

Analysis of Digital Marketing Strategies in the Pet Food Industry: A Comparative Study of Different Brands

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Abstract: The pet food industry is experiencing a significant transformation driven by the digital marketing revolution, which presents both substantial opportunities and complex challenges. As consumer demand for personalized experiences, transparency, and ethical business practices intensifies, pet food brands must adopt innovative digital marketing strategies to remain competitive. This paper examines the challenges and opportunities associated with digital marketing for pet food brands, focusing particularly on the delicate balance between data-driven personalization and consumer privacy, as well as the importance of maintaining brand authenticity in a fast-evolving digital environment. The integration of immersive technologies such as augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) with social media platforms offers brands new avenues to enhance consumer engagement and foster deeper, more meaningful connections. In light of these findings, this paper provides strategic recommendations for pet food brands, emphasizing the importance of authentic storytelling, the responsible use of data-driven personalization, and the need for investment in immersive technologies. By leveraging these strategies, pet food brands can bolster their market presence, strengthen consumer loyalty, and achieve sustainable growth in an increasingly dynamic digital landscape.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Pet Food, Marketing Strategy.

1. Introduction

The digital marketing landscape has transformed how industries operate, with the pet food industry being no exception. As consumers become more informed and discerning, pet food brands must adapt to new expectations regarding product transparency, ethical sourcing, and personalized experiences. Digital marketing, characterized by data-driven insights and real-time consumer engagement, offers brands the opportunity to meet these demands while expanding their reach through platforms such as social media, e-commerce, and emerging technologies like augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR). However, this shift also brings significant challenges, particularly regarding the balance between personalization and privacy, maintaining brand authenticity, and standing out in an increasingly competitive market.

With consumers placing greater emphasis on ethical consumption, sustainability, and tailored product experiences, pet food brands must differentiate themselves by adopting digital strategies that are transparent, engaging, and personalized. However, the rise of digital platforms also introduces risks such as brand dilution, intrusive advertising, and over-reliance on promotions that may erode

brand value. This paper aims to analyze the challenges and opportunities that digital marketing presents to the pet food industry, providing strategic recommendations for brands to navigate these complexities effectively.

2. Theoretical Framework of Digital Marketing

2.1. Social Media Marketing: The Power of Digital Platforms

Social media marketing has become a cornerstone of digital marketing strategies for consumer goods companies, enabling brands to build relationships, promote products, and foster brand loyalty. Social media is defined as “a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content”[1]. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok provide consumer goods brands with unprecedented access to global audiences, allowing for both direct communication and engagement.

The theoretical foundation for social media marketing is rooted in social influence theory, which posits that individuals are influenced by the behavior, opinions, and preferences of others within their social networks [2]. Brands capitalize on this by encouraging consumers to share content, leave reviews, and engage in conversations about products. Social media marketing also integrates aspects of network theory, which examines how relationships and connections between individuals within a network can enhance the spread of information. In the digital marketing context, consumer goods companies rely on social networks to amplify their reach through shares, likes, and comments, increasing brand visibility through peer influence and social interactions.

One significant advantage of social media marketing is the ability to foster user-generated content (UGC), which has become a powerful tool for promoting authenticity and credibility. Studies show that consumers trust content created by their peers more than traditional brand advertising [3]. UGC, in the form of reviews, testimonials, or shared experiences, helps build consumer trust and can significantly influence purchasing decisions. Moreover, social media platforms allow for real-time feedback and two-way communication between brands and consumers, facilitating direct interaction that enhances brand-consumer relationships [4].

The engagement theory further supports the value of social media in digital marketing. Engagement involves creating meaningful interactions between consumers and brands, where consumers are not just passive recipients of information but active participants in brand narratives [5]. Through platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, consumer goods companies can create interactive campaigns that encourage user participation, such as challenges, polls, and contests. This heightened level of engagement strengthens emotional connections with consumers, fostering brand loyalty.

However, brands face challenges in maintaining consistency and authenticity in their social media marketing strategies. Influencer marketing, a subset of social media marketing, highlights these concerns. While influencers with large followings can boost brand awareness, the commercialization of influencer partnerships has led to a decrease in consumer trust, especially when influencers promote products without genuine engagement [6]. Therefore, consumer goods companies must carefully select influencers whose values align with their brand identity to maintain authenticity and credibility.

2.2. Content Marketing: Creating Value Through Information and Storytelling

Content marketing is defined as “a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience—and, ultimately, to drive profitable customer action” [7]. In the consumer goods industry,

content marketing focuses on providing consumers with information, education, and entertainment that goes beyond traditional product promotion. By doing so, brands build trust and establish themselves as thought leaders or problem-solvers within their industry, ultimately driving engagement and loyalty.

The theoretical basis for content marketing lies in media dependency theory [8], which posits that individuals rely on media to understand and interpret the world around them. In the context of consumer goods, consumers increasingly depend on digital media to gain insights into product usage, benefits, and trends. This dependency presents brands with the opportunity to craft content that not only educates consumers but also establishes an emotional connection through storytelling. For instance, brands like Dove and Patagonia have successfully employed content marketing strategies that align their products with broader social and environmental causes, resonating with consumers on a deeper level.

Content marketing is also closely tied to inbound marketing, where the goal is to attract consumers to the brand by providing content that addresses their specific needs and challenges. Unlike outbound marketing, which pushes messages through traditional advertising, inbound marketing encourages consumers to seek out the brand based on the value they derive from the content [9]. For consumer goods companies, this could involve producing blogs, videos, and tutorials that help consumers solve problems, compare products, or learn about trends. By positioning themselves as reliable sources of information, brands can drive organic traffic to their websites and increase conversion rates.

Content marketing funnel theory explains how content can guide consumers through the different stages of the buying process—from awareness to consideration to decision-making [10]. At the top of the funnel, content such as blog posts and infographics serve to build awareness and educate the audience about the brand and its products. As consumers move down the funnel, more targeted content such as case studies, product reviews, and testimonials can help them evaluate their options and make purchasing decisions. By aligning content with each stage of the consumer journey, brands can create a seamless path from initial interest to conversion.

3. Comparative Analysis of Pet Food Brands' Digital Marketing Strategies

In this chapter, the author will provide a detailed comparative analysis of the marketing strategies employed by two major players in the pet food industry: Myfoodie, an established brand founded in 2013, and Honestbite, a relatively newer competitor founded in 2016.. Both brands have carved out strong positions within the competitive landscape, with Myfoodie ranking second on Maigoo's list of pet food brands in 2024 and Honestbite ranked eighteenth. Despite Honestbite's shorter history, it has displayed significant potential and market growth. By examining their respective marketing strategies, we can gain insight into how each brand navigates the dynamic pet food market to build consumer trust, enhance brand loyalty, and drive sales.

3.1. Comparison of Strategic Overview and Digital Platforms

Myfoodie, with its longer history, has built a comprehensive customer engagement strategy across multiple digital platforms. From its inception, Myfoodie implemented sophisticated customer service infrastructure, including online consultation channels such as Ronglian Qimou, accessed 400 telephone consultation service, and interactive voice response IVR navigation. This infrastructure allows for effective customer management and ensures a seamless user experience across its platforms. Additionally, McFoody has demonstrated a strong presence on e-commerce platforms such as Tmall, JD, TikTok. The brand's growth is evident in its remarkable performance during key promotional periods achieved 200% growth in JD in 2017 and exceeding 300% growth by mid-2018..

Furthermore, during the 2022 Double Eleven shopping festival, McFoody stood out as the only billion-dollar brand in the Tmall's pet food industry, securing top rankings across multiple platforms, including TikTok, and Pinduoduo. This strong digital footprint underscores Myfoodie's ability to leverage e-commerce for significant market penetration and growth. The brand has also received numerous accolades, including the "China Quality Award" and "Tmall's Most Popular Brand Among Consumers," enhancing its credibility and industry presence.

In contrast, Honestbite, while newer, has demonstrated impressive agility and effectiveness in utilizing social media and influencer marketing. The brand has over 100,000 followers on Weibo, indicating a strong social media presence. Honestbite's flagship stores on major e-commerce platforms such as Taobao, Tmall, and JD enable the brand to reach a broad consumer base and provide a seamless shopping experience. Furthermore, Honestbite utilizes platforms like Xiaohongshu (Little Red Book) to encourage user-generated content, where consumers share product reviews and experiences. The brand also engages influencers to evaluate its products, leveraging social proof to build trust and enhance its reputation. Additionally, Honestbite's active participation in public welfare activities initiatives—such as donating cat food in collaboration with universities and supporting stray animal rescue efforts—further strengthens its brand image by aligning its business operations with corporate social responsibility (CSR) values.

3.2. Comparison of Content Marketing and Brand Storytelling

Both Myfoodie and Honestbite emphasize content marketing as a key component of their broader marketing strategies. Content marketing allows these brands to engage with their audience beyond product promotions by offering valuable, educational content that builds trust and fosters long-term relationships with consumers.

Myfoodie excels in using content marketing to establish itself as a knowledgeable and responsible brand in the pet food industry. For instance, the company's official website features a dedicated "Pet Knowledge" section, where visitors can access a wealth of information about pet health, such as the susceptibility of young cats to various diseases. By sharing expert knowledge, Myfoodie positions itself as a brand that cares about pet welfare and is committed to educating consumers. It is effective to enhance consumer trust and reinforce the brand's credibility as a leader in the pet food sector. Moreover, Myfoodie's content marketing extends beyond its website, as the brand engages with consumers through interactive social media campaigns, such as quizzes, contests, and photo-sharing activities. By encouraging consumers to share their pet stories and photos, Myfoodie harnesses the power of UGC to boost brand visibility and credibility. UGC is particularly effective in building trust, as potential customers are more likely to believe peer recommendations over traditional advertising.

Honestbite also utilizes storytelling and educational content to differentiate itself in the market. The brand's commitment to providing high-quality, non-fishy food for pets is reflected in its brand statement, which resonates with pet owners seeking healthy and natural food options for their furry companions. Honestbite emphasizes transparency and quality in its storytelling, which helps establish an emotional connection with consumers. The brand's active participation in community-building initiatives, such as stray cat rescue events, further strengthens its reputation as a socially responsible company. Honestbite also leverages real-time trends in the pet food market, such as the increasing demand for high-end, functional, and customized pet food products. By sharing stories about its product development process and highlighting its specialized offerings (e.g., pet food targeting gastrointestinal, joint, or oral health), Honestbite aligns itself with industry trends and demonstrates its commitment to meeting the evolving needs of pet owners.

Both brands employ content marketing as a core strategy, but their approaches differ in scope and execution. Myfoodie relies on a blend of educational content and interactive campaigns to

engage with a broad audience, leveraging UGC and expert knowledge to build a reputation of responsibility and expertise. The brand's content is heavily focused on educating consumers about pet health and nutrition, thus positioning itself as a thought leader in the industry. On the other hand, Honestbite places a stronger emphasis on storytelling and CSR. The brand's use of influencer marketing, combined with its active involvement in social causes, appeals to socially conscious consumers who value ethical and responsible business practices. Honestbite's content strategy is geared toward creating emotional connections with its audience, with an emphasis on the authenticity and quality of its products.

4. Challenges and Opportunities in Digital Marketing for Pet Food Brands

4.1. Challenges in Digital Marketing for Pet Food Brands

One of the most pressing challenges for pet food brands in digital marketing is maintaining brand authenticity. As consumers become more discerning, they increasingly seek transparency from brands, particularly in industries related to health and well-being. Pet owners are particularly sensitive to the quality of ingredients and the safety of products they provide to their pets, demanding authenticity from pet food brands. Digital marketing platforms, however, can sometimes blur the lines between genuine engagement and overt commercialization, leading to skepticism. Brands like Myfoodie and Honestbite must strike a balance between promoting their products and maintaining an authentic voice. The widespread use of influencer marketing, for instance, has drawn criticism in recent years, as consumers become wary of paid endorsements that lack sincerity. While influencers can enhance brand credibility, overuse or poorly matched endorsements can dilute the brand's authenticity, leading to consumer distrust [6]. Pet food brands must therefore carefully select influencers who align with their core values and mission to ensure that their marketing efforts are perceived as genuine. Moreover, the push for transparency is especially critical in the pet food industry, where consumers expect clear communication about product ingredients, sourcing, and manufacturing processes. Digital marketing campaigns that fail to provide detailed product information can backfire, as consumers increasingly demand accountability and honesty. Brands that are perceived as hiding information or using misleading tactics risk losing consumer trust, which can be difficult to regain in a highly competitive market.

As digital marketing becomes more data-driven, concerns about consumer privacy have emerged as a significant challenge for pet food brands. The use of data analytics, artificial intelligence, and personalized marketing allows brands to tailor content and advertisements to individual consumers, enhancing engagement and conversion rates. However, this data collection has sparked widespread concern regarding the potential misuse of personal information. Consumers are becoming more protective of their digital privacy, particularly in the wake of high-profile data breaches and growing awareness of how personal information is tracked and used. For pet food brands, which often rely on personalized marketing to connect with pet owners, this presents a dilemma. While personalization can improve the customer experience, it can also lead to a sense of intrusion if not handled correctly. Studies indicate that excessive behavioral tracking and targeted advertising can cause consumers to feel that their privacy is being violated, leading to negative brand perceptions [11]. Pet food brands must therefore navigate this delicate balance, ensuring that their data collection practices are transparent and ethical, while still delivering personalized content that adds value to the consumer.

The digital marketing landscape has become highly competitive, with numerous brands vying for consumer attention across platforms such as social media, search engines, and e-commerce. Pet food brands, in particular, are challenged to stand out in this saturated market, where consumers are continually inundated with a plethora of advertisements and marketing messages. While platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Google Ads have made marketing tools more accessible, they have

also heightened the level of competition, making it increasingly difficult for individual brands to differentiate themselves meaningfully. For companies such as Myfoodie and Honestbite, a key challenge is to develop unique, engaging content that resonates with their target consumers, while navigating the noise generated by competing brands. This difficulty is further compounded by the rise of UGC and the growing tendency of consumers to trust peer recommendations over traditional brand messaging. Consequently, pet food brands must allocate resources to the creation of innovative, high-quality marketing campaigns that not only capture attention but also foster long-term consumer engagement and brand loyalty. Such efforts are critical for maintaining a competitive edge in an increasingly congested digital marketplace.

4.2. Opportunities in Digital Marketing for Pet Food Brands

Despite persistent privacy concerns, data-driven personalization offers significant potential for enhancing marketing strategies within the pet food industry. Through advanced data analytics, brands can achieve a more nuanced understanding of consumer behaviors, preferences, and purchasing patterns, enabling them to deliver highly relevant and tailored content. This level of personalization can markedly improve consumer engagement and conversion rates, as individuals are more inclined to respond positively to marketing that addresses their specific needs. For pet food companies, this approach is particularly valuable in addressing the unique requirements of pet owners. By leveraging data on pet health, dietary preferences, and customer feedback, brands can create customized product recommendations, targeted promotions, and personalized content that resonate with their audience. For instance, customer segmentation based on factors such as pet species, age, or health conditions allows for more focused marketing campaigns that directly meet these needs, thereby enhancing the consumer experience and fostering brand loyalty through a demonstrated understanding of individual preferences.

Social media platforms provide a unique avenue for pet food brands to establish more personalized connections with their audience. The interactive nature of these platforms fosters a sense of community among pet owners, encouraging them to share experiences, seek advice, and participate in discussions. Platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok offer optimal environments for showcasing UGC, partnering with influencers, and nurturing customer relationships. Brands such as Honestbite have effectively harnessed social media by incentivizing customers to share product reviews, photos, and stories about their pets. UGC serves as a form of social proof, enhancing brand credibility, as consumers are more likely to trust peer endorsements over conventional advertising messages. Moreover, social media platforms provide sophisticated analytics tools, enabling brands to monitor engagement, assess campaign performance, and modify strategies in real-time. By using these insights to optimize content and respond to consumer feedback, pet food brands can build a dedicated, engaged community that drives sustainable growth.

The emergence of immersive technologies like AR and VR presents exciting opportunities for pet food brands to deliver more engaging and interactive marketing experiences. These technologies allow brands to offer consumers a more immersive understanding of their products, enriching the online shopping experience and fostering deeper emotional connections with the brand. For example, AR tools could enable consumers to visualize how pet food products align with their pet's dietary needs or lifestyle, while interactive apps and virtual tours could showcase the sourcing and production processes, enhancing transparency and trust. Additionally, VR could be employed to create virtual pet care workshops or product demonstrations, providing consumers with unique and memorable experiences that reinforce the brand's value proposition.

5. Strategic Recommendations for Pet Food Brands

The pet food industry is undergoing a significant transformation driven by digital marketing. As brands seek to connect with increasingly informed and discerning consumers, navigating challenges related to brand authenticity, consumer privacy, and intense competition is paramount. At the same time, the opportunities afforded by personalization, social media engagement, and immersive technologies offer substantial growth potential. To thrive in this evolving landscape, pet food brands must adopt strategic approaches that balance these challenges with the opportunities presented by digital marketing. The following recommendations provide a framework for success in this competitive and rapidly changing industry.

5.1. Emphasize Transparent and Authentic Brand Storytelling

One of the primary challenges in the pet food industry is maintaining brand authenticity amidst the complexities of digital marketing. Consumers today are not only interested in the nutritional content and safety of the products they purchase but also in the ethical values and transparency of the brands they support. Pet food brands must therefore prioritize transparent and authentic storytelling as a key pillar of their digital marketing strategies.

To build and maintain trust, brands should leverage their digital platforms to provide consumers with detailed information about product sourcing, ingredient quality, and manufacturing processes. This transparency can be particularly effective in fostering consumer trust and loyalty in an industry where health and safety concerns are paramount. For example, pet food companies can use storytelling to highlight their commitment to ethical sourcing practices, sustainability, or animal welfare, aligning their brand narratives with the growing consumer demand for corporate responsibility.

Research supports the importance of storytelling in building brand loyalty. Studies show that brands that communicate their values and share behind-the-scenes insights are more likely to resonate with consumers, particularly in industries where trust is critical [6]. Pet food brands can take advantage of this trend by creating compelling narratives that showcase their expertise, heritage, and commitment to quality, using digital platforms such as blogs, social media, and video content to humanize their brand and engage with consumers on a deeper level.

Additionally, brands should UGC that aligns with their authentic messaging. UGC, including customer testimonials, pet owner stories, and product reviews, can enhance brand credibility by allowing consumers to see real-life applications of the products they are considering. Engaging consumers in this way strengthens the brand's community and fosters a sense of shared values, which is critical in the pet food market.

5.2. Leverage Data-Driven Personalization While Respecting Consumer Privacy

Data-driven personalization has become an essential strategy for pet food brands seeking to tailor their marketing initiatives to individual consumer preferences. By harnessing consumer data, brands can deliver highly personalized product recommendations, targeted promotions, and customized content that resonates with distinct audience segments. However, as the use of consumer data in marketing continues to proliferate, concerns regarding privacy are increasingly prevalent. As a result, pet food brands must carefully balance the utilization of data-driven insights with the protection of consumer privacy.

The success of personalized marketing efforts hinges on transparency and obtaining informed consumer consent. Pet food brands should clearly articulate how consumer data is collected, stored, and utilized, ensuring that consumers are fully aware of the process and have the option to opt in or out of data-sharing practices. This approach not only builds trust but also addresses concerns about

potential privacy breaches, which can negatively affect brand reputation. Studies have shown that consumers are more inclined to engage with personalized marketing when they feel that their privacy is respected and they understand the value exchange involved [11].

In practical terms, pet food brands can implement segmentation strategies that cater to specific consumer groups based on factors such as pet breed, age, dietary needs, or health conditions. For example, by leveraging CRM systems to analyze customer purchasing patterns, brands can offer personalized recommendations that are closely aligned with the health requirements of individual pets. This targeted approach enhances both conversion rates and the overall consumer experience by delivering relevant, valuable content tailored to personal preferences. Furthermore, personalization should extend beyond promotional messaging to include content marketing and customer engagement initiatives[12]. Brands can develop personalized email campaigns that offer pet owners customized advice on pet care, nutrition, and health, thereby fostering long-term relationships and deepening brand loyalty. When executed with a strong commitment to consumer privacy, such strategies not only enhance the overall customer experience but also position the brand as a credible and trusted partner in pet care, strengthening the brand's reputation and value proposition.

5.3. Incorporate Immersive Technologies for Enhanced Consumer Experiences

The rise of immersive technologies, such as AR and VR, presents a unique opportunity for pet food brands to create interactive and engaging marketing experiences that differentiate them from competitors. These technologies allow brands to offer consumers a more immersive understanding of their products and services, fostering deeper emotional connections and enriching the online shopping experience.

AR can enable consumers to visualize how a particular pet food product might fit into their pet's dietary needs or lifestyle. Interactive AR apps could guide pet owners through the process of selecting the right food based on their pet's specific health requirements, providing a personalized and informative experience that builds trust. Similarly, AR tools could be used to showcase product sourcing, manufacturing processes, or sustainability efforts, increasing transparency and enhancing consumer confidence in the brand. Virtual reality, on the other hand, offers opportunities for creating immersive educational experiences, such as virtual pet care workshops or product demonstrations. Pet owners could participate in virtual environments where they learn about proper pet nutrition, interact with veterinary professionals, or explore the benefits of different pet food products in a highly engaging way. These memorable experiences not only reinforce the brand's value proposition but also create a lasting impression that can drive consumer loyalty[13].

Incorporating immersive technologies into digital marketing strategies allows pet food brands to provide consumers with more interactive, informative, and enjoyable experiences. By leveraging these technologies, brands can strengthen their connection with consumers, differentiate themselves from competitors, and enhance brand loyalty.

6. Conclusion

In the context of the digital age, the pet food industry faces a dynamic landscape where both opportunities and challenges coexist. Digital marketing offers brands unprecedented tools to engage with consumers in a personalized, interactive, and scalable manner. The potential to leverage data-driven insights, integrate immersive technologies, and utilize social media platforms provides pet food brands with an avenue to reach new heights in customer engagement and brand loyalty. However, these opportunities are not without risks. The growing reliance on data for personalization raises concerns about consumer privacy, while the pressure to scale marketing efforts quickly can lead to brand dilution if not managed carefully[14].

The digital marketing landscape presents both significant opportunities and complex challenges for pet food brands. To thrive in this environment, brands must carefully balance the need for personalization with the growing demand for privacy and transparency. By emphasizing authentic storytelling, leveraging data responsibly, and embracing immersive technologies, pet food brands can position themselves for long-term success in an increasingly competitive digital marketplace. These strategies not only enhance consumer engagement but also build trust, loyalty, and brand equity, ensuring that pet food brands remain relevant and competitive in a rapidly evolving industry.

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