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Effect of Content Marketing on Customer Patronage of Online Shops

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Abstract

This research examined the effect of content marketing on customer patronage of online shops. The study's objective was to determine the significant impact of content marketing on customer patronage. A cross-sectional design was adopted, and primary data were collected using a structured online questionnaire. As it was not possible to obtain the total population for the study, the Cochran formula was employed for sample size determination with an unknown population. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 384 online customers in Abia State, Nigeria. The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical tools. The analysis revealed that content marketing had a significant positive effect on customer patronage of online shops. Based on these findings, the study concluded that content marketing significantly enhances customer patronage. Among the recommendations, it was suggested that online shops should focus more on the quality and relevance of their advertisements rather than on their quantity.

Introduction

The emergence of the internet has significantly transformed how businesses operate, leading to notable changes in customer behavior. Marketers have also had to adapt, learning to engage with new customer behaviors driven by digital technologies to increase market share and maximize profits. Today, businesses no longer focus solely on producing and selling products but also on providing information about products, promotions, advertising, pricing, delivery, and payment methods. Khan and Mahapatra (2009) emphasized that technology plays a vital role in enhancing the quality of services offered by businesses. It has also enabled consumers to easily connect and discuss brands with others (Powers et al., 2012). Afirina et al. (2015) noted that with the rise of digital media, consumers no longer rely solely on what companies say about their brands; they can now follow what the media, friends, peers, and associations say as well.

The digital revolution has introduced new ways for consumers to seek and obtain information about the vast array of products and services available, leading to the development of digital marketing. Digital marketing involves achieving marketing objectives by applying digital technologies (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

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According to Russell and Thamir (2020), digital marketing promotes goods, services, and ideas through digital channels to acquire new customers and retain existing ones. These channels include websites, search engine optimization (SEO), search engine marketing (SEM), email marketing, social media marketing (SMM), digital advertising, mobile marketing, viral marketing, affiliate marketing, and content marketing (Bala & Verma, 2018; Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). Vinerean (2017) pointed out that content marketing has become a preferred online marketing strategy due to technological advancements.

Content marketing is essential both from an academic perspective, for the evolution of marketing, and from a practical perspective, for its application in achieving business goals in the online space (Vinerean, 2017). The Content Marketing Institute (2017) defines content marketing as creating personalized, valuable content for an interactive, engaged, and targeted audience. Järvinen and Taiminen (2016) propose that content marketing involves creating and delivering content (e.g., text messages, images, videos, and animations) that adds value and fosters relationships between the customer and the company. Vinerean (2017) also noted that content marketing has long been a core aspect of companies' digital marketing strategies, playing a crucial role in branding. Content can take various forms, such as blogs, white papers, e-books, Q&A articles, forums, news updates, images, infographics, and videos (Poonam, 2021). The goal is to provide valuable information to the target audience that drives engagement, builds knowledge, and ultimately encourages customer patronage.

Content marketing has a significant effect on customer patronage, especially in the promotion and advertising of products and services. Raghunandan and Parimal (2015) argued that on virtual business platforms, the quality, value, and nature of information provided to end-users is a major factor influencing site traffic, captivating consumer interest, loyalty, and trust in the product or service. This explains why businesses increasingly invest in digital marketing. Levy and Gvili (2015) observed that businesses have shifted from traditional media like print and billboards to digital platforms due to their ability to enhance customer patronage.

Adegbuyi et al. (2015) defined customer patronage as the support or benefits a company receives from customers. It is a measure of company performance in terms of sales volume, profit margins, and customer retention. Customer patronage reflects how customers feel about a company, brand, or product, with factors such as feelings, experiences, and expectations influencing their behavior.

There is a notable gap in the literature regarding the effect of digital content marketing on customer patronage of online shops in Abia State, Nigeria. Existing studies on this topic are largely theoretical, and the use of Abia State as a case study is limited. This study will address this gap by empirically examining the effect of content marketing on customer patronage of online shops in the region. Eshiett et al. (2022) noted that a major challenge for virtual service providers and marketing strategists is building trust among their diverse customers. This challenge is exacerbated in developing countries due to issues such as poverty, underdevelopment, limited internet access, unreliable power supply, and the risk of fraud (Eshiett et al., 2022; Agu, 2020; Salome & Ofunre, 2019).

Similarly, Oti (2021) highlighted that e-commerce adoption in Nigeria remains low due to a strong preference for offline transactions. This preference stems from the perceived risks associated with e-commerce, which negatively affect consumer confidence. The ability of traditional marketing to establish trust through direct interactions presents a significant challenge for online platforms. Amid these challenges, this study seeks to understand the impact of content marketing on customer patronage of online shops, particularly in the face of these barriers. The objective of the study is to determine the effect of content marketing on customer patronage in Abia State.

Research Hypothesis

HO_1: There is no significant effect of Content Marketing on customers' patronage of online shops.

Review of Related Literature

Digital Marketing (DM)

The present advancement in technology has brought about numerous changes in the world today. These changes have transformed how companies conduct business, especially those focused on providing optimal services for their customers and serving them better. Companies are now exploring various ways to enhance relationships with their customers, and one such method is digital marketing (Russell & Thamir, 2020). Digital marketing is a modern form of marketing that offers new opportunities for businesses; it is currently the most convenient and effective way to market products and services (Russell & Thamir, 2020). Behera et al. (2019) argue that digital marketing is a strategy through which electronic companies leverage data analysis to deliver personalized marketing messages to both existing and potential users.

Anuj and Priyanka (2021) define digital marketing as a collection of tools and strategies for selling goods and services over the internet. Similarly, Afirina et al. (2015) describe digital marketing as a broad term encompassing various promotional techniques used to reach customers via digital technologies. It includes an extensive range of service, product, and brand marketing tactics that primarily use the internet as a core promotional medium, alongside mobile platforms and traditional TV and radio. In the same vein, Nitin and Priti (2019) view digital marketing as the promotion of products using digital technologies. Darshit et al. (2022) define digital marketing as the promotion of products or services through digital technologies such as the internet, mobile phones, display advertising, and any digital medium.

Digital marketing consists of various channels, including content marketing, Search Engine Optimization (SEO), email marketing, social media marketing, and mobile marketing, all aimed at creating innovative strategies to engage with prospective and existing customers (Deshpande, 2020). According to Tetiana and Yana (2016), one key task of digital marketing is to facilitate two-way communication between a company and its customers. First, it should attract new customer groups that trust traditional marketing methods, and second, it should maintain online engagement with existing customers. Moreover, digital marketing should provide the online audience with relevant information even when they are offline. It is crucial to

remember that digital is not merely a channel but a technology that helps transfer information more quickly and effectively.

Digital Marketing Channels (DMC)

Digital Marketing Channels are the various means by which companies or individual entrepreneurs share information with their customers. According to Tetiana and Yana (2016), DMC involves using digital tools such as cellphones, apps, tablets, personal computers, digital television, LCD screen outdoor advertising, and POS/self-service terminals for sharing marketing information. Similarly, Azeez and Oladeji (2018) state that DMC includes content marketing, SEO, pay-per-click advertising, social media marketing, affiliate marketing, email marketing, digital banners, online advertising platforms, and mobile marketing (apps). According to Jackson (2011), digital platforms offer a more flexible and detailed exploration of products and services, allowing customers to compare prices and confirm product quality more easily than traditional marketing methods.

Content Marketing (CM)

According to Rach and Halvorson (2016), a content marketing strategy is a plan for building an audience by publishing, maintaining, and distributing consistent content that educates, entertains, or inspires, with the ultimate goal of driving profitable customer actions. Mandloys Digital Agency (2013) defines content marketing as the creation of relevant, compelling, entertaining, and valuable content that must be consistently provided to influence customer behavior. Content marketing is an essential activity for retaining customers, acquiring new ones, and building a strong brand. Its primary purpose is to educate consumers by providing valuable information, which then fosters brand loyalty and encourages future purchases. This type of marketing generally does not involve direct selling; instead, customers are encouraged to purchase when ready.

Copyblogger (2013) views content marketing as creating and sharing valuable, free content to attract and convert prospects into customers, and existing customers into repeat buyers. According to them, content should be free, encouraging access, consumption, and sharing. The content should also be related to the business's industry, educating the audience so that they "know, like, and trust" the company, which could lead to future business.

Customer Patronage

With the advent of digital technologies, consumers have become more informed, knowledgeable, and demanding (Okolo, 2017). Digital marketers need to understand their customers' needs, preferences, and purchasing behavior. Raji et al. (2020) describe patronage as the material aid and motivation provided by a patron, who, in this context, is the customer. Patronage refers to the loyalty or repeated support that customers show towards a brand, service, store, or product category. Consistent patronage requires a strong commitment from the customer to the firm or product (Nkpurukwe et al., 2020).

Kotler and Keller (2006) note that brand-loyal customers make purchases confidently based on past experiences without needing to re-evaluate the brand. Simons (2016) defines customer patronage as the support or approval customers provide toward a specific brand. Wadya and Sadiq (2014) explain that customer

patronage occurs when customers purchase and use products or services from a particular firm. Nkpurukwe et al. (2020) further elaborate that customer patronage is the impulse and desire that drives customers to purchase goods and services from an outlet.

Customer patronage is crucial for businesses, as it ensures sales and market share growth, leading to profit maximization. Olsen and Connolly (2013) suggest that patronage is measured by comparing a customer's total weekly or monthly purchases from a store with the normal family consumption in a month. Satisfied customers are more likely to share positive experiences with others, while dissatisfied customers tend to report negative experiences to a wider audience (Angelova & Zekiri, 2011). According to Oyakhire (2021), customer patronage is a vital metric for businesses to measure and improve customer service delivery

Theoretical Framework

This work will be anchored on Technology Adoption Model.

Technology Adoption Model – (TAM)

One of the theories upon which this study is anchored is the Technology Adoption Model (TAM), propounded by Fred Davis in 1989. While this model has been widely used in technology adoption studies, its strength lies in the simplicity of its framework. The TAM was developed by drawing from the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) by Ajzen. It was designed to determine user acceptance of a wide range of computing technologies (Davis, 1989). According to Davis, two theoretical constructs were found useful in conceptualizing the TAM model: Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU). Both constructs affect the intention to use a system. PU is defined as the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance their job performance. Likewise, PEOU is the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would be free from effort. In relation to this study, TAM emphasizes the importance of digital marketing channels in consumers' daily activities. The rate of adoption of these channels may be determined by PU and PEOU, which in turn affects consumers' intention to patronize a particular marketer. The adoption behavior determines how consumers choose to use these channels in their activities. This is critical for companies because if adoption rates are not favorable, communication through these channels may be hampered, yielding less effective results. Therefore, TAM forms the theoretical foundation of this study.

Review of Empirical Studies

Raphael et al. (2024) studied the effect of interactive content marketing on product patronage of selected online ladies' wear shops in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State. The survey research design was employed, with the population consisting of customers from three online shops selected by the researcher. Data were collected using questionnaires and analyzed with both mean and standard deviation, while hypotheses were tested using correlation and multiple regression analyses. Findings revealed that interactive videos, infographics, and quizzes—all variables of interactive content marketing—positively affected product patronage. It was recommended that online shops maintain active, organic, and consistent brand elements like logos, colors, and hashtags across their websites.

Eshiett et al. (2022) examined the effect of digital content marketing on increasing customer loyalty by driving traffic to specific content owners. The study, which sampled postgraduate students of Ahmadu Bello University, designed and administered digital content marketing questions aimed at gauging customer loyalty. Using Pearson Correlation Coefficient, it was found that clear and reliable content significantly enhances customer loyalty. The study concluded that effective dissemination of digital marketing content is essential for breaking away from traditional marketing methods and embracing digital content marketing in Nigeria. Anwuri and Eke (2020) explored the relationship between content marketing strategies and customer patronage of e-tailers in Port-Harcourt. A cross-sectional survey was conducted, with a population of over 1.1 million, from which 400 customers were surveyed. Data analysis using Spearman's Correlation Coefficient showed significant positive relationships between content marketing strategies and customer patronage. It was recommended that online shops use strategies like infographics, mobile applications, and e-newsletters to improve retention and repurchase.

Ayoola and Ibrahim (2020) investigated the effect of electronic marketing on customer satisfaction in Nigeria's aviation services. Six domestic airlines were selected, and data were gathered from 100 customers using a questionnaire. The findings indicated that search engine optimization, social media marketing, and email marketing positively impacted customer satisfaction. In Chennai, India, Beenu and Rathika (2019) analyzed the impact of customers' attitudes toward digital and conventional advertising. A descriptive study of 110 respondents revealed that digital advertising has a greater impact than conventional methods. The study recommended keeping digital advertising informative and valuable for consumers' decision-making.

Njoku and Chiana (2019) investigated the impact of e-marketing on small business enterprises in Abia State, Nigeria. Using a sample size of 369, the study revealed that e-marketing significantly improves marketing performance in terms of profitability, market share, and customer satisfaction. Adekunle and Agbetokun (2018) examined the effects of internet marketing practices on customer loyalty in Jumia Nigeria. The study used convenience sampling to select 120 respondents and found that social media marketing, email marketing, and search engine marketing had a significant impact on customer loyalty. The study recommended consistent product updates to enhance customer loyalty.

Ogbonna (2018) explored the relationship between e-marketing and marketing performance among SMEs in Abia State. The findings showed a positive correlation between e-marketing and sales volume and market share. The study recommended encouraging the use of e-marketing platforms to boost performance. Okolo et al. (2018) studied the impact of online advertising on consumer brand awareness and patronage at UBA branches in Enugu, Nigeria. While online advertising significantly impacted brand awareness, it did not have a significant effect on consumer purchase behavior.

Methodology

This research employed a cross-sectional design because it is a research that was conducted at a particular point in time. A cross-sectional study is a type of research design that involves collecting data from a population at a specific point in time. This

study was carried out in Abia State, Nigeria. Abia State is one of thirty-six (36) States in Nigeria. It is a state in the South East geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The data that was used for the analysis of this research study was obtained through primary data. Primary sourced data are original data collected for the purposes of the problem under investigation (Onodugo, Ugwunoah, and Ebinne, 2010). For the purpose of this study, the primary data was collected from a structured questionnaire. The study population comprised all customers of online shops within Abia State. Based on the complexity of the population of the study, the researcher employed the use of Conchran formula to determine a sample size of 384 participants.

The questionnaire was distributed to the respondents through an online Google form. Validity of the instrument was measured using face validity, and this was done by three research experts. The reliability of instrument was determined by a reliability test using pilot study. Data collected for the study were analyzed using statistical tools such as, descriptive, and inferential statistical tools. In the descriptive tool's frequency tables, percentages, were used in analyzing the research questions and while the inferential statistics of Multiple Regression Model was used to test the hypothesis.

Results

Out of 384 questionnaires sent to respondents via online Google form, 361 questionnaires were completed and returned. This represents a 94 per cent of the response rate.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Statistics (n=361)

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Female	185	51.2
Male	176	48.8
Age		
18-28 years	5	1.4
29-38 years	176	48.8
39-48 years	140	38.8
49-58 years	40	11.1
>58 years	-	-
Marital Status		20.5
Single	74	73.4
Married	265	1.7
Separated	6	1.7
Divorced	6	2.8
Widowed	10	
Educational Level		
SSCE	-	-
Bachelors/HND	167	46.3
Masters/PhD	194	53.7
Preferred online shop		
Jumia	163	45
Konga	116	32
Both	82	23

Table 1 presents socio-demographic statistics based on a sample size of 361 individuals. These statistics offer insights into the gender distribution, age range, marital status, educational levels, and preferred online shopping platforms among

the respondents. Gender distribution reveals a relatively balanced representation, with 51.2% female and 48.8% male respondents. In terms of age, the majority fall within the 29-38 years bracket, constituting 48.8% of the sample. Notably, there is a smaller representation in the youngest and oldest age groups, with only 1.4% falling between 18-28 years and 11.1% above 58 years. Marital status showcases a predominant presence of married individuals, accounting for 73.4% of the sample, followed by singles at 20.5%. The percentages drop significantly for separated, divorced, and widowed individuals, indicating a predominantly married respondent pool. Educational attainment is represented by three categories: SSCE, Bachelors/HND, and Masters/PhD. Interestingly, there are no respondents with an SSCE qualification listed in the table. The majority possess either Bachelors/HND (46.3%) or Masters/PhD (53.7%) qualifications. Finally, the table displays preferences regarding online shopping platforms. Jumia emerges as the most preferred platform, with 45% of respondents selecting it. Konga, garners a notable preference at 32%. Both Jumia and Konga together attract 23% of respondents.

Table 2: Response on Effects of Content Marketing

SN	ITEMS	VHE 4	HE 3	LE 2	VLE 1	Mean	Remark
1.	The use of videos, texts, photos, images, infographics and banners in promotion and advertisement of products captivates and induces me to make a purchase.	100	190	55	16	3.0	Accept
2.	The use of videos, texts, photos, images, infographics and banners affords me the freedom to make my choice without undue interference by product owners	101	187	45	28	3.0	Accept
3.	I am attracted to make a purchase because the videos, texts, photos, images, infographics and banners provide useful and relevant information about the brand and its products.	115	157	67	22	3.0	Accept
4.	Videos, texts, photos, images, infographics and banners do not only inform me or reveal fascinating facts about brand's products, they also help me to make the right buying decision.	98	204	54	5	3.1	Accept
5	The use of videos, texts, photos, images, infographics and banners in promotion of products addresses a substantial part of my questions or inquisition about a brand's products which in most cases lead to patronage	95	196	49	21	3.0	Accept
6.	Videos, texts, photos, images, infographics and banners on the site of the online shops give me reason to visit, learn and become a customer	107	163	69	22	3.0	Accept
	Grand Mean					**3.0**	**Accept**

Table 2 outlines respondents' perceptions regarding the effects of content marketing on their purchasing behaviour. The findings suggest a strong acceptance of various content marketing tactics in influencing consumer decisions. Items such as the use of videos, texts, photos, images, infographics, and banners in promotion and advertisement of products received a mean score of 3.0, indicating that they captivate and induce respondents to make purchases. Similarly, the freedom afforded by these content formats to make choices without undue interference by product owners, as well as their provision of useful and relevant information about brands and products, received mean scores of 3.0, reflecting acceptance. Furthermore, the effectiveness of these content formats in informing, revealing fascinating facts, addressing inquiries, and ultimately facilitating the right buying decisions garnered a mean score of 3.1, indicating strong approval. Overall, the grand mean of 3.0 reflects a widespread acknowledgment of the effectiveness of content marketing strategies in engaging consumers and driving patronage.

Table 3: Response on Customers Patronage of Online Shops

SN	ITEMS	VHE 4	HE 3	LE 2	VLE 1	Mean	Remark
1.	I make purchases from online shops	100	107	102	52	2.7	Accept
2.	I feel satisfied with my online purchases	55	171	94	41	2.7	Accept
3.	I will recommend the online shops I have patronized to friends and family	87	188	76	10	3.0	Accept
4.	The products I bought online were delivered to me within the time promised	96	171	66	28	2.9	Accept
	Grand Mean					**2.8**	**Accept**

Table 3 presents respondents' perspectives on their patronage of online shops. Overall, the findings reveal a favourable attitude towards online shopping experiences. Respondents reported making purchases from online shops and expressed satisfaction with their online transactions, both scoring a mean of 2.7. Additionally, respondents indicated a strong willingness to recommend the online shops they have patronized to friends and family, as evidenced by a mean score of 3.0. Furthermore, respondents reported positively about the timeliness of product delivery, with a mean score of 2.9, suggesting that products bought online were delivered within the promised time frame. However, respondents also acknowledged a perceived risk associated with online purchasing, scoring it a mean of 2.6. Despite this, the grand mean of 2.8 reflects an overall positive acceptance of customers' patronage of online shops, highlighting a general acknowledgment of the benefits and convenience of online shopping.

Hypotheses Testing

The model summary provides an overview of the regression analysis conducted to predict customer patronage based on Content Marketing (CM). The overall model fit is evaluated with R Square, which indicates that approximately 37.7% of the variance in customer patronage can be explained by the predictor included in the model. The adjusted R Square, which adjusts for the predictor in the model, is 24.9%, suggesting that the model's explanatory power remains consistent when considering the number of predictors.

Table 4: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.614[a]	.377	.249	1.1421

a. Predictor: (Constant) Content Marketing

Table 11: Regression Analysis Coefficients

		Unstandardized Coefficients			
Model		B	Std. Error	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	7.561	.759	9.964	.000
	CM	.121	.061	1.896	.009

a. Dependent Variable: Customers Patronage
Content Marketing (CM), Customers Patronage (CP)

> *HO_1: There is no significant effect of Content Marketing (CM) on customers' patronage of online shops.*

The coefficient for CM (β = 0.121, t-value = 1.896), and the p-value is slightly greater than 0.05 (p = .009), indicating that the effect of CM on customers' patronage is statistically significant. Therefore, we reject null hypothesis. This suggests that Content Marketing has a significant positive effect on customers' patronage of online shops.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Content marketing has a significant positive effect on customer patronage of online shops. This finding aligns with the results of Anber Mohammad (2022) and Amin Rayat et al. (2017), who also found that content marketing significantly affects customer patronage. The use of content marketing—through videos, texts, photos, images, infographics, and banners—by online shops not only informs customers or reveals fascinating facts about products and services but also helps them make the right purchasing decisions. The study's results statistically demonstrated a significant positive effect of content marketing on customer patronage of online shops. Based on these findings, the study concluded that content marketing plays a crucial role in enhancing customer patronage.

In light of the findings, it is recommended that online shops and marketers produce appealing content. Special attention should be paid to the quality and relevance of ads over quantity. Videos should be concise and to the point, texts should be bold and easily readable, and photos and images should communicate their message at a glance. Infographics and banners should be informative. Content that provides useful information and reveals fascinating facts about a product encourages customers to make purchases.

Suggestions for Further Study

This research examined the effect of content marketing on customer patronage of online shops. Future studies should explore other sectors and industries. Additionally, it is recommended to conduct similar studies from the perspective of online shops. As this study relied primarily on questionnaires to gather data, which

may introduce bias, future research could use secondary data for a more objective approach.

Moreover, this study focused on content marketing's impact on customer patronage of online shops. Future studies could investigate the effectiveness of other digital marketing platforms such as social media marketing, affiliate marketing, email marketing, search engine marketing, video marketing, banner advertising, and mobile marketing. Cross-country and cross-cultural studies could also be conducted to validate the results. Finally, while this study used a Multiple Regression Model to analyze the data, future researchers could conduct relational studies to investigate the relationship between content marketing and customer patronage.

Limitations of the Study

Generalizing the results is limited to the research sample, as the study focused only on content marketing and customer patronage in online shops in Abia State, Nigeria. The study's findings may be subjective, as only a specific and limited sample was examined.

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