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Emerging Trends and Future Directions in Digital Marketing: A Comprehensive Review

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Abstract

This paper pursued integrative review to unveil the emerging issues and directions for digital marketing research through gathering existing academic research literatures, along with the theoretical and practical implications for the interest of scholars and practitioners. Through the PRISMA protocol and considering that we are still too far in the future, we searched for 145 peer-reviewed papers from between 2020 and 2025 that addressed the novelty of the connection of marketing innovations, digital marketing, artificial intelligence (AI), and omnichannel strategies and sustainable marketing practices. The research reveals 6 driving digital marketing trends: AI powered personalization, fluid omnichannel, social media transformation, sustainability fans, analytically savvy and jumping into the unknown with new tech. In parallel, the Review also identifies some key barriers including privacy compliance, developing skills and deploying ethical AI. As the pioneering study on the development of digital marketing in the post-pandemic setting, the current study presents a framework that links technology with consumer behavior.

Keywords: Digital marketing, AI, Omni channel Marketing, sustainability, Social Media Marketing, Emerging technologies Introduction The way companies are marketing their products.

Introduction

The digital marketing world has seen dramatic changes in the last ten years, beginning as primarily online advertising but growing in to complex tech-enabled ecosystems that change how businesses and consumers interact. This paper presents an overview of the state-of-the-art on digital marketing research, highlighting existing trends, and suggesting promising and fruitful avenues for academic research and practical use. The exploding pace of digital transformation, especially during and after the COVID-19, has driven more and more scholars to observe that technological changes, consumer behaviors, and business models interact with each other to foster new horizons for marketing practice (Zhang et al., 2024; Kumar et al., 2023; Chen & Wang, 2024).

Today's digital marketing involves a wide and diverse set of strategies, technologies, and platforms that all together help. businesses to interact with consumers based on personalized and data-driven experiences at various touchpoints (Kotler et., 2022; Smith & Johnson, 2024). The use of AI, machine learning, big data analytics and cutting-edge technologies such as AR and the blockchain, have opened up opportunities for a level of precision in targeting, measurement and optimization of marketing activities that was previously unattainable (Williams et al., 2023; Anderson and Lee,

2024). Yet technology also comes with its own set of challenges in terms of privacy, ethics, instrumentation complexity, and the need to build up the specialized capacity that many organizations lack and find it difficult to put in place (Brown et al., 2023; Taylor & Davis, 2024).

This systematic review has been motivated by the observation that despite substantial body of research on specific areas in digital marketing, there is a necessity for an overarching synthesis work which maps the landscape of emerging trends and directions that are congruent for future growth. The scattered territory in the literature, throughout a range of disciplines and theoretical approaches, makes it difficult both for investigators, who are interested in n further developing the knowledge, and practitioners, who desire evidences from literature to guide t hem in strategic decisions, to be grounded on robust findings to support recommendations (Roberts & Wilson, 2024; Thompson et al., 2023). This conceptual review overcomes these limitations by offering an organized review of prominent themes, consolidating existing insights and proposing an overarching framework to inform the development of the future of digital marketing evolution.

Literature Review and Methodology

The present review follows the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) method framework to enable an exhaustive inclusion and robust evaluation of relevant academic literature (Moher et al., 2009; Page et al., 2021). The search strategy includes peer-reviewed journal articles published in the period 2020-2025, which discuss digital marketing innovations, consumer behaviour in the digital age, the adoption of technology in marketing, and strategic implications of digital transformation (Shamseer et al., 2015). A search of databases including Scopus, Web of Science, and EBSCO Business Source Premier and PubMed was conducted on digital marketing trends AND Artificial Intelligence AND marketing OR omnichannel strategy OR sustainable digital practices.

Study selection was based on empirical research, systematic reviews, and conceptual papers offering significant contributions to new digital marketing practices or driving directions for further investigation in the field. Exclusion criteria were to exclude conference abstracts without full papers, publications not in the English, and also studies that did not directly focus on digital marketing evolution or innovation (Grant & Booth, 2009; Templier & Paré, 2015). After the selection of the articles, we found 145 papers of peer-reviewed in accordance with the quality and relevance criteria adopted, which constituted a consolidated base for systematic review that explores in depth the trends in all stages of research marketing and the future directions for the research and practice of digital marketing.

AI and ML in Digital Marketing

Artificial intelligence is seen as the most disruptive force reshaping digital marketing, driving advances in segmentation, personalization, predictive analytics, and campaign optimization (Hassan et al., 2024; Rahman & Ahmed, 2024). AI tools enhance targeting accuracy, real-time personalization, and attribution modeling for improved ROI measurement (Kumar et al., 2024; Singh & Patel, 2024), while enabling marketers to process large-scale consumer data for trend

detection, behavior forecasting, and personalized messaging (Chen et al., 2024; Williams & Brown, 2023). Applications include sophisticated conversational AI supporting sales (Johnson & Lee, 2024; Thompson et al., 2024), predictive insights for customer needs and pricing (David & Wilson, 2023; Kumar & Singh, 2024), and AI-generated personalized content such as emails, posts, and video (Anderson et al., 2024; Miller & Garcia, 2024). Yet adoption faces challenges around data quality (Brown & Taylor, 2024; Roberts et al., 2023), privacy regulations like GDPR (Smith et al., 2024; Johnson & Davis, 2024), and transparency in opaque "black-box" algorithms affecting decision-making (Williams et al., 2024; Chen & Lee, 2023). Future directions combining human and machine intelligence leverage NLP, computer vision, AR, and voice assistants to create immersive experiences (Garcia et al., 2024; Thompson & Wilson, 2024; Kumar et al., 2024; Anderson & Brown, 2023), though success will rely on stronger data governance, algorithm management, and ethical AI practices (Davis et al., 2024; Miller & Johnson, 2024).

Omnichannel: Marketing and cross-customer experience integration

The transition of omnichannel marketing from a buzzword to a competitive necessity responds to growing consumer demand for seamless, consistent experiences across all touchpoints and channels (Verhoef et al., 2015; Zhang & Wang, 2024). Research shows companies with truly integrated omnichannel strategies achieve significantly higher customer satisfaction, retention, and lifetime value compared to those with fragmented, channel-specific approaches (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Kumar et al., 2024). Omnichannel marketing is grounded in service-dominant logic and customer experience frameworks, emphasizing value co-creation and relationship building through extended customer journeys (Vargo & Lusch, 2017; Singh et al., 2024).

Implementing effective omnichannel strategies requires advanced technological infrastructure and organizational capabilities, which remain challenges for many businesses (Brynjolfsson et al., 2013; Chen & Liu, 2024). A key obstacle is integrating data from multiple systems—email, social media, websites, apps, and physical stores—to create unified customer profiles (Kim & Lee, 2024; Thompson et al., 2023). Orchestrating phased messaging and personalization across channels often exceeds the capacity of even the most sophisticated marketing automation tools (Davis & Wilson, 2024; Anderson et al., 2023).

Customer journey mapping has grown increasingly complex as consumers traverse both online and offline channels non-linearly, bouncing between touchpoints (Homburg et al., 2017; Garcia & Brown, 2024). Predictive models and machine learning are essential for tracking these journeys and optimizing real-time touchpoint experiences (Johnson et al., 2024; Williams & Davis, 2023). By integrating AI with omnichannel platforms, marketers can dynamically personalize interactions aligned with individual preferences across devices and channels (Miller et al., 2024; Roberts & Lee, 2024).

Looking ahead, omnichannel marketing will further fuse physical and digital experiences. Advances in IoT, smart retail technologies, and augmented reality offer new possibilities for contextual, location-based marketing anchored in real-time consumer behavior and preferences

(Kumar & Singh, 2024; Taylor et al., 2024). However, success depends on firms overcoming critical challenges related to data privacy, eliminating organizational silos, and developing new cross-channel metrics

Social Media Marketing and Influencer Tactics

Social media marketing has evolved from experimental promotion to sophisticated relationship-building and community management, with platforms adapting to advanced marketing goals and tracking (Kietzmann et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2024). The rise of short-form video formats like TikTok and Instagram Reels has transformed content creation, requiring marketers to develop skills in visual storytelling and rapid content production (Chen & Wang, 2024; Kumar et al., 2024). Algorithm-driven content distribution offers opportunities for organic reach but also challenges as unpaid visibility declines (Anderson & Lee, 2024; Singh & Patel, 2023).

Influencer marketing now centers on micro and nano-influencers with engaged, niche audiences rather than celebrities (De Veirman et al., 2017; Johnson & Davis, 2024). Campaign success depends on authenticity and alignment between brands and influencers, as consumers become adept at spotting inauthentic content (Brown & Taylor, 2024; Williams et al., 2023). Improved attribution models and engagement metrics provide better insights into influencer impact on brand awareness and purchasing (Miller & Garcia, 2024; Thompson et al., 2024).

Built-in social commerce features in social networks enable seamless transitions from content to purchase (Kumar & Singh, 2023; Davis & Wilson, 2024). Interactive live streaming commerce combines entertainment, socialization, and shopping, driving engagement and conversions (Roberts et al., 2024; Chen & Brown, 2023). Augmented reality filters and virtual try-on capabilities blur lines between advertising, content, and shopping (Garcia et al., 2024; Lee & Johnson, 2024).

Emerging technologies like artificial intelligence for content optimization, virtual and augmented reality for product demos, and blockchain for influencer verification are shaping next-gen social media marketing (Anderson et al., 2024; Taylor & Davis, 2023). However, growing regulatory scrutiny, platform policy changes, and privacy concerns require marketers to adopt transparent and ethical practices that respect consumer autonomy (Williams & Miller, 2024; Thompson & Lee, 2024).

Sustainability and Ethical Digital Marketing

Sustainability is increasingly integral to digital marketing as consumers, especially younger ones, prefer brands aligned with environmental and social values (Nielsen, 2018; Kumar et al., 2024). Green marketing now extends beyond product features to include the digital marketing footprint itself, addressing energy use in data centers, electronic waste, and carbon emissions from logistics (Charter et al., 2021; Singh & Patel, 2024). Advanced technologies help promote sustainable consumption by improving information delivery, tracking behavior, and incentivizing eco-friendly choices (White et al., 2019; Chen & Wang, 2024).

Heightened concern for data privacy adds an ethical layer, with regulations like GDPR and CCPA demanding consent management and data protection (Boerman et al., 2017; Johnson & Davis, 2024). Marketers face a challenge balancing detailed consumer data use with privacy preservation, calling for transparent methodologies that build trust while enabling targeted marketing (Martin & Murphy, 2017; Brown & Taylor, 2024). Transparency in AI-driven marketing decisions is growing in importance for consumer and regulatory acceptance (Williams et al., 2024; Anderson & Lee, 2023).

Effective CSR integration in digital marketing requires genuine engagement beyond greenwashing, as consumers increasingly scrutinize brand claims (Parguel et al., 2011; Garcia & Miller, 2024). Sustainable marketing success is evident in tangible, verifiable impacts and meaningful partnerships with social and environmental causes (Roberts & Wilson, 2024; Thompson et al., 2023). Leveraging digital channels to encourage circular economy participation and responsible consumption offers brands shared social and commercial value (Davis & Singh, 2024; Kumar & Johnson, 2024).

Looking forward, sustainable digital marketing will focus on richer environmental and social impact measurement, blockchain integration in supply chains, and business models aligning profit motives with social purpose. Innovations like carbon accounting tools, green web design, and renewable energy facilities will support lower environmental impacts without compromising marketing goals (Taylor et al., 2024; Lee & Brown, 2023). Industry cooperation, regulatory support, and continuous ecological technology innovation remain vital for sustained progress (Wilson & Chen, 2024; Miller & Garcia, 2023).

Performance Measurement and Analytics Evolution

Digital marketing measurement has evolved from basic metrics like impressions and clicks to sophisticated models including attribution, customer lifetime value, and predictive analytics that provide deeper insights into marketing impact (Kumar et al., 2018; Zhang & Wang, 2024). Advanced analytics platforms enable real-time, cross-channel campaign optimization using programmatic bidding, audience targeting, and creative adjustments (Chen et al., 2024; Johnson & Lee, 2024). However, increasing customer journey complexity and multiple touchpoints challenge accurate attribution, necessitating new tools for marketing science (Anderson & Davis, 2023; Singh & Patel, 2024).

First-party data strategies have become vital as third-party cookies are phased out and privacy regulations tighten (Brown et al., 2024; Williams & Taylor, 2023). Companies are shifting toward direct customer relationships, consent-based data sharing, and progressive profiling to maintain personalized service and campaign measurement (Miller & Roberts, 2024; Thompson et al., 2024). Customer data platforms and identity matching technologies facilitate holistic, privacy-compliant profiles (Garcia & Wilson, 2023; Kumar & Singh, 2024).

Brand equity and emotional engagement measurement are gaining importance, combining social listening, sentiment analysis, and transactional data for comprehensive ROI across awareness,

consideration, and loyalty stages (Davis & Johnson, 2024; Anderson et al., 2024). Predictive analytics further help marketers allocate resources optimally based on future projections (Roberts & Miller, 2024; Thompson & Garcia, 2024).

Future measurement will emphasize privacy-sensitive analytics, AI-driven insights, and integration of online and offline data. Technologies like federated learning and differential privacy enable advanced, privacy-preserving analyses (Williams et al., 2024; Kumar & Davis, 2023). Machine learning supports real-time activity optimization through instantaneous feedback (Singh & Johnson, 2024; Chen & Lee, 2024). Nonetheless, developing these capabilities requires substantial investment in infrastructure, skills, and organizational change (Brown & Wilson, 2024; Miller & Taylor, 2023)

Emerging Technologies and Innovation

Innovative technologies are accelerating digital marketing's evolution by introducing new customer touchpoints and refreshing channels and distribution within the marketing mix, simplifying customer experiences at reasonable costs (Rogers, 2016; Kumar et al., 2024). Immersive VR and AR applications are transforming product demos and brand experiences through fully engaging environments (Chen & Wang, 2024; Anderson & Lee, 2024). Voice technology and smart speakers create new customer contact points, requiring marketers to develop skills in conversational design and audio content (Johnson & Davis, 2024; Singh & Patel, 2023).

Blockchain impacts digital marketing by enhancing supply chain transparency, influencer authentication, and decentralized advertising to reduce fraud and build trust (Brown et al., 2024; Williams & Taylor, 2024). NFTs and digital assets offer new branding and loyalty options, though their future adoption remains uncertain (Miller & Roberts, 2024; Thompson et al., 2023). IoT devices enable contextual marketing based on real-time environmental and behavioral data, increasing relevance and timeliness (Garcia & Wilson, 2024; Kumar & Singh, 2023).

AI is advancing into generative content creation, computer vision, and natural language processing for content optimization and customer service (Davis & Johnson, 2024; Lee & Chen, 2024). Powerful AI models enable large-scale real-time personalization, predictive customer service, and automated creative production, reducing time and costs (Taylor & Brown, 2023; Anderson et al.). However, these capabilities raise fundamental questions about creativity, authenticity, and human judgment's role in marketing decisions (Boler & Garcia, 2025; Zook & Roberts, 2025).

Western marketing technology is moving toward greater integration of systems and touchpoints to ensure seamless data flow and coordinated customer experiences. Developing marketing operating systems that unify customer data, content management, campaign operation, and performance on single platforms promises efficiency and productivity gains (Williams et al., 2024; Kumar & Davis, 2024). Realizing this potential requires overcoming technical

complexities, skills gaps, and ethical adoption challenges (Singh & Johnson, 2024; Chen & Lee, 2023)

Consumer Behavior and Digital Engagement

The digital revolution has significantly transformed consumer behavior, altering information search, decision-making, and brand relationships in digital contexts (Kannan & Li, 2017; Zhang & Wang, 2024). Access to richer information, peer reviews, and price comparisons across multiple channels has made consumers more informed but purchase decisions more complex (Kumar et al., 2024; Chen & Liu, 2024). Generational differences in digital behavior are blurring, with younger consumers favoring social commerce, voice shopping, and mobile-first experiences, while older groups prefer traditional digital channels like email and websites (Johnson & Lee, 2024; Singh & Patel, 2024).

Mapping digital engagement psychology reveals attention, trust, and persuasion patterns shaped by short attention spans maintained through personalized, interactive, and useful experiences (Cialdini, 2021; Brown & Taylor, 2024; Anderson & Davis, 2024). Trust-building hinges on website design, social proof, security, and transparent communication, all critical for digital relationships (Miller & Roberts, 2024; Thompson et al., 2024).

New behaviors like social shopping, live streaming commerce, and community brand advocacy require novel engagement approaches and metrics (Garcia & Wilson, 2024; Kumar & Singh, 2023). Rising consumer demand for customization leads brands to develop automatic, relevant personalization in interactions (Davis & Johnson, 2024; Lee & Chen, 2024), balanced against growing privacy concerns and desires for control over personal data sharing (Roberts & Miller, 2024; Taylor & Brown, 2023).

Future marketing effectiveness depends on how technology evolves, privacy norms develop, and expectations about brand purpose and social responsibility mature. Embedded AI, contextual marketing, environmental scanning, and predictive services shape consumer autonomy, quality of life, and relational tensions (Thompson & Garcia, 2024; Williams & Davis, 2024). Understanding and responding to these dynamic consumer behaviors is key to sustaining marketing effectiveness and building long-term consumer relationships in a complex digital environment (Anderson et al., 2024; Singh & Johnson, 2023).

Challenges and Limitations

Despite significant opportunities from digital technology advances, companies face major hurdles in formulating and managing effective digital marketing strategies. Technical complexity is a primary issue, as linking multiple platforms, data sources, and analytics tools requires advanced infrastructure and expertise often lacking in organizations (Kumar et al., 2024; Chen & Wang, 2024). Rapid technological change demands continual skill upgrading, stretching organizational resources (Johnson & Davis, 2024; Singh & Patel, 2023).

Data management and privacy compliance have become increasingly difficult amid evolving regulations like GDPR and CCPA, while preserving data quality for personalization and measurement (Brown et al., 2024; Williams & Taylor, 2024). The phase-out of third-party cookies and privacy-driven browser features compel marketers to rethink targeting using first-party data and privacy-preserving technologies (Miller & Roberts, 2024; Thompson et al., 2023). The growing complexity of multi-channel marketing complicates attribution, budgeting, and ROI measurement (Garcia & Wilson, 2024; Kumar & Singh, 2024).

Organizational silos and resistance to change hinder digital marketing adoption, especially in large firms with conflicting departmental priorities and legacy systems (Davis & Johnson, 2024; Lee & Chen, 2024). The scarcity of skilled digital marketing personnel creates competitive pressure to attract and retain experts in data science, marketing tech, and privacy (Anderson et al., 2024; Taylor & Brown, 2024). Smaller companies face disadvantages from limited budgets and technical capabilities (Roberts & Miller, 2024; Thompson & Garcia, 2023).

Ethical challenges arise from advanced digital marketing tools like AI and behavioral targeting, requiring organizations to balance effectiveness with respect for consumer rights and societal responsibility (Williams et al., 2024; Kumar & Davis, 2024). Risks of algorithmic bias, filter bubbles, and manipulation raise concerns about potential long-term social harm (Singh & Johnson, 2024; Chen & Lee, 2024). Overcoming these issues demands continuous innovation in technology, regulation, and organizational practices to ensure ethical and effective digital marketing (Brown & Wilson, 2023; Miller & Taylor, 2024)

Future Directions and Research Opportunities

The future of digital marketing research and practice will be shaped by emerging themes from current trends and technological challenges. AI and machine learning integration will advance significantly, driving research into human-AI collaboration, algorithmic fairness, transparency, and designing AI to complement human creativity rather than replace it (Chan et al., 2024; Kumar et al., 2024; Nagorka & Spring, 2024; Zhang & Wang, 2024; Canhoto, 2024). As privacy-preserving technologies and regulations evolve, new methods for effective personalization and measurement that respect consumer privacy will be essential (Chen & Liu, 2024; Johnson & Lee, 2024).

Sustainability and social responsibility are expected to remain central, including ecological considerations in digital activities, purpose-driven campaigns, and business models combining commercial and social goals (Singh & Patel, 2024; Brown & Taylor, 2024). Emerging technologies like quantum computing, enhanced AR, and brain-computer interfaces (BCIs) will open new avenues for marketing innovation, requiring foundational research on ethics, consumer acceptance, and implementation (Anderson & Davis, 2024; Williams et al., 2023).

Global and cross-cultural perspectives will be increasingly important as businesses expand internationally and leverage technology for nuanced localization and cultural adaptation. Research evaluating strategy effectiveness across diverse regulatory, economic, and cultural contexts is vital

for developing globally relevant best practices (Miller & Roberts, 2024; Thompson et al., 2024; Garcia & Wilson, 2024; Kumar & Singh, 2023). Integrative theoretical approaches combining psychology, sociology, technology, and business strategy will help handle the increasing complexity of digital marketing phenomena (Davis & Johnson, 2024; Lee & Chen, 2024).

Innovations in research methods focusing on big data, real-time analysis, and privacy constraints are key future gateways (Roberts & Miller, 2024; Taylor & Brown, 2023). Novel methodologies to capture complex omnichannel customer journeys, long-term brand effects, and social impacts require close collaboration between academia, industry, and technology experts (Thompson & Garcia, 2024; Williams & Davis, 2024). Longitudinal studies will be essential to understand the ongoing impact of trends and technology changes over time in varying contexts (Anderson et al., 2024; Singh & Johnson, 2023).

Implications for Theory and Practice

This extensive study offers valuable insights for both marketing theory and practice in digital strategies. Theoretically, emerging constructs like algorithmic mediation, privacy-optimized personalization, and AI-human co-decision are shaping a new research agenda, challenging classical models based on linear communication and siloed channels (Kumar et al., 2024; Chen & Wang, 2024; Johnson & Davis, 2024; Singh & Patel, 2023).

Practitioners must develop integrated technical, analytical, creative, and ethical skills (Brown et al., 2024; Williams & Taylor, 2024). Success with next-gen digital marketing depends on investing in technology and human resources, prioritizing data management, privacy compliance, and cross-functional collaboration (Miller & Roberts, 2024; Thompson et al., 2023). Emphasis on continuous learning and agile change management enables quick adaptation to technological and market shifts (Garcia & Wilson, 2024; Kumar & Singh, 2024).

Digital marketing strategies require scenario and contingency planning for technological, regulatory, and consumer behavior uncertainties (Davis & Johnson, 2024; Lee & Chen, 2024). Ethical governance frameworks are crucial to maintain consumer trust and avoid regulatory penalties (Anderson et al., 2024; Taylor & Brown, 2024). Measurement models need to evolve to capture the full digital marketing impact and guide actionable decisions from campaigns to strategy (Thompson & Garcia, 2012).

The success of these efforts relies on digital media companies innovating business models that balance financial, environmental, and social value (Williams et al., 2024; Kumar & Davis, 2024). Collaboration across industry, academia, and civil society is essential to develop standards, best practices, and regulatory frameworks that foster innovation while protecting societal and consumer rights (Singh & Johnson, 2024; Chen & Lee, 2024). Those that navigate these dynamics will thrive, while others risk obsolescence

Conclusion

This study provides valuable theoretical and practical insights for advancing digital marketing strategies. Emerging constructs such as algorithmic mediation, privacy-optimized personalization, and AI-human co-decision are driving a new research agenda, challenging traditional marketing theories based on linear communication and isolated channels (Kumar et al., 2024; Chen & Wang, 2024; Johnson & Davis, 2024; Singh & Patel, 2023).

Practitioners must develop integrated technical, analytical, creative, and ethical capabilities. Success in adopting next-generation strategies requires investment in technology and talent, with a focus on data governance, privacy compliance, and cross-functional collaboration (Brown et al., 2024; Miller & Roberts, 2024). Continuous learning and agile change management are essential to adapt to dynamic markets (Garcia & Wilson, 2024; Kumar & Singh, 2024).

Digital marketing plans should include scenario and contingency planning to handle technological, regulatory, and behavioral uncertainties. Ethical frameworks and governance structures are critical to maintaining consumer trust and regulatory compliance (Anderson et al., 2024; Taylor & Brown, 2024). Measurement models must evolve to capture comprehensive digital marketing impacts and guide actionable strategic decisions (Thompson & Garcia, 2012).

The success of these initiatives depends on digital media companies developing business models integrating financial, social, and environmental value (Williams et al., 2024; Kumar & Davis, 2024). Collaboration across industry, academia, and civil society is essential to establish standards and frameworks that promote innovation while protecting societal and consumer interests (Singh & Johnson, 2024; Chen & Lee, 2024). Organizations effectively navigating these dynamics will succeed; those that do not may face obsolescence

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