative meta-analysis; as the review reflects the literature available as of 2025, studies published after this date are not included. Finally, the majority of the reviewed studies applied a single MCDM method rather than hybrid approaches, which constrains the extent to which methodological robustness could be compared across studies.

Future research could address these limitations in several ways. Subsequent reviews could adopt a fully integrated multi-database search protocol, combining and deduplicating results from Scopus, Web of Science, and ScienceDirect alongside Google Scholar within a single systematic search strategy, to further strengthen coverage and replicability. Extending the review period beyond 2025 and applying a full screening of all identified records, rather than a relevance-ranked subset, would further strengthen methodological rigor. Given the limited use of hybrid MCDM approaches identified in this review, future empirical studies are encouraged to test combined methods (e.g., SWARA-COPRAS or AHP-TOPSIS) for digital marketing strategy selection and to validate these methods in real organizational settings across a wider range of sectors beyond tourism, textile, and manufacturing. Finally, as the

number of studies applying MCDM to this domain grows, a quantitative meta-analysis or bibliometric review may become feasible and would offer a more robust synthesis of the field.

Çatışma Beyanı (Competing Interests)

Çalışmanın yazarı, herhangi bir çıkar çatışması olmadığını beyan etmektedir.

The author declares that he has no competing interests.

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Etik Beyanı (Ethical Statement)

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It is declared that scientific and ethical principles have been followed while carrying out and writing this study and that all the sources used have been properly cited.

Araştırmacıların Katkı Oranı (Author's Contributions)

Bu makale yazarın kendi çabaları ve incelemeleri neticesinde oluşturulmuştur.

This article was created as a result of the author's own efforts and reviews.

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