

The Influence of Content Marketing on Purchase Decisions

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Abstract

Research Question (RQ): This study addresses how content marketing can be clearly defined and applied, particularly for organizations that are in the early stages of adoption or have not yet implemented it, with emphasis on its key elements, interaction with consumers, and its influence on consumer purchase decision-making.

Purpose: The purpose of this research was to examine the influence of content marketing on consumer purchase decisions. The aim of the research was to highlight the importance of content marketing in terms of strategic marketing planning and its impact on achieving effective and competitive marketing organizations.

Method: The research is based on a primary empirical quantitative approach. It was conducted on a sample of 128 students and younger employed persons from the city of Zagreb. Various scientific research methods were used, including analysis and synthesis, abstraction and concretization, generalization and specialization, inductive and deductive methods, classification, description, and statistical methods. For hypothesis testing, univariate and bivariate analyses were applied, particularly correlation and regression analysis.

Results: The research results showed a statistically significant and positive influence of content marketing on consumer purchase decisions ($p < 0.001$). Regression analysis confirmed the predictive ability of content marketing in shaping purchase decisions, which also confirmed the research hypothesis.

Organization: The findings of the research have important practical implications for managers and marketing experts, as they show that content marketing is an effective strategy for increasing company performance, creating greater value for consumers, and achieving competitive advantage in the market.

Society: The research highlights the role of digital communities and viral communication in shaping new social dynamics that extend beyond individual consumer behavior to broader societal interactions.

Originality: The originality of the research lies in the development of a simple research model for examining the influence of content marketing on purchase decisions. The study contributes to the understanding of this relatively new field and opens possibilities for the further development of this research domain.

Limitations / Further Research: The study is limited by a relatively small sample size and cross-sectional design, which restricts generalization and longitudinal analysis. Future research should include larger samples and longitudinal approaches.

Keywords: content marketing, consumer behavior, purchase decisions, digital marketing, viral communication, marketing strategy, online communities, decision-making.

1 Introduction

The role of the Internet in the process of evaluating and purchasing products and services has brought a key change in how consumers conceptualise choice and make purchasing decisions. In the era of digital transformation, access to information generated by other users about their personal experiences has assumed increased significance in product and service selection and in the purchase decision-making process. Digital media have thus become imperative for stimulating consumer purchasing behaviour, as their capacity to connect with consumers in a more interactive and individualised manner represents a new era in consumer marketing. Accordingly, marketing organisations are increasingly motivated to maintain a presence on social networks to cultivate more nuanced relationships with consumers through activities aimed at fostering online consumer communities. The development and maintenance of such communities have been shown to embrace brand loyalty and consumer trust (Gensler et al., 2013, p. 249; Rohm et al., 2013, pp. 295–300).

A considerable body of research has examined various dimensions of this phenomenon, including social media marketing (Bolat et al., 2016, p. 441; Duffett, 2017, p. 23), the nature and meaning of online communication in the consumer-to-consumer relationship (Campbell et al., 2014, p. 439; Gruen et al., 2006, pp. 398–400), content generation by marketing organisations (Huotari et al., 2015, pp. 766–767), and the influence of these phenomena on business performance (Moran et al., 2020, p. 537), as well as achieving competitive advantage (Ritz et al., 2019, p. 189). Content marketing, in particular, represents a contemporary marketing paradigm with many long-term benefits, such as building brand loyalty by engaging target audiences with valuable content, rather than through conventional promotional techniques (Seyyedamiri & Tajrobehkar, 2021, pp. 79–81). Nonetheless, for the role of content marketing to be more clearly understood and effectively applied, particularly by marketing organizations that are only gradually adopting this approach, or that have yet to do so, it is necessary to clearly define the construct in a manner that articulates its underlying factors, its mechanisms of consumer engagement, and its contribution to overall organizational performance.

Despite the growing body of literature on content marketing, several important gaps remain. First, much of the existing empirical evidence originates from Western European, North American, and Asian markets, whereas comparatively little research has examined content marketing within the emerging digital markets of Southeast Europe. Second, although the relationship between content marketing and consumer behaviour has been theorised extensively, empirical confirmation of its influence on the purchase decision-making process of young adult

consumers, a demographic characterised by intensive engagement with social networks and digital content, remains limited. The present study addresses these gaps by empirically examining the influence of content marketing on the consumer purchase decision-making process among young adult consumers in the Croatian market.

The purpose of the present study is to examine the influence of content marketing on the consumer purchase decision-making process. The aim is to highlight the importance of content marketing within the framework of strategic marketing planning and to demonstrate its contribution to the effectiveness and competitiveness of marketing organisations. Furthermore, this research seeks to draw attention to the ongoing shift in the classical marketing paradigm and to the corresponding need for organisations to adapt to evolving consumer patterns in purchase decision-making. Based on the theoretical foundations outlined in the following section, the study tests the following hypothesis: Hypothesis 1 (H1): Content marketing, through unobtrusive and non-persuasive communication of the value of products or services, exerts a statistically significant influence on the consumer purchase decision-making process. To test this hypothesis, the study employs a quantitative cross-sectional design and is based on data collected from 128 young adult respondents (aged 18–30 years) from the City of Zagreb, Croatia.

2 Theoretical Background

2.1 Content Marketing: Conceptual Foundations

Content marketing has become the standard practice in contemporary industries that follow market trends and respond to evolving patterns of social behaviour. Prior research has demonstrated that content marketing is more effective than traditional marketing because it shifts the conventional marketing paradigm, namely, persuading consumers of the reasons to choose a product or service, towards a model centred on communicating the value that products or services deliver to their consumers (Wen-Hai et al., 2019, p. 827). In general, content marketing is a marketing approach that involves creating and disseminating content perceived as valuable from the recipient's perspective, with the dual purpose of capturing consumer attention and fostering engagement within communities organised around specific target groups.

From the consumer's perspective, content includes material that audiences wish to read, learn from, watch, or otherwise experience. From a business perspective, content consists of information presented on websites, applications, and other digital platform channels whose primary function is communication. The purpose of content marketing is primarily to educate consumers by providing valuable information, and content developed in this manner has been shown to influence brand loyalty.

As a relatively recent phenomenon within the marketing discipline, content marketing currently lacks a single, universally accepted definition (Keegan & Rowley, 2017, p. 17). Existing definitions differ in their formulation, but all definitions converge on the underlying construct. The principal task of content marketing is to provide consumers with information that is engaging, useful for problem-solving, entertaining, or otherwise beneficial; its primary aim is not direct selling (Kim & Song, 2010, pp. 382–383), but rather the sharing of relevant market information to create consumer value. This marketing concept is used to connect with target market segments through content (Kusumasondjaja, 2018, p. 1142) and consequently requires a thorough understanding of the target market and its interests. Market segmentation thus represents a critical component of content marketing, as each piece of content must be tailored to the specific segment being targeted (Huang et al., 2011, p. 1283).

The development of credibility and trust with the target market is of vital importance, and consumers come to recognise such relationships through the genuine and reliable contributions of organisations implementing a content marketing strategy. In fact, this is about delivering value, which is realized through the sharing of information about the organisation or its products. Organisations employ a range of techniques to deliver relevant and engaging content to consumers, including informational material, advice, humour, video content, and storytelling (Ha & Im, 2012, p. 84). The direct benefits of content marketing for organisations include increased sales, reduced operating costs, and the cultivation of loyal consumers (Ismagilova et al., 2021, pp. 1087–1090).

2.2 Content Marketing as a Strategic Approach

The use of content as a marketing strategy represents a real creative challenge for marketers, owing primarily to the expansion of digital communication channels and social networks. While the content marketing strategy is not entirely new, organisations have created and distributed content for many years, both to attract new consumers and to retain existing ones. However, the current form differs from earlier iterations in that the content used to generate profit is not directly tied to sales activities. Rather than persuading consumers to purchase, content is designed to attract or enhance interest (Pelletier et al., 2020, p. 272). In such situations, consumers seek content with educational, useful, attractive, or humorous qualities (Tafesse & Wien, 2018, p. 246). Research has established that social media achieve optimal effectiveness when implemented together with content marketing. Original content disseminated through social networks increase engagement with the target audience and enhances the likelihood of desirable reach. However, content marketing carries certain disadvantages alongside its advantages (Pulizzi & Barrett, 2009, pp. 9–20). Consumers perceive and engage with traditional media differently, particularly with regard to credibility of their content: they seek content that enhances their awareness and capability. Traditional media frequently fail to research contemporary consumers effectively, whereas social media tools can yield richer and more granular consumer

data. Although content marketing reduces costs for marketing organisations, this cost reduction may, in some instances, also compromise content quality.

Notwithstanding these considerations, the literature provides substantial evidence that content marketing constitutes a strategy with a number of advantages (Lányi et al., 2021, p. 10):

- building credibility through delivering value to consumers
- developing consumer relationships
- reducing dependence on external sources
- greater control over communication content
- enabling differentiation, and
- supporting a versatile business marketing strategy.

The benefits of content marketing for organisations are clearly evident, and it is therefore advisable that organisations not yet engaged in such practices begin considering this approach and generating content disseminated through digital platforms. However, content marketing should not be regarded as a stand-alone marketing activity, rather, it must be integrated within the organisation's broader marketing strategy (Eze et al., 2021, pp. 49–50).

2.3 Content Marketing versus Traditional Marketing

Traditional marketing involves the analysis, planning, implementing, and monitoring of decisions relating to product, price, promotion, and sales, with the aim of facilitating exchanges that achieve individual and organisational objectives. Under contemporary market conditions, which are increasingly characterised by demand for personalised products, particularly visible in the service sector, consumers prioritise product quality, after-sales services, and supply flexibility. This shift in consumer expectations signals a shift within the marketing construct from a predominantly product-oriented paradigm to one more strongly focused on the consumer, and specifically on consumer expectations regarding the delivery of value. Under such conditions, the principal marketing objectives become consumer satisfaction, trust, and loyalty, where, product or brand management is enhanced through direct communication and interaction with the consumer (Glynn Mangold et al., 1999, pp. 75–76).

Another important difference between content marketing and traditional marketing is the way information is distributed to the consumer. Whereas traditional marketing uses conventional media such as television, radio, newspapers, magazines, posters, and flyers to convey its message, content marketing uses distribution channels in a fundamentally different manner, drawing on social networks, electronic mail, web-based articles, blog posts, webinars, and podcasts. Traditional marketing constitutes a unidimensional construct, as it permits communication only in one direction without genuine consumer feedback, and has consequently been characterised as a monologic mode of communication with consumers (Quinn et al., 2016,

pp. 2122–2123). Conventional distribution mechanisms do not enable consumers to respond directly to a product or to communicate with company representatives. Content marketing, by contrast, is an interactive paradigm that, owing largely to the Internet, facilitates dialogue between consumers and marketing organisations (Holliman & Rowley, 2014, p. 279). While traditional marketing shapes uniform messages transmitted unidirectionally within a defined time frame, with the aim of reaching the broadest audience as possible, content marketing directs its messages towards a more narrowly defined and smaller audience, thereby enabling direct and interactive communication with consumers (Gong et al., 2019, p. 399).

2.4 Contemporary Research Streams in Content Marketing

Recent research on content marketing has examined this domain from a range of perspectives, including business strategy (Anastasiu & Dospinescu, 2019, p. 814), brand building (Koay et al., 2020, pp. 61–62; Srivastava & Sivaramakrishnan, 2021, pp. 472–473), business performance (Yi & Ahn, 2017, p. 125), digital marketing (Stokes & Lomax, 2020, p. 357), emerging trends in marketing practice (Ngarmwongnoi et al., 2020, p. 751), consumer satisfaction (Torres et al., 2018, p. 888), business optimisation (Kilgour et al., 2015, p. 330), and innovative forms of advertising (Muñoz-Expósito et al., 2017, p. 1130). These studies conceptualise content marketing as a tool, or even a strategy, for achieving optimised and effective consumer engagement. As content marketing reflects a consumer-oriented philosophy (Kuş, 2016, p. 47), social network communities facilitate conversations centred on product- or brand-related content, through which uncertainties are resolved, and members provide mutual support through content generation. In addition, more opportunities for storytelling enable consumers to connect with brands on a deeper emotional level. In this regard, Du Plessis (2017, p. 4) argues that content marketing reflects the natural occurrence and unobtrusiveness of content within private online media spaces, while authentic messages contribute more warmth and a recognisable brand voice on social networks.

2.5 Social Networks and Consumer Engagement

The rapid development of social media has undoubtedly led to the rise of community creation in the digital space, more commonly identified under the collective term social networks. Social networks represent a space in which members consume, generate, and share multimedia content via blogs, websites, and online communities through the exchange of photographs, videos, texts, and comments. Among the most popular examples of social networks are those focused on videos (YouTube), photographs (Instagram and Flickr), text-based messaging (X formerly known as Twitter), general social content (Facebook), presentations (SlideShare), and audio-visual content (podcasts). Contemporary consumers increasingly engage with conversations within social network communities rather than with classical advertising, as the former is perceived as less intrusive (Chi, 2011, p. 51). To engage consumers more effectively

and motivate their continued participation in social networks, content marketing strategies should focus on identifying the types of content that are most relevant and appealing to the target audience (Chauhan & Pillai, 2013, p. 41).

2.6 Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) and Purchase Decisions

When purchasing products, consumers frequently seek information through reviews and ratings produced by other consumers on social networks and across the Internet more broadly, relying on electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). Marketers can take strategic action to generate, encourage, and amplify eWOM, thereby influencing the consumer decision-making process. The concept of eWOM is closely related to content generated by marketing organisations, but even more so to content produced by individual consumers within the digital communication space. eWOM refers to the dissemination of information about products or services, and a range of techniques is consciously used by marketers to drive eWOM.

Traditional word-of-mouth promotion (WOM) was originally defined as an oral form of interpersonal non-commercial communication among acquaintances (Sánchez-González & González-Fernández, 2021, p. 3) and represents the oldest form of product and service promotion. It basically focuses on person-to-person contact, but on the Internet it becomes a network phenomenon with far-reaching influence, provided the message is sufficiently persuasive (Chih et al., 2020, p. 1223). The traditional WOM phenomenon has developed into its electronic counterpart, eWOM. Whereas in traditional patterns of word-of-mouth promotion the message disappears as soon as it is spoken, in the case of eWOM the message remains for a certain period of time (Gharib et al., 2020, pp. 123–124). Such messages may take the form of blog posts, online reviews, social network posts, and contributions to online communities. Consumers purchase and evaluate products or services, develop favourable or unfavourable impressions, and subsequently share and discuss these experiences online in the form of recommendations, reviews, and blog posts. Electronic word-of-mouth manifests itself as consumer-to-consumer interaction, and content generation occurs within this relationship through the sharing, transmission, and content creation (Lang, 2011, p. 587). It should also be mentioned that the effects of eWOM can be negative as well as positive, and consequently eWOM must be managed carefully and addressed on an ongoing basis (Bachleda & Berrada-Fathi, 2016, pp. 119–120; Wen-Hai et al., 2019, p. 831).

Considering all of the above, the structure of content, its perceived quality, and the substance of electronic word-of-mouth promotion within social networks and across the Internet emerge as key determinants of the purchase decision-making process. It may consequently be assumed that content marketing has an influence on consumers' intention to purchase a product or service. Based on the theoretical foundations reviewed above, the present study proposes the following hypothesis: Content marketing, through unobtrusive and non-persuasive

communication of the value of products or services, has a statistically significant impact on the consumer purchase decision-making process.

3 Method

This study applied a range of scientific methods grounded in established methodological approaches in the social sciences (Creswell, 2014; Ivanko, 2007; Saunders et al., 2019). Analysis and synthesis were used to examine and integrate theoretical concepts from the literature, while abstraction and generalization facilitated the identification of key characteristics and relationships among the phenomena under investigation. Induction and deduction were applied in formulating conclusions based on both empirical data and theoretical premises. More specifically, abstraction was used to isolate the essential elements of content marketing and consumer behaviour from broader theoretical frameworks, whereas generalization enabled the derivation of broader inferences from individual findings. Specialization narrowed the research focus to the relationship between content marketing and purchase decisions within a defined sample. The methods of classification and description were likewise applied (Ivanko, 2007).

The purpose of the present study was to examine the influence of content marketing on social networks on the consumer purchase decision-making process. The research employed a cross-sectional, quantitative design and tested a hypothesis. Two variables were operationalised: content marketing as the independent variable and purchase decisions as the dependent variable.

Empirical quantitative research was conducted among students and young working adults from the area of the city of Zagreb. Given the resource constraints and the recognized limitations of probability sampling in this research context, a non-probability purposive-convenience sample was used (Creswell, 2014). The sampling frame was constructed from existing business databases of electronic contacts and from contacts accessible through the author's professional and social networks. The inclusion criteria required respondents to be aged between 18 and 30 years and to be active users of social networks. The unit of analysis was the individual respondent.. Data were collected in October 2023. Of 200 invitations sent, 128 complete responses were received, yielding a response rate of 64.0%.

The research instrument was developed based on a review of relevant scientific literature and drew on concepts and measurement instruments used in previous research. Data were collected by means of a structured online questionnaire consisting of 19 items addressing demographic data, attitudes towards content marketing on social networks, and purchase decision-making. Attitudinal items were measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = completely disagree to 5 = completely agree).

Reliability of the instrument was assessed using the standardised Cronbach's alpha coefficient, and the dimensionality of the constructs was examined through exploratory factor analysis. As a

prerequisite for the factor analysis, the suitability of the data was verified using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity.

For the purpose of hypothesis testing, univariate analysis and bivariate analysis (correlation analysis and regression analysis) were used. All data were processed and analysed using the statistical software package IBM SPSS 29.0, as well as MS Office Excel.

4 Results

The final sample consisted of 128 respondents, including men and women aged 18 to 30. Demographic characteristics included sex, age, and employment status, which together provide insight into the sample structure and inform interpretation of the findings.

The dimensionality and internal consistency of the dependent variable, purchase decisions, was examined through reliability analysis and exploratory factor analysis (EFA). Prior to the EFA, the suitability of the data was verified: the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.783, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 2760.376, p < 0,001$). Factor analysis was conducted using the principal components analysis with Varimax rotation and Kaiser's criterion (eigenvalues greater than 1.0), yielding three factors. Each extracted factor demonstrated an acceptable level of reliability, and the total variance explained by the three-factor solution was 63.23 %. The standardised Cronbach's alpha was 0.760, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. The construct of purchase decisions was subsequently operationalised as the mean score of the ten constituent items (hereafter noted as O_K).

An equivalent procedure was applied to the independent variable, content marketing. The KMO coefficient was 0.744, confirming the adequacy of the data for factor analysis, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 667.255, p < .001$). EFA using Varimax rotation and Kaiser's criterion confirmed a three-factor structure, with all three factors demonstrating appropriate reliability. The total variance explained was 75.23 %. The construct of content marketing was operationalised as the mean score of the constituent standardised items (hereafter noted as M_S).

To test the study's hypothesis, correlation and simple linear regression analyses were conducted with content marketing (M_S) as the independent variable and purchase decisions (O_K) as the dependent variable.

Table 1

Correlation Between the Dependent Variable (O_K) and the Independent Variable (M_S)

		O_K	M_S
O_K	Pearson Correlation	1	0,764
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0,000
	N	128	128
M_S	Pearson Correlation	0,764	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,000	
	N	128	128

As shown in Table 1, the correlation between content marketing and purchase decisions was positive and statistically significant, $r = .764$, $p < .001$, indicating a strong relationship between the two variables. Higher levels of perceived content marketing were associated with stronger consumer engagement and a greater likelihood of purchase decision-making.

Table 2

Regression Model Summary for the Dependent Variable (O_K)

<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	<i>SE</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>df1</i>	<i>df2</i>	<i>p</i>
.764	.430	.413	0.457	86.303	1	127	<.001

Table 2 shows that the regression model was statistically significant, $F(1, 127) = 86.303$, $p < .001$, with content marketing explaining 43 % of the variance in purchase decisions ($R^2 = .430$; adjusted $R^2 = .413$)

Table 3

Regression Coefficients for Purchase Decisions (O_K)

Predictor	β (Standardized)	Sig.
M_S (Content Marketing)	.764	< .001

Content marketing (M_S) had a statistically significant positive effect on purchase decisions ($\beta = .764$, $p < .001$), indicating that higher levels of content marketing are associated with a greater likelihood of consumer purchase decision-making.

Therefore, the results of the correlation and regression analysis provide statistical support for the hypothesis confirming that content marketing exerts a statistically significant influence on the consumer purchase decision-making process. The findings underscore the significant contribution of content marketing to the explanation of consumer behaviour, where approximately 43 % of the variation in purchase decisions can be attributed to consumers' perception of, and exposure to, content quality within the digital environment. The results highlight the important role of digital content in shaping consumer preferences and behaviour in the contemporary digital marketplace, suggesting that well-crafted and relevant content can

substantially influence the perceived value of products or services and thereby encourage purchase decisions.

5 Discussion

The present study was set out to examine the influences of content marketing on the consumer decision-making process. The findings confirmed the dimensionality of both the dependent and independent variables, and the psychometric properties of the measurement instrument were assessed as satisfactory. The regression analysis demonstrated the predictive capacity of content marketing in shaping consumer decisions ($p < .001$), a finding that is consistent with prior research evidencing the significant influence of content marketing on purchase behaviour.

From a research standpoint, this study offers several useful insights into the role of content marketing in fostering interactive engagement with target consumers who actively seek information within the online environment. This form of marketing engagement differs from the classical marketing paradigm in that the consumer is not merely a passive recipient of information but is encouraged towards active self-engagement through a range of subtle and experientially rich content available in the digital space. The findings indicate that marketing organisations are well positioned to capitalise on consumer presence within online environments associated with products and services.

Specifically, the present study contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it provides a clearer understanding of the relationship between digital media and content shaped by organisations. Second, it extends the conceptual treatment of social networks and the construct of content. Third, it offers empirical confirmation of the influence of content marketing on purchase decisions, and thereby of its substantive role in strengthening the competitive position of organisations that engage in content marketing. The regression analysis showed the predictive capacity of content marketing in shaping consumer purchase decisions, as consumers evaluate products and services through the messages and content encountered within the digital world. Accordingly, the findings support the hypothesis that content marketing exerts a statistically significant influence on the consumer purchase decision-making process, thereby confirming the theoretical assumptions outlined in the earlier sections of this paper.

The findings align with the broader literature on content marketing. As Lee and Hwang (2021) observe, content marketing employs non-promotional stories that are carefully integrated across different social media platforms, an approach characterised by the absence of overt promotional intrusion. Consumers respond favourably to content tailored to specific channels, findings such material more engaging than conventional advertising formats. The present findings further corroborate the argument advanced by Mazzarol et al. (2007) that communicated content accelerates purchase decision-making relative to traditional marketing methods. Informal marketing communication, particularly through word-of-mouth mechanisms, also plays a

significant role in this process (Ranaweera & Karjaluoto, 2017, pp. 714–715); conversely, negative consumer reactions to content can result in substantial reputational damage to marketing organisations.

While large business systems have historically been the pioneers of content marketing, an increasing number of small and medium-sized organisations now recognise its strategic value and have adopted such approaches (Ritz et al., 2018, pp. 180–181). A large number of studies have examined the influence of content marketing on business performance (Sweeney et al., 2012, pp. 240–241), and the present findings provide indirect confirmation of this relationship that purchase intentions are widely understood to predict actual purchase behaviour (Voyer & Ranaweera, 2015, pp. 640–643), and the frequency and quantity of such behaviours are reflected in the economic indicators of company operations and overall organisational performance. In addition, beyond obtaining new consumers, the cultivation of consumer loyalty represents one of the key marketing objectives of successful organisations (Babić Rosario et al., 2016, p. 306), an objective for which content marketing is particularly well suited.

6 Conclusion

The purpose of the present study was to examine the influence of content marketing on social networks on purchase decisions, and to analyse its role and applicability within the digital environment in the context of consumer interaction and value creation. The research operationalised two variables: purchase decisions (O_K) as the dependent variable and content marketing (M_S) as the independent variable. Empirical quantitative research was conducted on a sample of 128 students and young working adults from the area of the city of Zagreb. To test the study's hypothesis, correlation and simple linear regression analysis were performed.

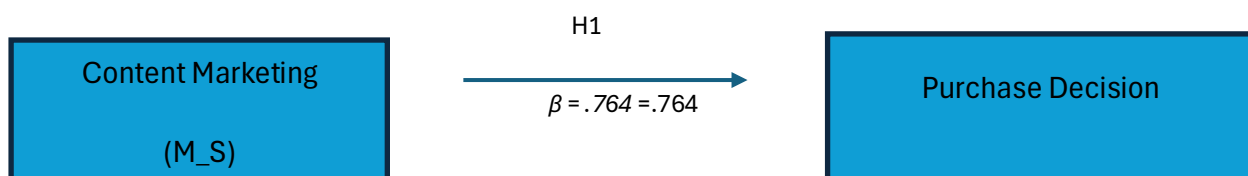
The regression analysis demonstrated the predictive ability of content marketing in the process of shaping consumer purchase decisions, as consumers evaluate products and services through the messages and content encountered within the digital environment. The findings indicate that consumers rely substantially on digital content and information accessible through social networks when evaluating products and services, and that content marketing plays an important role in shaping consumer attitudes and final purchase decisions.

The scientific contribution of this paper is the conceptualisation of the content marketing construct, that is, in its demonstrated relevance to the broader process of enhancing the economic performance of organisations through the stimulation of consumer purchasing, and its empirical confirmation of a statistically significant effect of content marketing on purchase decisions within the digital environment. The study thereby contributes to the expansion of existing knowledge in the fields of digital marketing and consumer behaviour. A research model examining the influence of content marketing on purchase decisions was developed, and both the theoretical analysis and empirical analysis confirmed the interdependence of these

constructs in shaping organisational-level marketing outcomes. From a scientific perspective, the model of the functional relationship between these two key factors also offers practical guidance for practitioners on enhancing and broadening the application of content marketing as an alternative form of marketing activity across a wider range of organisations. Specifically, the findings suggest that organisations targeting consumers aged 18–30 should: a) invest in storytelling and educational content rather than direct promotional messaging; b) prioritise platforms where electronic word-of-mouth is most active; and c) develop content tailored to specific consumer segments rather than adopting a uniform communication approach.

Figure 2

Model of the Impact of Content Marketing on Purchasing Decisions



Note. H1 represents the hypothesised path; $\beta = .764, p < .001$.

The research model was constructed and intended to be understandable and applicable across sectors, markets, and business planning contexts. The findings may indicate to marketing professionals and managers, both those currently engaged in content marketing and those considering its adoption, that this approach represents a particularly appropriate strategy for enhancing organisational efficiency and the value delivered to consumers, and that it constitutes a foundational element in the pursuit of competitive advantage. Accordingly, content marketing should not be treated as a discrete tactical activity for creating and sharing content, but rather it should be planned strategically over the long term, supported by dedicated internal resources within the organisation. The findings should also be relevant to managers seeking alternative means of engaging with the target audiences, particularly within social networks.

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, the relatively small purposive-convenience sample ($N = 128$) precludes the generalisation of findings to the wider population; future research should therefore be conducted with a substantially larger and more diverse sample. Second, the study employed a cross-sectional design, which did not permit analysis of the dynamics of these processes over time; longitudinal research is therefore warranted to capture changes in consumer behaviour and content marketing effectiveness across extended periods. Third, future studies would benefit from examining different sectors, examining the characteristics of, and differences in, the application of content marketing across specific industries. Further research should also continue to explore the significance of digital communities and social media content from the consumer perspective, employing a variety of methodological approaches.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the findings provide sufficient evidence regarding the area under investigation and offer a concise overview of content marketing and its influence on the consumer purchase decision-making process. Content marketing plays an important role in shaping consumer purchase intentions and behaviour in the digital environment, as consumers actively rely on digital content, social networks, and electronic word-of-mouth when evaluating products and making purchase decisions.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there are no financial, professional, or personal relationships that could inappropriately influence the conduct and results of the study.

Ethics statement

The study was conducted in accordance with the principles and guidelines from the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), and informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in the study, who were assured the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses and of their right to withdraw at any point.

AI statement

The authors used ChatGPT (OpenAI) for language and style editing during the preparation of the manuscript. All AI-assisted content was reviewed, verified, and further edited by the authors, who take full responsibility for the integrity, credibility, and accuracy of the final version of the manuscript. The AI tools are not listed as authors of the paper, and their use was conducted in accordance with the relevant guidelines of COPE (2023) and APA (2025).

Data availability statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Abstract

Vpliv vsebinskega trženja na odločitve o nakupu

Raziskovalno vprašanje (RV): Kako vsebinski marketing vpliva na proces sprejemanja potrošnikovih nakupnih odločitev in kakšna je njegova vloga pri oblikovanju nakupnih namer ter vedenja potrošnikov v digitalnem okolju?

Namen: Namen raziskave je preučiti vpliv vsebinskega marketinga na nakupne odločitve potrošnikov ter analizirati njegovo vlogo pri oblikovanju nakupnih namer in vedenja v digitalnem okolju.

Metoda: Raziskava temelji na primarnem empiričnem kvantitativnem pristopu. Izvedena je bila na vzorcu 128 študentov in mlajših zaposlenih oseb iz mesta Zagreb. Uporabljene so bile različne znanstvenoraziskovalne metode, vključno z analizo in sintezo, abstrakcijo in konkretizacijo, posploševanjem in specializacijo, induktivno in deduktivno metodo, klasifikacijo, deskripcijo ter statističnimi metodami. Za preverjanje hipotez so bile uporabljene univariatne in bivariatne analize, zlasti korelacijska in regresijska analiza.

Rezultati: Rezultati raziskave so pokazali statistično značilen in pozitiven vpliv vsebinskega marketinga na nakupne odločitve potrošnikov ($p < 0,001$). Regresijska analiza je potrdila napovedno sposobnost vsebinskega marketinga pri oblikovanju nakupnih odločitev, s čimer je bila potrjena tudi raziskovalna hipoteza.

Organizacija: Ugotovitve raziskave imajo pomembne praktične implikacije za managerje in marketinške strokovnjake, saj kažejo, da je vsebinski marketing učinkovita strategija za izboljšanje uspešnosti podjetja, ustvarjanje večje vrednosti za potrošnike ter doseganje konkurenčne prednosti na trgu.

Družba: Raziskava prispeva k boljšemu razumevanju vloge digitalnih skupnosti, družbenih omrežij in vsebin z vidika potrošnika. Pokazala je, da vsebinski marketing vpliva ne le na vedenje posameznih potrošnikov, temveč tudi na širše vzorce družbene komunikacije v sodobnem digitalnem okolju.

Izvirnost: Izvirnost raziskave se kaže v razvoju raziskovalnega modela za proučevanje vpliva vsebinskega marketinga na nakupne odločitve. Študija prispeva k razumevanju tega razmeroma novega področja ter odpira možnosti za nadaljnji razvoj raziskovalnega področja.

Omejitve/nadaljnje raziskave: Omejitve raziskave predstavlja razmeroma majhen namenski priložnostni vzorec, ki ne omogoča posploševanja ugotovitev na širšo populacijo. Poleg tega je bila raziskava izvedena kot presečna študija, zato ni bilo mogoče opazovati sprememb pojava skozi čas. Prihodnje raziskave bi morale vključiti večji vzorec, uporabiti longitudinalni raziskovalni načrt ter vključiti primerjave med različnimi sektorji.

Ključne besede: vsebinski marketing, nakupne odločitve, potrošniki, družbena omrežja, digitalni marketing, elektronsko širjenje informacij od ust do ust (eWOM), nakupne namere, konkurenčna prednost.



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