



## ASSESSING THE UTILIZATION AND EFFECTIVENESS OF CONTENT MARKETING IN BUSINESS PRACTICES IN BOTSWANA

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**ABSTRACT:** *The study ascertains the extent to which content marketing is used by businesses. The objective of the study was to ascertain the extent to which content marketing is used by businesses. The study employed the quantitative research method where the data for the study were collected through the survey approach. The regression method was employed to analyse the data collected and it was found that: access to micro content does not significantly influence individual trust for a product compared to access to large content. However, access to content, online presence, age, and gender significantly influence consumer trust. Content marketing, higher online purchasing behavior, and higher consumer age significantly increase trust for a product. Males were less likely to have reduced trust compared to females. The research suggests that modern consumers are more concerned with the quality and dependability of information than its length. Therefore, businesses should focus on providing accurate, transparent, and dependable information. Content marketing plays a crucial role in fostering consumer confidence, as it increases trust by providing thorough and trustworthy information. This highlights the importance of digital marketing methods and the need for businesses to invest in informative, precise, and interesting content marketing efforts to increase brand trust and customer loyalty.*

**KEYWORDS:** Content Marketing, Consumer trust, Customer Loyalty, Brand Trust.



## INTRODUCTION

In the era of digital technology, the discipline of marketing has gone through significant developments, with content marketing emerging as a crucial tactic for organisations aiming to captivate, educate, and persuade their intended audience. This strategy, involving the development and dissemination of digital contents such as films, blogs, and social media posts, does not directly endorse a specific brand but aims to generate curiosity about its offerings (Halvorson & Rach, 2012). Amidst the intricacies of the digital marketplace, it is vital for firms to comprehend the degree to which content marketing is employed and its influence on customer behaviour and corporate performance.

The origin of content marketing can be traced to the early era of the internet, but it has acquired significant speed in the past decade as a result of the widespread use of social media platforms and shifts in consumer behaviour. In the present day, consumers have higher expectations from companies beyond just offering products or services. They desire active involvement, useful knowledge, and worth through contents that are pertinent and significant to their life (Rockley & Cooper, 2012). Businesses have responded by progressively embracing content marketing tactics to fulfil these expectations and cultivate a connection with their audience.

Content marketing has various functions: it enhances brand recognition, establishes expertise, aids in search engine optimisation (SEO), and has a substantial impact on consumer buying choices. Kumar et al. (2016) conducted a study which found that content created by companies on social media had a direct influence on consumer behaviour, leading to increased brand engagement and sales. This implies that content marketing has a broader impact than just increasing brand visibility. It plays a crucial part in the conversion funnel by shaping consumer views, attitudes, and behaviours. Furthermore, the efficacy of content marketing is not limited to a certain business but extends across other areas, including technology, fashion, food, and healthcare. Duffett (2017) emphasises the importance of advertising in influencing the views of young consumers, highlighting its wide-ranging relevance and significance in modern marketing techniques. Furthermore, in the digital era, content marketing plays a significant role by creating a platform for businesses and consumers to engage in a two-way communication channel. This allows brands to directly collect insights, feedback, and preferences from their audience (Gebauer, Füller, & Pezzei, 2013).

The deliberate implementation of content marketing is in line with the transition towards more customised, contextually appropriate marketing strategies. In the face of a growing influx of information and advertising, businesses can differentiate themselves and cultivate strong customer relationships by providing personalised contents that align with individual interests and requirements (Nichols, 2015). The ability to customise contents based on specific consumer profiles is enhanced by advancements in data analytics and machine learning, as noted by Trainor et al. (2014).

Nevertheless, the implementation and assimilation of content marketing are accompanied by inherent difficulties. To constantly produce top-notch, captivating contents, one must possess ample resources, ingenuity, and a profound comprehension of the target audience's inclinations and actions. In addition, assessing the influence of content marketing on business results, such as return on investment (ROI) and customer lifetime value, is a challenging task that requires advanced analytics and attribution models (Pütter, 2017).



Ultimately, content marketing has become an essential component of contemporary corporate strategies due to its capacity to effectively captivate consumers, establish brand value, and shape consumer buying patterns. The fact that it is widely used in various industries highlights its efficacy and adaptability as a marketing tool. Nevertheless, in order to fully use its capabilities, organisations must successfully overcome the obstacles associated with generating and evaluating content, guaranteeing that their content marketing endeavours are deliberate, focused, and in harmony with overarching corporate goals.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Trends of Social Media

It may seem like social media is a recent phenomenon, but its origins can be traced back to the early days of computing in the 1950s (Gebauer et al., 2013: 1519). The technological advances of the last few centuries can be traced back to the steady growth of communication networks. It was a long road from the first social media platform, User nets, which debuted in 1979 to the ubiquitous social media platform we know today as Facebook. From the 1990s, social media has replaced traditional forms of business promotion and is now used by nearly all major and small business organizations.

First, there were User nets, where people could post to newsgroups, and then there were bulletin board systems (BBS), where people could sign in and engage with one another (Gebauer et al., 2013: 1521). Change is inevitable, and social media is a game-changer because of the versatility it brings to communication at the individual and organizational levels. Businesses can improve their search engine rankings, sales, leads, and website traffic by including search icons into their social media marketing campaigns. Business growth is not the only benefit of social media optimization (Kumar et al., 2016: 25).

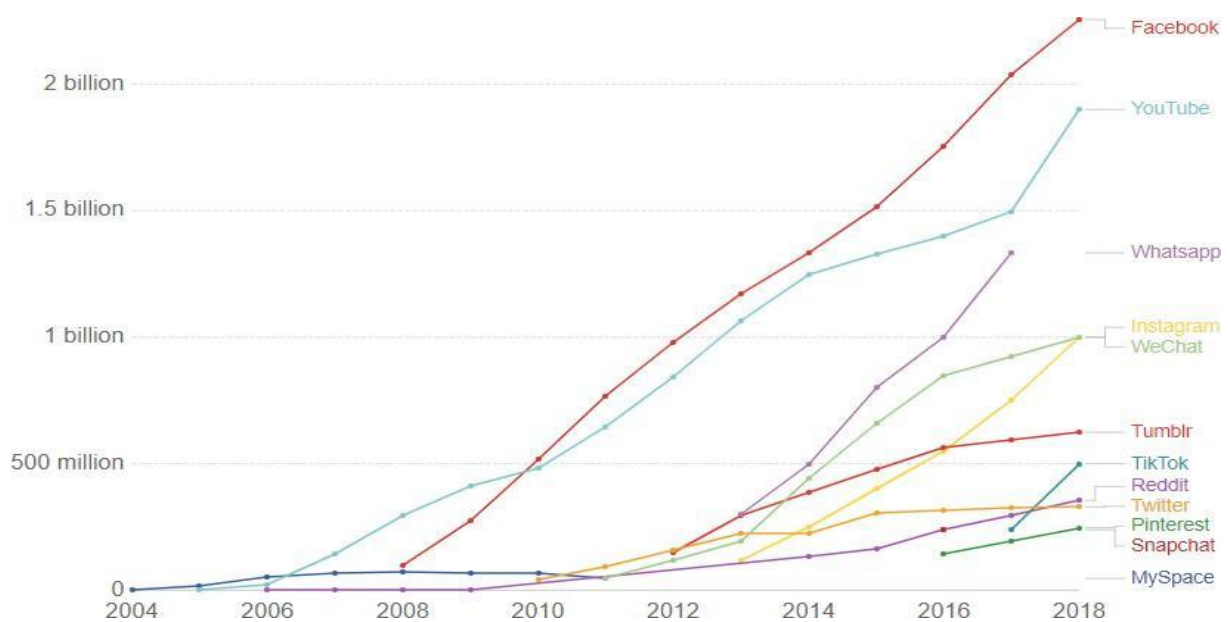
Organizations can get a tremendous return on investment (ROI) from their social media marketing efforts if they create and stick to specific goals and objectives for such campaigns (ROI). Companies like BlackPlanet, Asian Avenue, and MoveOn were just a few of the many that sprung up in the 1990s as online communities began to flourish. In addition to WordPress, weblog platforms like Blogger and Epinions emerged. The advent of numerous social networking sites in the year 2000 provided a significant boost to the development of social media. Launched projects included the likes of LunarStorm, Cyworld, and Wikipedia. Sites including MySpace, LinkedIn, tribe.net, Facebook, Yahoo, and YouTube all emerged in rapid succession beginning in 2002. (Junco et al., 2018: 124).

In addition, social media marketing facilitates the establishment of quantifiable objectives, the acquisition of a thorough understanding of your target demographic, the conduct of necessary research and development, the discovery of new social networks, and the selection of pertinent, business-related content from the vast ocean of information available online. Brand awareness can be expanded through the use of social media marketing (Mayfield, 2011: 89). Brand recognition aids in shoppers' familiarity with a given item. According to Cohen (2019), the brand name should be more important than the product or service you are selling. A successful social content strategy may be developed by a business by using the appropriate social media platform to promote its products. Metrics such as real-time accessibility, connections, and consumer engagement can be monitored and recorded. Finally, Viral Marketing on any



trending issue is available through social media marketing. This is a communication between two people with the objective of inspiring actions that benefit the company (Keller & Staelin, 2017). The ALS Ice Bucket Challenge is a good example of viral marketing since it gained widespread attention by immersing the entire world, including celebrities and business owners.

However, billions of dollars in consumer advertisements have been expended on Facebook, Google, and YouTube as the three most prominent sites regulating social media marketing. Because of the real-time data it provides on its many users, Twitter has also been dubbed a more responsive platform. Additionally, there are new online businesses attempting to join social media networks, such as TikTok, to compete with the established social media titans.



**Source:** Ortiz-Ospina (2019: 2)

The figure illustrates the patterns of user growth for several social media platforms until the conclusion of 2018. Facebook is in the forefront of the highest rate of expansion, exceeding 2 billion members, with YouTube coming second. WhatsApp, Instagram, and WeChat also have substantial growing trends, whilst Twitter, Pinterest, and Snapchat display more moderate development. The data from Myspace indicates a downward trajectory.

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that social networking and social media have different purposes. Social media, for example, is used to broadcast content online, whereas social networking serves as a tool for linking users of different online services (Cohen, 2019: 9). Among these distinctions is the ROI, which is significantly different for social media compared to networking (ROI).



## **Theory of Reasoned Action**

The theory of reasoned action is an approach to consumer behavior first proposed by Fishbein (1967). It analyzes how marketing influences customers based on their preexisting opinions. Customers take action based on their expectations that doing so would lead to a desired result, whether that result is one they are already familiar with or one they have never experienced before, as explained by the idea of reasoned action. Thus, the most important factor that prompts buyers to make purchases is their ability to make well-informed choices. A central tenet of this theory of customer behavior is that precision is preferable than ambiguity (Radel et al., 2016), that is to say, consumers are more likely to take action if they have reason to expect that it would produce the intended outcome. The customer has the option to alter their mind or choose an alternative course of action at any point prior to the completion of the action (from the time the decision is made to the time the action is completed).

One lesson that may be drawn from this is the importance of linking a great outcome to a specific consumer. The company AXE, for instance, promotes its body sprays in a way that makes all men who apply them think they are more attractive to women. The notion goes on to underline how crucial it is to move customers through the marketing funnel as opposed to keeping them standing still and giving them the chance to talk themselves out of a decision or choose to spend their money on a rival company.

## **Engel Kollat Blackwell Model**

A logical continuation of the concepts introduced by the theory of rational action is the Engel Kollat Blackwell (EKB) Model (Bonnice, 1985). Input, processing information, choice phases, and decision-related factors are the four main components of this theory of buyer behavior, which together shape how customers choose to spend their money.

The initial stage, known as "input," refers to the time when people are exposed to the most marketing content, such as billboards, web ads, and in-store displays. They move on to information processing as a result of the facts presented in these materials, where they incorporate that input with prior knowledge, biases, and expectations to arrive at the most optimal course of action (Huettner, Boyacı, & Akçay, 2019). Eventually, they reach a conclusion to buy based on the data they gathered and their own rational analysis.

There are five stages to making a decision: identifying a need, gathering relevant information, considering and ranking possible solutions, making a final selection, and living with the results.

According to the EKB model of consumer behavior theory, the most important time for input is during the research phase. During this phase, consumers are given sufficient knowledge about the product or service to remember it or to return to the company for it when the need arises, as well as throughout the external influence phase. The content marketing experts in the lifestyle business understand this pattern and use it to great effect, creating a need for their items by promising consumers that they would look, smell, or feel better than they would if they had used an alternative brand (Kodippili, Jayawickrama, Yugandari, Pamudini, & Samarasinghe, 2016).





## METHODOLOGY

This study will use a quantitative research methodology to thoroughly examine how businesses use content marketing and how it affects their performance metrics. The study will collect survey data and analyse it using regression analysis. Utilising the methodological framework proposed by (Creswell, 2014), the survey will focus on a varied group of marketing professionals from a wide range of businesses. The objective of this technique is to get a comprehensive comprehension of the current content marketing tactics, how they are put into practice, and the resulting impact on business results.

The survey instrument will be carefully designed, including both closed-ended questions for quantitative analysis and specific open-ended queries to gather more detailed qualitative insights, as suggested by Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2019). The main areas of investigation will include the distribution of funds for content marketing, the frequency of content creation, the range of content types, preferences for platforms, the perceived effectiveness of content marketing efforts, and the specific Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) used to measure success. These areas of inquiry will adhere to the comprehensive survey design principles established by Bryman (2016).

After receiving the survey results, the data will be coded and entered into a statistical software suite for analysis, following the procedure criteria outlined by (Field, 2018). Initial data exploration using descriptive statistical measures will establish the basis for a detailed comprehension of the dataset. This will be followed by conducting multiple regression analysis to clarify the predictive impact of different content marketing strategies on specific performance indicators, while accounting for any potential confounding variables. This analytical approach aligns with the analytical rigour advocated by Thomas (2017), enabling a thorough assessment of the interaction between content marketing strategies and business performance results.

### **Model:** Consumer Trust

Trust = f(micro content marketing, Demographic factors, economic factors, and geographic)

$$L_i = \ln(P_i/1 - P_i) = \beta_0 + \beta_n X_n + \mu \dots$$

where:

$L_i$  = Logit

$P_i$  = Probability of success; Positive trust

$1-P_i$  = Probability of failure; Insignificant or Negative trust

$\beta_0$  = Intercept/Constant term

$\beta_1$  = Vectors of the Regression Coefficients

$X_n$  = Vector Matrix of independent variables; micro content marketing, demographic factors such as age, level of education and gender, economic factors such as level of income and employment status, and geographic factors such as place and distance to access product

$\mu$  = Unobserved error term.



## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

**Table 1: Business Related Questions (n=104)**

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Customer Growth	103	.777	.418	0	1
Micro Content	99	.687	.466	0	1
Target Audience	100	.76	.429	0	1
Marketing	103	.845	.364	0	1
Competition	104	.942	.234	0	1
Insights on customers preferences	104	.913	.283	0	1

**Source:** Author's Computation

From the table above, it is evident that most businesses witnessed customer growth in the last business year, used micro contents, knew their target audience, and had insights on customers preferences, as the mean values were 0.77, 0.68, 0.76, and 0.91 respectively. Furthermore, most businesses had reported they have competitors, and also engaged in marketing generally, with means of 0.94 and 0.84 respectively.

**Table 2: Micro Content and Consumer Trust for a Product (n= 177)**

Variables	Logit Consumer Trust	Probit Consumer trust
Trust		
Micro Content	0.296 (0.582)	0.110 (0.316)
Online purchasing Behavior	0.419*** (0.122)	0.233*** (0.0668)
Access to info via content marketing	1.594* (0.857)	0.893* (0.460)
Time needed get access to a product	0.657 (0.616)	0.361 (0.329)
Level of income	-0.157 (0.434)	-0.0803 (0.228)
Education in years	-0.0625 (0.102)	-0.0325 (0.0552)
Age	0.0716* (0.0415)	0.0391* (0.0220)
Gender	-0.984* (0.566)	-0.517* (0.304)
_cons	-3.110 (2.194)	-1.710 (1.192)
$R^2$		
AIC	114.8	114.3
BIC	143.4	142.8
F		
N	177	177

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.10$ , 0.05, \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**Source:** Author's Computation

Table 2 shows the result of the model of this study which was to ascertain the effect of micro-content marketing and other control variables on consumer trust for a product as a result of access to information on the commodity. From the results, compared to having access to large contents, access to micro contents did not significantly influence the individual's trust for a product as a result of access to information on the product. However, access to content generally, degree of online presence, age and gender significantly influence consumer's trust. Specifically, the result shows that access to info via content marketing, higher consumers' online purchasing behavior, and higher consumer age significantly increased the individual's trust for a product as a result of access to information on the product. Meanwhile, for gender, the result shows that compared to females, male were less likely to have reduced trust.

The effect of micro content and consumer trust for a product as a result of access to information on the commodity was also investigated. From the results, compared to having access to large contents, access to micro contents did not significantly influence the individual's trust for a product as a result of access to information on the product. Furthermore, the result shows that access to info via content marketing generally and a higher consumers' online purchasing behavior both significantly increased the individuals' trust for a product as a result of access to information on the product. The research on how micro-content affects consumer trust in a product offers insightful information about the dynamics of information consumption. Contrary to assumptions, it seems that a person's faith in a product is not much affected by the amount or format of the content (micro or huge). This might mean that modern consumers are pickier and more concerned with the veracity and authenticity of the information than with its length. Consumers may emphasize the quality and dependability of the information over the brevity or thoroughness of the material in the digital era because information is so readily available and numerous. Therefore, regardless of the material type, businesses looking to gain the trust of customers should concentrate on providing accurate, transparent, and dependable information. This calls into question long-held beliefs about the effectiveness of microcontent and stresses how crucial it is for content marketing strategies to prioritize content over style.

The crucial role that carefully created content plays in fostering consumer confidence is highlighted by the positive association between knowledge access via content marketing and enhanced product trust. Content marketing dramatically increases consumers' trust in a product by giving them thorough and trustworthy information about it. The relationship between greater trust and increased online purchasing behavior further emphasizes the importance of digital marketing methods. It implies that as consumers make more purchases online, their confidence in the goods is increased by the knowledge they obtain from content marketing. This underlines the necessity for businesses to spend money on informative, precise, and interesting content marketing efforts. In doing so, they potentially increase brand trust and customer loyalty while also meeting the informational needs of the consumers. This could result in better sales in the cutthroat online market environment.





## CONCLUSION

Content marketing was the least used form of marketing by businesses in the study area compared to other forms of marketing. Thus, this study concludes by noting that despite evident usage of content marketing and micro-content marketing in the studied area, the study's findings reveal that, in comparison to other marketing forms, content marketing is the least preferred. This suggests a potential need for businesses to reassess and potentially restructure their marketing strategies to align with more favored approaches. It is recommended that businesses should prioritize creating high-quality, accurate, and transparent content over merely focusing on content quantity or brevity. By investing in comprehensive content marketing strategies that emphasize the authenticity and reliability of information, companies can enhance consumer trust, foster greater online purchasing behavior, and ultimately achieve a competitive edge in the digital marketplace.

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