

Content Marketing: Shaping the Future of Digital Marketing

S. Arunaa*, M. Sivakumar**

Abstract

During the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of digital marketing as a key component of organisational marketing strategies significantly increased worldwide. An important aspect of digital marketing is content marketing, which plays a dynamic role in shaping an organisation's online presence. With the rise in digitalisation, content marketing has become imminent in building brand awareness, customer engagement, and lead generation. The effectiveness of a company's digital existence largely depends on the relevance and quality of its content marketing efforts. In today's digital age, content marketing – which was once considered secondary – has become crucial in building brand identity. Given this shift, digital marketers must thoroughly analyse their target audience to tailor content accordingly and select the most effective promotional strategies. This paper delves into the importance of content marketing, its future role within the digital marketing strategies, and the best approaches that can help in developing an effective content marketing plan.

Keywords: Content Marketing, Social Media Marketing, Online Marketing Trends, Digital Marketing

Introduction

The transformation of traditional marketing strategies has been largely driven by the advent of the digital revolution, which compels businesses to rethink their approaches to remain competitive in the modern digital area. In today's fast-paced world, consumers are less inclined to spend

time on traditional advertising methods such as billboards, radio, direct mail, or newspaper ads. Instead, the screen time of consumers is growing, which has made social media platforms a more effective and accessible space for marketers to reach a wider audience.

With digital medium, customers are now clearly informed about their purchases, as they can research the product specifications, educate themselves on the descriptions, and analyse all sorts of real-time feedback from other users. This change has made consumers make more educative and informed purchasing decisions. As a result of this, content marketing has emerged as one of the most essential tools for enhancing customer engagement. As a result of its proven ability to build loyal relationships and sustain brand presence amid consumers, content marketing has become indispensable to any business aiming for long-term success.

One key benefit of content marketing is its versatility – i.e., it can be utilised by businesses across various niches to promote their products or services effectively, regardless of their industry.

History

While content marketing is increasingly becoming a household word now, its root dates back longer than the 21st century. Ever since the Neanderthal man existed, people have been creating content intentionally or unintentionally. Early man used to paint on cave walls, depicting their lifestyle and events around them; these can still be found in caves around the world.

* PhD (Part-time) Research Scholar, Department of Management Studies, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India. Email: arunaasivaji@gmail.com

** Research Supervisor, Professor and Head, Department of Entrepreneurship Studies, Chairperson – School of Business Studies, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India. Email: dr.msk.mku@gmail.com

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- One of the earliest known examples of content marketing goes back to 1732 when Benjamin Franklin first published the *Poor Richard's Almanack* to promote his printing business.
- In 1861 Samuel Wagner first introduced the *American Bee Journal*, a magazine that continues to be published even today.
- Similarly, in 1895 John Deere launched *The Furrow*, a print magazine designed to educate farmers.

The term 'content marketing' was coined by John F. Oppedahl in 1996 during the rise of the dot-com era and the home computing revolution.

The landscape of content marketing changed significantly with the emergence of social media. The launch of Facebook in 2004 marked the beginning of a new era in online engagement. In 2007 Apple's introduction of the iPhone further revolutionised content creation and sharing, leading to an explosion of video- and image-based content across digital platforms.

Today, businesses utilise a wide range of formats and techniques to produce content, with millions of new pieces being published daily. As a result, online content has become the primary medium for brands to establish and strengthen their presence in the digital space.

Content Marketing

Content marketing is not solely focused on selling a product or service; rather, its goal is to engage, educate, or entertain the audience. It can be broadly defined as:

"A marketing approach that builds a strong connection with the audience by delivering valuable information, ultimately driving revenue generation."

Consumers today seek more than just products or services; they want to understand the brand behind their purchases. They are interested in a company's values, mission, and overall identity before making buying decisions.

Objectives of Content Marketing

Every company adopts its own unique approach to content marketing, but certain key elements must be

considered, such as promotional channels, content frequency, performance metrics, and the specific type of content used. The primary objectives of content marketing typically include:

- Enhancing brand awareness
- Generating new leads
- Fostering customer loyalty
- Expanding audience reach
- Creating demand for a product or service
- Strengthening relationships with the target audience.

Conducting a thorough target audience analysis is essential to identify potential customers and determine the most effective content marketing strategies. High-quality content remains the cornerstone of digital marketing success. In addition, selecting the right social media platforms and establishing an optimal posting frequency are crucial for maximising engagement.

Interacting with users who engage with the content helps amplify brand visibility and build meaningful connections with industry professionals and potential customers. Through strategic content marketing, businesses can successfully attract, engage, and retain their audience over the long term.

Importance of Content Marketing

More than 70% of business-to-business (B2B) marketers have increased their content production compared with pre-pandemic levels. Essentially, content marketing serves as a method of engaging with prospects and customers by providing valuable information rather than directly selling a product or service. By delivering relevant and informative content, businesses can enhance customer awareness of their offerings.

Content marketing appears in various formats, including online and print newsletters, magazines, websites, blogs, podcasts, white papers, digital media, and email campaigns. The core objective of content marketing is to educate consumers, ultimately fostering brand recognition and customer loyalty. In addition, when a brand uses specific words or phrases that resonate with its audience, it encourages deeper engagement, prompting customers to explore the brand's identity and values further.

Review of Literature

The term ‘content marketing’ was introduced by Pulizzi (2010) and has since evolved, taking on different definitions at various stages of marketing development. Given its dynamic nature, defining content marketing can be challenging, as its meaning varies depending on the context.

Marketers have increasingly adopted content marketing as a strategy to capture consumer attention and move away from disruptive advertising methods (Du Plessis, 2015). Unlike traditional marketing approaches that push products or services onto consumers, content marketing operates as a pull strategy, drawing customers towards the brand through valuable and engaging content (Liu & Huang, 2015).

In addition, content marketing aligns with marketing communications theory, further supporting its role in modern branding strategies (Cronin, 2016). Unlike other promotional techniques aimed at direct sales, content marketing focuses on brand-building by creating and sharing relevant content that resonates with the target audience. Today, marketers leverage storytelling to enhance brand recognition and familiarity among potential customers (Brieger, 2013).

Over time, content marketing has been defined in various ways, but one of the most widely recognised definitions comes from the Content Marketing Institute:

“Content marketing is the marketing and business process for creating and distributing relevant and valuable content to attract, acquire, and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience – with the objective of driving profitable customer action.” (Pulizzi, 2012)

As content marketing continues to evolve, scholars emphasise the importance of managing it effectively to maximise its impact.

Objectives of the Paper

This study has the following objectives:

- To examine how brands implement content marketing strategies.
- To explore the role of content marketing in modern marketing practices.

- To gain insights into current and emerging trends in content marketing.

Methodology

This study employs a content analysis approach, focusing on professional documents related to content marketing, including journals, case studies, books, articles, research papers, and relevant websites. A case study conducted by Peikkari and Welch (2018) was examined as part of this research. In addition, the research questions were formulated based on a comprehensive review of existing literature (Xiao & Watson, 2019). The initial analysis of secondary data guided the researchers in identifying and collecting further relevant literature and data.

Models and Theories

As marketers worldwide become more accustomed to the concept of content marketing, various theories have emerged to explain its effectiveness. Some key hypotheses are outlined below.

The BEST Framework

The BEST framework, also known as the BEST formula or BEST methodology, serves as a valuable tool for brands aiming to develop an effective content marketing strategy (Pulizzi & Barrett, 2009). This approach provides businesses with the necessary structure to create relevant and meaningful content that resonates with potential customers.

The BEST framework consists of four key steps:

- *Behavioural*: Every customer interaction should have a clear purpose.
- *Essential*: The content must provide value and be useful to the audience.
- *Strategic*: Content marketing should be an integral part of the overall marketing strategy.
- *Target Audience*: Content should be customised to meet the needs and preferences of the intended audience.

S.A.V.E. Framework

The S.A.V.E. framework suggests that the traditional 4Ps of marketing are no longer fully applicable to the modern

marketing landscape and should be redefined to align with current strategies (Ettenson, Conrado & Knowles, 2013).


4Ps Model		S.A.V.E. Framework
Product		Solution
Place		Access
Price		Value
Promotion		Education

Fig. 1: A Comparison of the Classic 4Ps and the S.A.V.E. Framework

Results and Findings

For businesses, recognising content marketing as an essential component of success has become more critical than merely understanding its mechanics. Before a consumer even considers purchasing a product or service – or is aware that such a solution exists – they typically experience a need without knowing the available options in the market. In such scenarios, consumers are likely to come across relevant content from a brand, find value in it, and develop a sense of trust even before directly engaging with the company. Content marketing, therefore, plays a crucial role in fostering brand loyalty long before a business identifies a potential customer.

The following key statistics provide valuable insights for brands looking to implement or refine their content marketing strategies (Riddall, 2023):

- 40% of B2B marketers document their content marketing strategies, while 33% follow a strategy without documenting it, and 27% operate without a clear strategy.
- 50% of marketers outsource their content marketing efforts.
- Content usage surged by 207% following the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Short-form videos and concise articles were the most widely used content types in the past year. In addition, the adoption of long-form content has increased from 22% to 42% over the same period.
- Interactive content generates 52% more engagement compared with static content. Furthermore, 56% of marketers believe blogging is an effective strategy, while 10% acknowledge that it delivers a measurable return on investment.

Discussion

Content marketing is set to become an integral part of every marketing strategy, leaving marketers with little choice but to embrace its implementation. Looking ahead, content marketing is expected to evolve in several key ways (Simonova, 2022):

- *Increased Interactive Content:* To enhance audience engagement, the use of interactive content – such as quizzes, surveys, games, and polls – will continue to grow. Content must be compelling and motivating for consumers. In addition, video content, particularly short-form videos, is expected to see sustained growth due to its natural appeal.
- *Expansion of Shoppable Content:* A significant rise in shoppable content is anticipated, where brands will have the ability to purchase ready-made content for use as their own.
- *Customer-Centric Approach:* Content marketing will shift further towards audience enrichment rather than direct product promotion. This evolution will make content strategies more targeted, purposeful, and focused on delivering value to consumers.
- *Growth of Online Content Tools:* The prolonged use of digital platforms such as social media, blogs, websites, and infographics will always keep expanding, which will strengthen their role as an important tool for content marketers.

Conclusion

Content marketing has had many different changes over the past decade, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, and it will continue to grow in various forms in the future. Everything, every message a brand sends out, is filled with content. Without content forms brands will not be able to get through to their target audience or any audience, for that matter. Video content, in particular short videos, has been generating a lot of leads recently and is dominating the market. It is also estimated to dominate over the market in the foreseeable future.

Any content that is completely effective will have a purpose and impact the audience on an emotional scale. The future of content marketing is already happening in the present where content is getting futurised. Understanding the target audience clearly shapes a

successful content marketing practice, which will lead to brand awareness, loyalty, and lead generation.

It can also be foretold that with natural language processing, artificial intelligence will overtake the creation of content. Through these technologies, brands will be able to save time, manpower and money. This will make brands stay on the edge of the competition if they wish to be top in their industry.

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