

Towards a Scientific Definition of App Marketing

A Practice-Oriented Approach Using Scientific and Grey Literature

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Abstract – The relevance of smartphones and mobile apps has increased significantly in recent years. Increasingly, companies are trying to use mobile apps for their business purposes. Accordingly, the role of app marketing has become more important. Nevertheless, there is no uniform understanding of the term "app marketing". Based on scientific and gray literature, two definitions of "app marketing" are developed. In the narrower sense, app marketing refers to measures aimed at making a mobile app better known and acquiring users i. e. generating app downloads. In the broader sense, app marketing refers to all activities that are used to acquire users for a mobile app, contact them, and encourage them to reach a specified goal. Additionally, based on job ads, an overview of activities in app marketing is provided from a practical point of view. Here, the focus is primarily on paid app install campaigns as well as on monitoring, reporting and analytics.

Keywords – App Marketing, Scientific Definition, Mobile Apps, Mobile Marketing

1 Introduction

In the last few years the relevance of smartphones has continued to massively increase (Eriksson et al., 2018; IDC, 2020; IfD Allensbach, 2020). One of the most popular functionalities of smartphones, besides calling, messaging and taking photos, are mobile apps (App Annie, 2017; BITKOM, 2019; Knego et al., 2015). Many companies are now publishing mobile apps and try to use them for their business purposes (BITKOM, 2011; Deckert & Wohllebe, 2021). Accordingly, the number of mobile apps offered on the most popular app marketplace from Google and Apple is constantly increasing (AppBrain, 2020). Consequently, today mobile apps exist for many industries and purposes, especially focusing on consumer-related issues. For example, industries include, but are not limited to ehealth, retail, education, and travel (BITKOM, 2020; Papadakis et al., 2018; Ross, 2020; Saare et al., 2019; Wohllebe, Dirrler, et al., 2020). Correspondingly, a lot of scientific research was conducted in the context of mobile apps and marketing in the last years

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(Bellman et al., 2013; Dinner et al., 2015; Heerde et al., 2019; Wohllebe, Stoyke, et al., 2020).

More and more often, the term „app marketing“ comes up in publications (Jürgens, 2017; Kreutzer et al., 2019; Panosian, 2017; Tosic, 2015). Also in practice, the interest in “app marketing” as a search query increases (Google Trends, 2021). Sometimes the term is also used in the context of or as a sub-aspect of “mobile marketing” (Ahrholdt et al., 2019, p. 161 ff.; Müller, 2011). Sporadically, the term of „application-based marketing“ is also used (Ahrholdt et al., 2019, p. 165).

Despite the increasing popularity of app marketing, it seems that there's no work existing providing a clear definition of the term yet (Google Scholar, 2021a; ResearchGate, 2021a; ScienceDirect, 2021a). However, such a definition would be of high relevance, especially considering that it seems not be clear, if app marketing is to be understood as marketing for an app or as marketing with an app (Tosic, 2015).

This paper therefore tries to find a clear scientific definition of the term “app marketing”. Additionally, it is examined which activities belong to app marketing in practice. Methodologically, the paper is a review of existing literature, also taking into account grey literature such as web sources from technology providers and marketing agencies as well as job listings.

2 Methodology

The literature review starts with screening the scientific databases Google Scholar, ResearchGate and ScienceDirect searching for “app marketing” (Google Scholar, 2021b; ResearchGate, 2021b; ScienceDirect, 2021b) as well as “app marketing definition” (Google Scholar, 2021a; ResearchGate, 2021a; ScienceDirect, 2021a).

As a second step, grey literature is screened for “app marketing definition”. Therefore the top results of the search engine Google are employed. Results include definition from news websites, technology providers and marketing agencies. Both, scientific and grey literature results are synthesized to a unified definition of app marketing in the third step.

The definition is followed by a description of typical app marketing activities. These activities are gained from job listings via the job portals Google Jobs, LinkedIn and Indeed (Google, 2021; Indeed, 2021; LinkedIn, 2021).

3 Definition of App Marketing

To define app marketing, firstly results from scientific literature are introduced. The results are presented by publication date, starting with the oldest relevant entry found.

According to Krieg (2012, p. 23), app marketing is the placement of an app on the market. In this broad understanding of app marketing, a mobile app can be seen as part of a marketing plan or as a stand-alone product. However, the author's understanding of app marketing focuses the acquisition of new users (Krieg, 2012, p. 30 ff.).

This understanding is also shared by Tomic (2015), who also emphasizes the two possible roles of an app in app marketing; on the one hand understanding the app as the product to be marketed, on the other hand the app as a marketing instrument.

Mroz (2016) understanding of the term is mainly focused on the acquisition of new users. Jürgens' (2017) also narrows the term down to acquisition, focusing on the app store optimization (ASO) aspect. In this context, the marketing for an app is aligned in such a way that it achieves the highest possible rankings on the app marketplaces.

A broader understanding is provided by Ahrholdt et al. (2019, p. 165 ff.). The authors come up with a longer term called "application-based marketing" and define several metrics and KPIs to measure. These definitions indicate an understanding that is not limited to the acquisition of users. Instead, it also includes the usage of the app and the communication with existing users employing push notifications.

In summary, the scientific literature mainly shows a focus on the issue of user acquisition. Due to the limited number of results, various definitions and understandings from the grey literature are added below. They're gathered from the search results for "App Marketing Definition" in Google and listed in the order in which they appear in the search results (January 2021).

OnlineMarketing.de (2021) uses app marketing to describe the targeted marketing of an app. The aim is to maximize awareness of the app, increase download numbers and generate sales. ASO is mentioned as a central element. Additional facets include the usability of the app and push notifications. This understanding also encompasses much more than simply acquiring new users. It is thus in line with the understanding gained from Ahrholdt et al. (2019, p. 165 ff.).

Ryte's (2021) understanding is practically identical. The technology provider additionally describes app marketing as a subarea of mobile marketing. At the same time, the source also makes it clear that mobile marketing means advertising via mobile devices. App marketing, on the other hand, also includes all other marketing channels that serve to make the app better known, according to the source.

The marketing agency Digital Minds (2020) also understands app marketing mainly as activities to acquire new users. However, besides increasing clicks and downloads, the source emphasizes the importance of app reviews and, in the long-term, generating revenue. Although mentioning marketing channels like social media and e-mail newsletters, the channel focus is on ASO according to Digital Minds.

With regard to the basic understanding of app marketing, the marketing agency Advidera (2021) is referring to Ryte's definition and understanding of app marketing as a part of mobile marketing (2021). In addition, the source names a bunch of marketing channels to promote an app, even classical channels like radio, print and television. However, the main focus remains on online marketing channels.

The "Social Media Academy" (2016) defines app marketing as promoting a smartphone app as well and is therefore very close to the understanding of Advidera (2021) and Ryte (2021).

For Stockenburg, writing for the Smartphone Magazine (2016), app marketing mainly is about promoting apps to acquire new users. Just like many other sources mentioned before, the focus is on ASO as a discipline.

Finally, YeePLY (2019) has a more extensive understanding, similar to the one of OnlineMarketing.de (2021). The source sees app marketing as the interaction with consumers along the whole user lifecycle, from the very first with the app until becoming a loyal app user.

In summary, it can be stated that there's no unique understanding of the term app marketing yet in scientific and in grey literature. However, some aspects are common for a lot of sources. Based on the literature reviewed, two definitions for app marketing can be provided:

App marketing in the narrower sense refers to measures aimed at making a mobile app better known and acquiring users i. e. generating app downloads.

However, since acquisition i.e. downloads are only a means to an end, a second definition is derived:

App marketing in the broader sense refers to all measures that are used to acquire users for a mobile app, contact them, and encourage them to reach a specified goal.

4 Screening of App Marketing Activities

As the definitions of app marketing in the narrower and the broader sense show, there are different ways of understanding the scope of app marketing. To gain a better understanding how app marketing is understood in practice, a total of eleven job listings from three different job websites is employed (Google, 2021; Indeed, 2021; LinkedIn, 2021).

The job ads were shown on the job websites when searching for “app marketing”. Only jobs with the terms “app” and “marketing” in the title were selected. Table 1 shows the job titles and how often each job title occurred in the results.

Job Title	Count
Junior App Marketing Manager	3
App Marketing Manager	2
Senior App Marketing Manager	1
App Marketing Consultant	1
Marketing & Community Manager App	1
Marketing Manager App	1
Social Media and App Marketing Manager	1
Manager, Mobile App Marketing	1

Table 1: Count per job title

All aspects related to app marketing were taken from the job descriptions, categorized and counted. For example, aspects related to social media were excluded when analyzing the “Social Media and App Marketing Manager” job description.

Table 2 shows which activities were mentioned in the job descriptions and how often they occurred. The results clearly indicate a high relevance of app install campaigns in general, mainly focusing on paid app install campaigns. Also the monitoring of key performance indicators (KPIs), reporting and analytics are of high relevance in app marketing. Also ASO and the management of app store entries is mentioned in almost half of the job descriptions. However, in contrast to the results from reviewing scientific and grey literature, ASO seems to be of a bit lower relevance.

Activity	Count
App install campaigns, mainly paid focus	10
KPI monitoring, reporting and analytics	9
Managing app store entries / ASO	5
Development and optimization of advertising materials	3
Attribution and tracking	2
CRM activities (mobile push, in-app notifications)	2
Conceptual working on app functionalities	2
Monitoring market trends and competitors	2
Developing new marketing opportunities	1
Collecting of and answering on app feedback	1

Table 2: Mentions counted per activity

Surprisingly, customer relationship management (CRM) related activities such as sending mobile push notifications or in-app message are only mentioned in two of eleven job ads.

5 Summary and Conclusion

The aim of this paper is to provide an overview of how the term "app marketing" is understood in practice and theory.

In the first part, an approach is taken to develop a uniform definition. The result is two definition approaches, one in the narrower sense and one in the broader sense. Both definitions are based on a review of existing scientific and gray literature. The results primarily show a focus on app marketing in the narrower sense, i.e., in the sense of acquiring new users. There are also broader interpretations of the term that include, in particular, addressing existing app users.

In the second part, an attempt is made to gain an understanding of how the term app marketing is understood in practice in companies on the basis of job ads. The results of the short screening of app marketing activities in practice show that app marketing in practice corresponds more to the first definition than the second. Accordingly, the focus is primarily on the acquisition of new users, especially paid acquisition. Less relevant for app marketing in practice seems to be the possibility to interact with existing app users. This could be explained by the assumption that addressing existing users is

in practice more anchored in the area of CRM / existing customer management than in app marketing.

Of particular interest for further research should be how the concept of app marketing changes over the years. Since the app market is largely controlled by Google and Apple, many opportunities and activities in app marketing also depend on what these two companies allow or enable as gatekeepers. For example, it is conceivable that interaction with existing app users will continue to gain relevance in the coming years and become an integral part of app marketing.

6 Authors

Atilla Wohllebe from Germany researches on consumer-related issues. His research interests include digitization, retail, and specifically the use of mobile technologies in these contexts. He has worked as an employee and freelancer on numerous digitization projects. He contributes to the WR Institute of Applied Sciences and is co-founder of Wohllebe & Ross Publishing.

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