

Content Marketing Best Practices in the Digital Age: A South African Perspective

Melaine Mpopu¹, Geoffrey Bick^{2,*}, Teresa Carmichael³

¹IMM Graduate School, Johannesburg, South Africa.

²Graduate School of Business, University of Cape Town, South Africa,
Orcid: 0000-0002-1677-2561

³Wits Business School, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa,
Orcid: 0000-0003-2741-1494

Keywords

Content Marketing

Digital Marketing

Social Exchange Theory

South Africa

Abstract

The mass adoption of the internet and the leaps in technology over the past three decades have required marketers to adapt and respond to the developments in interacting with customers through digital marketing. Because of this rapidly changing environment, this study aimed to determine what constitutes Content Marketing (CM) best practices in the digital age as perceived by South African marketing professionals.

A qualitative approach consisting of in-depth semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of twenty industry experts in the field of content marketing in South Africa was taken. The data were content analysed to identify the main themes as they aligned with the B.E.S.T. framework for CM practices.

The findings identified that the best practices were initiating behavioural responses, delivering essential content, incorporating a strategic approach to CM, formulating targeted content, and ensuring the measurability of CM. In addition, CM tactics employed by marketing professionals were highlighted, and the critical factors for successful CM were determined. Practical insights are offered for further development of CM in a South African context.

The application of Social Exchange Theory was pertinent in emphasising how content marketing can be utilised to engage consumers and trigger socially relevant responses.

*Corresponding Author

¹ mmdpofu@gmail.com

^{2*} geoff.bick@uct.ac.za

³ terri.carmichael@wits.ac.za

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Digital transformation has caused a paradigm change in how doing and conceiving marketing. The digital age has coined the term “content marketing”, also referred to by some as “new age marketing” (Pulizzi & Barrett, 2009a), and argued to have started growing in 2011 (Cohen, 2016). CM is defined as a marketing practice of producing and distributing beneficial, relevant and consistent content to attract and attain a distinct audience to drive profitable customer action (Pulizzi, 2012). The digital aspect has led to the coining of the term digital content marketing (DCM) (Koiso-Kanttila, 2004; Rowley, 2008; Rakic et al., 2014), which emphasises the changes that technological innovation has produced on content production, distribution, and management.

The type of content used in CM includes information presented in various formats including static content such as web pages, dynamic rich media content such as interactive product selectors, videos, podcasts, user-generated content (Chaffey, 2016), news, case studies, white papers, infographics, how-to guides, question and answer articles, e-books, email newsletters, photographs, blogs, social media posts, etc. (Leibtag, 2013). “Content is king” is a popular slogan in the digital economy. Research shows that over 27 million content items were published daily in 2018 (Prajapati, 2018). It has also been demonstrated that CM relates positively to firm performance in terms of sales, customer relationship and brand performance (Terho et al., 2022). It has, therefore, become worthwhile for organisations to articulate the different types of content and leverage their CM strategies to align with their business goals strategically.

1.2. Problem statement

The state of CM in developed countries such as the United States, Australia and United Kingdom is generally known, and information regarding it is widely available (Content Marketing Institute, 2021). While CM has been an important part of digital marketing strategy for many years, the current state of CM is that there are still a number of challenges to be addressed, including acquiring and fully implementing the optimal technologies to manage content strategically across the enterprise (Content Marketing Institute & MarketingProfs, 2023; Singla, et al., 2022).

The Content Marketing Institute (CMI), a global CM education and training organisation, provides CM research for some well-known international brands. The CMI undertakes annual surveys to ascertain marketers’ opinions on the CM trends, benchmarks and spending over twelve-month periods. The results of these surveys are published in reports such as the ‘Enterprise Content Marketing 2020: Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends — North America’, ‘B2C Content Marketing 2020: Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends — North America’, ‘Content Marketing in the United Kingdom: 2018 Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends’, ‘Content Marketing in Australia: 2018 Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends’ (Content Marketing Institute, 2021).

On the other hand, evidence of the state of CM in South Africa is generally limited (Daly, 2017). An excellent scoping review conducted by du Plessis (2021) confirmed the “scattered and fragmented literature” (p.1) on the topic and revealed that, of the 32 countries represented in her review, only one (Human, 2018) was authored in South Africa. Du Plessis has further published alone (du Plessis, 2017) and with colleagues (Swart, Du Plessis and Greeff, 2021), on the topic in the areas of content marketing in social media. Digital Content Marketing in South Africa was found to be growing rapidly as a result of positive outcomes, but further research is required to map out processes for optimisation of the tool (Izogo and Mpinganjira, 2023).

Recently, the Interactive Advertising Bureau of South Africa’s report (IAB, 2022) stated that CM has historically been underrepresented in the South African advertising industry and misunderstood by agencies and brands. This lack of research in this field further highlights the need to provide marketing professionals with a framework for effective CM strategies which is not limited to consumer markets: Terho et al. (2022) propose that fundamental shifts in B2B (business-to-business) buying behaviour has made Digital Content Marketing (DCM) a strategic priority for suppliers, but organisations struggle to realise its full potential. In addition, organisations are battling with implementation, particularly with internal communication and creating content that appeals to distinct stages of the buyer’s journey (Content Marketing Institute and MarketingProfs, 2023).

Although CM is a current concept receiving increased attention, its literature is fragmented. Several authors (Henning-Thurau, Malthouse, Friege, Gensler, Lobschat, Rangaswamy & Skiera, 2010, 2013; Wymbs, 2011; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011) have released studies about social media and digital marketing that do not discuss CM. A few authors (Keyes, 2006; Rowley, 2008; Pulizzi & Barrett, 2009b; Halvorson, 2010; Handley & Chapman, 2010; Lieb, 2011) have contributed to studies about CM over time and it has been recommended that further research into CM is required (Rowley, 2008; du Plessis, 2017).

Therefore, the problem statement is that there is limited prior research and information on CM best practices and related areas, such as CM tactics and critical aspects that impact CM's success in South Africa.

1.3. Research questions

In light of the limited knowledge of CM marketing best practices in South Africa, this study aimed to address the problem statement through the following research questions:

- Research Question 1 – What CM tactics are employed by marketing professionals in South Africa?
- Research Question 2 – What are the influencing factors for successful CM?
- Research Question 3 – What constitutes CM best practices in South Africa?

To effectively address the research questions, the scope of the research was limited to the perceptions of CM practices by marketing professionals rather than a cause-and-effect of successful CM.

1.4 Layout of the paper

Section 2 reviews the prior studies on the topic, including the definition of CM, the underlying theory base of Social Exchange Theory, the best practices for CM, and the factors influencing successful CM. Section 3 outlines the methodology for the research of this study, Section 4 the Results of the data analysis, Section 5 the Managerial implications, and Section 6 the Conclusions, Limitations, and Recommendations for future research.

2. Literature Review

The literature review is divided into the following sections: the definition of CM, the underlying theory base of Social Exchange Theory, CM tactics, CM best practices, and successful CM.

2.1 Definition of content marketing

Du Plessis (2015) defined CM as “a strategic brand storytelling technique aimed at changing consumers’ inactive behaviour through unobtrusive, engaging brand conversations in earned media.” This was revised by the Content Marketing Institute, which proposed, “Content marketing is a strategic approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience—and, ultimately, to drive profitable customer action.” (Content Marketing Institute, 2018: p.8). A content marketing strategy aims to leverage multiple story channels, such as print, online, in-person, mobile, social media, etc., at different stages of the buying process, from awareness generation to customer retention.

The Interactive Advertising Bureau of South Africa (IAB, 2022) provides a more specific definition of Digital Content Marketing as follows:

“A strategic marketing approach of creating and distributing relevant, consistent content targeted at defined audiences to add value to their lives at specific points in the user journey, without using the brand or its product as the hero. Content marketing delights, educates, informs and entertains to build and engage owned, loyal audiences, thereby increasing their commercial value to the brand.” (IAB, 2022: p.7)

The revision was in response to the fact that the lines between advertising content, native content, brand content and content marketing are blurring and being used interchangeably. Content marketing is seen as separate from branded content, where sponsored or paid content promotes the brand and traditional advertising communication. Content marketing is audience-owned, for ‘content as product’, instead of paid media for ‘brand as product’.

2.2 Social Exchange Theory

The underlying theory base applicable to determining CM best practices was guided by the Social Exchange Theory (SET) founded by Homans (1958). SET is based on sociological and psychological theory. It studies the social behaviour in the interactivity of people, applying a cost-benefit analysis to define risks and benefits. This theory is relevant to the study of CM as it helps understand the behaviour between the implementers and consumers of CM, particularly with reference to consumer engagement (Bowden & Mirzaei, 2022; Khairani & Fachira, 2022).

SET regards social interchange as a behaviour that may lead to both economic and social consequences (Bowden & Mirzaei, 2022), and it has been primarily analysed by evaluating human interactions with the marketplace. The study of the theory from the microeconomics standpoint is attributed to American sociologist and theorist Peter Blau (1964). From his viewpoint, every individual tries to maximise his/her wins (Cook & Rice 2003). Blau (1964) expressed that once this concept is realised, it is possible to detect social exchanges everywhere. SET has been applied to almost all social situations, such as organisational management, consumer buying decisions, television viewing, politics, marriage, and others (Redmond, 2015).

Particular factors define how relationships are centred on exchange and how they affect their surroundings. The variables involved in SET are ‘positive reinforcement’ and ‘evaluation and comparison’ described below:

- ***Positive reinforcement***

As human beings are motivated by self-interest, social exchange is shaped mainly by the number of benefits one party stands to gain from a transactional relationship. If consumers receive a high level of quality from the goods and services, they spend their money on, they will be driven to continue purchasing those goods and services. (Homans 1958).

- ***Evaluation and comparison***

Before entering transactional relationships, a party analyses whether the benefits will be worth the cost and if other parties they are not currently connected to will provide more benefits in exchange for lower prices. If the initial option for entering a transactional relationship is not the best, subjectively speaking, the party will choose a different option (Degutis, et al, 2023; Homans, 1958).

- ***Reciprocity***

SET states that humans are driven by affirmative reinforcement (Homans 1958). They will likely repeat the step when they obtain benefits or incentives because of their actions. Degutis et al (2023) established that CM can build trust in firms, leading them to be more willing to disclose personal information which in turn can be used to individualise promotional activity. Consequently, the study explored whether reciprocity is promoted by CM in evaluating whether consumers feel that since the organisations have offered them benefits, they should reciprocate in kind.

- ***Customer satisfaction***

SET reveals that people decide if establishing a relationship with another individual or group has additional benefits than costs (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1958). Self-interest encourages all parties involved in a transactional relationship to shape their interactions positively. Transactional relationships are expanded and preserved when both parties meet their responsibilities to each other, and satisfying the consumer is among the organisation's commitments. Accordingly, the study explored the extent to which customers' needs inform and affect a CM strategy.

2.3 CM tactics

The first Research Question explores CM practitioners' different tactics to achieve a specific goal. Du Plessis's (2015) six elements of CM describe the characteristics of CM and, therefore, provide insight into CM tactics. These six elements are medium, strategic, formation, intrinsic, communication and corollary.

Medium element

The medium element indicates the type of channel for the dissemination of the brand content. Each channel is distinctive with its own users. CM exists in various forms, including company magazines, newsletters, blog posts, videos, webinars, podcasts and fully functional media sites (Du Plessis, 2015). Content marketers must assess prospects for interactivity, collaboration and co-creation before content is created and shared (Du Plessis, 2015). The goal should be to generate as much earned media as possible in the form of social mentions, views, comments, shares, reposts, reposts and subscribers; CM practitioners can choose the channel. However, earned media generates electronic word of mouth (eWOM) and is not regulated by the marketer (Corcoran, 2009).

Strategic element

The strategic element describes the strategic approach to creating and sharing brand content. Bloomstein (2012, p. 101) defines content strategy as "the practice of planning for the creation, delivery and governance of useful, usable content to be effective". Content marketers should create brand content aligned with the company's overall brand strategy and positioning. More value can be derived for the target audience and, ultimately, brand content engagement when brand content creation is considered part of a strategic integrated approach (Du Plessis, 2015). An example of a strategic approach to developing content is combining advertising and entertainment into a single marketing communications product distributed as entertainment content with a highly branded quality in line with an organisation's overall brand strategy (Du Plessis, 2015).

Formation element

The formation element alludes to the tangible formation of the brand content which should ideally be entrenched in the company's principles and brand promise. The content can incorporate engaging brand stories that expand co-creation by consumers, encouraging them to share their brand experiences in the form of opinions or comments (Muñiz and Schau, 2011), thereby enhancing brand awareness (Du

Plessis, 2015). Further, marketers can attempt to use a diversified regimen (Harad, 2013) by hiring talented journalists to create compelling content with ideas from unique perspectives (Scott, 2007). Strategic partnerships with external parties such as social artists, media houses, conferences and seminars can help create alternative forms of content.

Intrinsic element

The intrinsic element describes the natural aspect of the brand content that has a familiar brand voice that interests and is relatable to the consumers. Therefore, it is vital to have good knowledge about the target audience and the specific channel. This element demonstrates that content should not be obtrusive but be part of consumers' regular online conversations (Du Plessis, 2015).

Communication element

The communication element denotes the technique(s) utilised to deliver the brand content which should be disseminated in an appealing manner that meets the consumers' needs (Du Plessis, 2015). Brand content should fulfil educational, informational, and entertainment needs, among others, and should be of value to the daily lives of the target audience (Payne et al., 2008; Horrigan, 2009). Ensuring the content is relevant to the correct audience is essential to drive social media engagement (Du Plessis, 2015), confirming the relevance of SET to CM.

Corollary element

The corollary element refers to the expected outcome of the brand content, which depends on the organisation's brand strategy and objectives. Results of the brand content could include producing constant brand awareness, driving traffic, promoting brand conversion (Hyoryung & Kannan 2014) or turning customers into brand supporters who will distribute and co-create the brand stories and obtain eWOM via social media (Du Plessis, 2015). Rose and Pulizzi (2011) identified CM objectives as brand awareness or reinforcement, lead conversion and nurturing, customer conversion, customer service, customer upsell, and passionate subscribers. In a CM study (2012), lead generation (51 per cent), brand awareness (38 per cent), thought leadership (34 per cent), sales (29 per cent) and customer acquisition (29 per cent) were named as the primary goals of CM.

This element demonstrates what the target audience should ideally do with the content after consuming it, such as becoming brand advocates of the organisation by sharing and co-creating the content with their followers or fans on social media or changing their behaviour towards the brand (Du Plessis, 2015, 2022).

2.4 Successful CM

RQ2 – “What are the influencing factors for successful CM?” seeks to determine what enables CM practitioners to execute their strategies effectively and what influences consumers to respond positively to CM. Successful CM is described below from a resources' perspective and recipient's perspective, with views from different scholars:

CM Resources

A CM strategy will positively influence marketing objectives and the business's overall goals with adequate resources in place. Before publishing any content, a CM system and team should be in place, with a budget to help fund the initiatives and measure long-term success metrics. Most CM teams use various tools, from automation software to content management, collaborative platforms and SEO tools, which should form part of CM strategy. Further, a sound CM system requires several roles, including CM manager, content editor, video production, copywriters, social media managers, graphic designers, tech support, and analysts (Brenner, 2018).

As stated by the Content Marketing Institute's research (2018), 86% of B2C organisations and 91 per cent of B2B are using CM. The majority of these organisations are increasing their budgets each year. The most successful organisations spend nearly 40 per cent of their marketing budget on content strategy. Therefore, financial investment is essential in executing CM (Brenner, 2018).

Emotions

An article's success depends on its positivity and evoking an emotive response (Wylie, 2014); Individuals share articles internally when they connect to the message (Botha & Reyneke, 2013).

Co-creation and Trust

Co-creation arises when online users pursue opportunities to contribute to information generation about organisations for consumer insights (Degutis, et al, 2023; Gulbrandsen & Just, 2011). When consumers contribute information to organisations, it enables content exploration (Goldenberg, Oestreicher-Singer & Reichman, 2012). Collaboration and co-creation are a new realisation of brand branding because they develop trust and retain customers (Merz, He & Vargo, 2009). User-generated content positively affects brand equity (Christodoulides, Jevons & Bonhomme, 2012) as it involves outside opinions and insights that benefit the organisation.

The current concept of co-creation is derived from three fields: 1) the ability to connect via digital technology, 2) organisations that encourage customer participation, and 3) increased emphasis on providing customers with what they need and not selling to them (Ind, Iglesias & Schultz, 2013). However, it is important to note that consumers' personalities can influence their motives in sharing information, which may cause various outlooks towards co-creation (Fuller, 2010; Wong & Yazdanifard, 2015).

Personalisation

A growing number of customers expect to have tailored customer experiences that reveal their personal needs, attitudes and situations (Light, 2014) and encourage comprehensive uniqueness where customers feel valued as people and have a sense of familiarity (Hussain, 2013). Personalised messages make an organisation stand out from various rivals in the market since the content applies to the audience (Reilly, 2014). Knowing the customers and their needs is essential because high-quality content creates value for customers rather than merely promoting the company's products (Lopes, 2022).

Ethics and honesty

Marketers must ensure that disclosures are clear and discernible to customers in advertisements and sponsored content. Disclosure and clarity are the lifelines that influence the success of a business (Syzdek, 2014; Wong & Yazdanifard, 2015).

2.5 CM best practices

The third Research Question seeks to determine the accepted or prescribed processes as best practices. Pulizzi and Barrett (2009b) created the B.E.S.T. formula to create a CM roadmap that assists companies in creating valuable and relevant content, which is illustrated below:

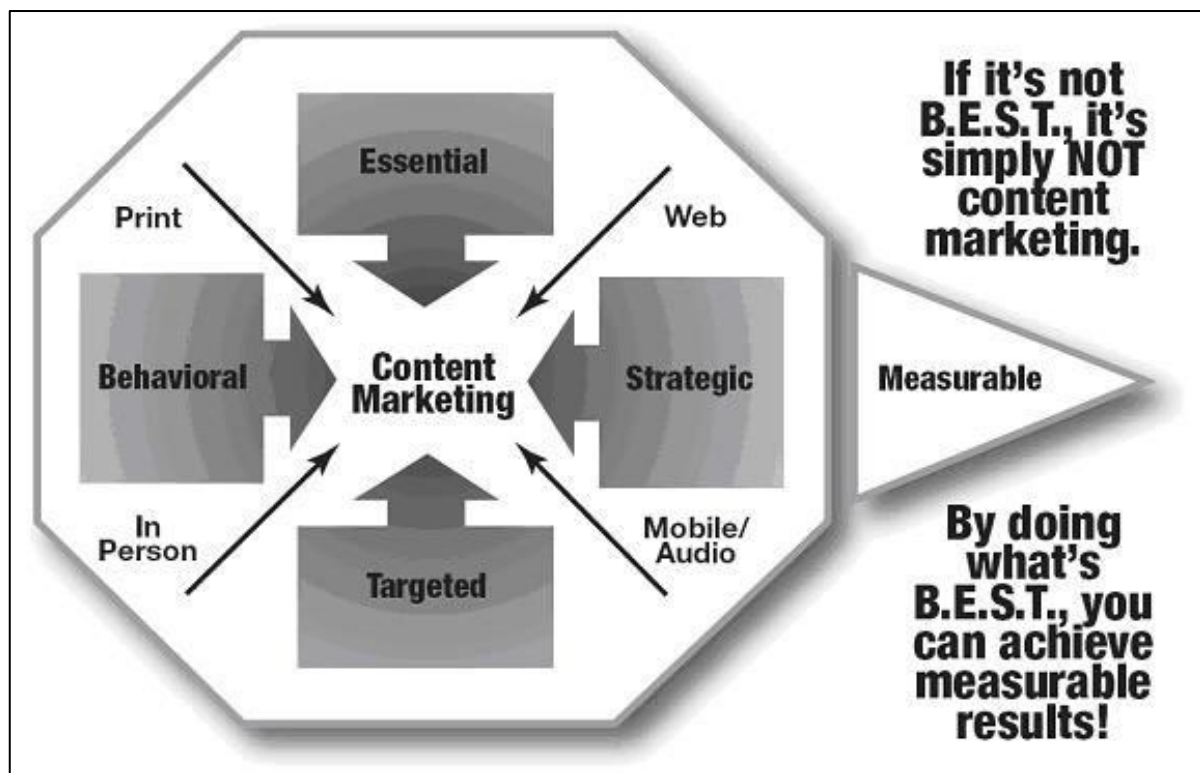


Figure 1. The B.E.S.T. formula developed by Pulizzi and Barrett (2009b)

The B.E.S.T. formula states that marketing strategy constituents should be behavioural, essential, strategic, and targeted, and the overall strategy should be measurable:

Behavioural

The content should have a resolution in that the aim of marketing communications/conversations should be realised (Pulizzi & Barrett 2009b). One of the signs of successful CM is when the CM message prompts a response or an action from the customers, such as being shared, liked, commented on or for it to 'go viral' (Botha & Reyneke, 2013).

Essential

The content should convey information that the target audience requires or is helpful to their success at work or in life (Pulizzi & Barrett 2009b). In Corporate Vision's survey (2012), there are numerous suggestions that B2B brands consider CM as simply conveying product-driven selling communications

instead of resolving the audience's challenges. Jefferson and Tanton (2013) argue that CM needs a cultural shift from "selling" to "helping". Various commentators affirm that CM requires a different mindset from a "broadcast" approach, where brands disseminate one-way product-based selling messages to "interrupt" the recipient from their preoccupation.

Therefore, Halligan and Shah (2010) and Odden (2012) find it important for organisations to adopt an "inbound" approach where customers keenly seek out a brand because it offers them relevant, engaging content that educates or entertains them.

Strategic

The CM work should be an integral part of the business strategy (Pulizzi & Barrett 2009b). Tracking global best practices and trends to become or remain a global business has been identified as a fundamental difficulty facing the marketing profession in various studies (Barnett, Dascher, & Nicholson 2004; Duke 2002; Palmer 2002).

Another strategic approach is adapting the New Media Promotion strategies, which refer to ways that technology has made things more straightforward; for example, SEO (search engine optimisation) is improving the search engine rankings of the websites (Pulizzi & Barrett 2009b).

Targeted

The content should be accurately targeted to a precise audience to be relevant to the customers (Pulizzi & Barrett 2009b). An increasing number of customers anticipate having personalised customer experiences that reflect personal needs, attitudes and situations (Light, 2014) and encourage inclusive individuality where customers feel respected and have a sense of familiarity (Hussain, 2013). Personalised messages make an organisation stand out from competitors since the content is relevant to the audience (Reilly, 2014).

Measurable

CM metrics are summarised in four key categories: consumption, sharing, lead generation and sales metrics. These groupings allow firms to measure the contribution of CM to creating value, identify any disparity between the results attained and intended, and, consequently, execute corrective measures to achieve the objectives (Elisa & Gordini 2014).

Metrics and measurement instruments should align with CM goals and include measurement systems related to relationship building and customer growth, considering customer lifetime value, engagement, and organisational goals (Holliman & Rowley, 2014; Elisa & Gordini, 2014).

Tracking data and SEO and establishing benchmarks for success, such as rates of opened emails, revenue, marketing and sales qualified leads, internal shares, and impressions, are helpful ways of predicting success and, further, having tools that review the analytics of content such as Google Analytics, Google Webmaster Tools, Kapost, Buffer help in assessing performance of content (Pusack, 2017).

2.6 Research propositions

Based on the prior research on the topics, the Research Questions are developed into Research Propositions as follows:

- **Proposition 1**— The CM tactics employed by marketing professionals in South Africa include the following six elements:

- Medium, strategic, formation, intrinsic, communication and corollary

This proposition is linked to RQ1 as it helps explore the various CM tactics marketing professionals employed in South Africa. The key references are Du Plessis (2015), Corcoran (2009), Rose and Pulizzi (2011), Bloomstein (2012), Harad (2013), and Scott (2007).

- **Proposition 2** – Successful CM is determined by the following factors:

- Availability of resources such as relevant systems, human capital, and financial resources
- Delivery of emotive and personalised content
- Provision of co-creation opportunities
- Presentation of an ethical and honest organisation

This proposition is linked to RQ2 as it helps determine successful CM in an overall business context. The key references are Brenner (2018), Wylie (2014), Botha and Reyneke (2013), Ind, Iglesias and Schultz (2013), and Christodoulides, Jevons and Bonhomme (2012).

- **Proposition 3**— Best practices of CM include addressing the following B.E.S.T. criteria:

- Initiating Behavioural responses
- Delivering Essential content
- Incorporating a Strategic approach to CM
- Formulating Targeted content
- Ensuring CM is Measurable

This proposition is linked to RQ3 as it helps determine the best way to achieve CM objectives. The key references are Pulizzi and Barrett (2009b), Wylie (2014), Botha and Reyneke (2013), Jefferson and Tanton (2013), and Odden (2012).

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research approach and strategy

There is relatively little research on this topic, particularly in South Africa. Given the relative uniqueness of this industry, an exploratory approach was adopted, utilising a qualitative strategy with an inductive methodology and a cross-sectional approach.

3.2 Population and sampling

The population comprised marketing professionals involved in CM planning, implementation and management. Purposive sampling was used where participants were carefully selected for inclusion based on the possibility that each participant would expand the variability of the sample, identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that were particularly knowledgeable about or experienced with CM being the phenomenon of interest (Cresswell & Clark 2011). A total of 20 marketing professionals knowledgeable in CM responded to the study.

3.3 Data collection

In-depth interviews using a semi-structured interview schedule were used to collect data (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). This is because the study is concerned with CM's nature, explanation and understanding and interviews provide the opportunity to examine data for in-depth meanings and processes (Labuschagne, 2003). Primary data were collected through face-to-face, telephonic and video calling (through MS Teams) and probed the research propositions regarding CM best practices in South Africa. The instrument allowed communication between the interviewer and interviewee to be open-ended and to focus on relevant topics as they arose during the conversations (Adams et al., 2007). Participants had the freedom to answer the questions in any order they preferred, which helped the conversation flow freely.

3.4 Data analysis

Data collected from interviews were transcribed verbatim, and then content was analysed through coding and categorisation to identify themes relevant to the study. This approach follows the King and Horrock (2019) stages of conducting a thematic analysis. The steps were modified to fit this particular study and included three main stages of descriptive coding, interpretive coding, and overarching theme identification.

3.5 Research criteria

For quantitative research, the issues of validity and reliability are critical. However, it is important for qualitative research to ensure trustworthiness in data collection and analysis (Cresswell, 2014). Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed the equivalent stringent criteria credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability to assess the trustworthiness and rigour of qualitative studies.

Credibility: The purpose of the credibility criterion is to establish confidence that the results of qualitative research are authentic, credible and believable from the participants' perspective. To increase credibility, the semi-structured interview included several prompts that allowed the expansion of answers and the opportunity to request more information when required. Further, familiarity with CM established researcher authority in conducting the investigation (Trochim, 2020).

Dependability: The purpose of the dependability criterion is to ensure the qualitative research findings are repeatable if the investigation were conducted with similar participants and context. To increase dependability, consistency was maintained by documenting and keeping a trackable record of any changes and revisions to the research protocol (Forero, Nahidi, De Costa et al. 2018).

Confirmability: Confirmability is the degree to which other researchers can confirm or corroborate the research results. To increase confirmability, the research process for checking and rechecking the data throughout the study was documented and care was taken to avoid bias or distortion (Forero, Nahidi, De Costa et al. 2018).

Transferability: Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be transferred to similar contexts or settings, which is different to the generalisability required in quantitative studies. Transferability was increased by providing detailed descriptions of the research context and the assumptions central to the study (Trochim, 2020).

3.6 Ethics

The research used an ethics clearance from the Institute of Marketing Management (IMM). The study considered the following ten ethical considerations that are the most significant principles associated with ethical considerations in research (Bryman & Bell 2007), including voluntary participation, the privacy of respondents, confidentiality of the research data, anonymity of participants guaranteed, and not exposing respondents to harm.

4. Results and Findings

4.1 Respondent demographics

The 20 respondents sampled for the study were all marketing professionals with experience in content marketing, with the majority holding degrees in marketing and between four and forty-two years of experience in marketing with an average of 16 years. Consequently, this was a knowledgeable sample able to provide deep insights into the phenomenon. The respondents were interviewed for between forty and sixty minutes, as described in the table below.

Table 1: Description of the respondents

Job Description	Number sampled	Marketing education and experience	Location
Marketing Lead	3	1) Diploma in Marketing Management and ten years' experience	Johannesburg
		2) BBA in Communications Science and Honours in Business Management and 16 years' experience	Johannesburg

Job Description	Number sampled	Marketing education and experience	Location
		3) IMM Honours Marketing Management degree and Course in Digital Marketing and 12 years' experience	Durban
Senior Marketing Consultant	1	1) Postgraduate Diploma in Marketing and 4.5 years' experience	Cape Town
Digital Marketing Consultant	1	1) Communications degree and 13 years' experience	Johannesburg
Marketing Manager	7	1) Postgraduate degree in Marketing Management and 17 years' experience	Johannesburg
		2) BA Corporate Communications and 16 years' experience	Johannesburg
		3) Bachelor of Commerce in Marketing and Postgraduate degree in Marketing and Advertising and 15 years' experience	Cape Town
		4) Media and writing degree and 14 years' experience	Johannesburg
		5) Bachelor of Commerce Honours in Marketing and ten years' experience	Johannesburg
		6) Diploma in Marketing Management, Honours in Marketing degree and Diploma in social media Digital Marketing and 16 years' experience	Cape Town
		7) Bachelor of Commerce and 16 years' experience	Cape Town
Marketing and Communications Manager	1	1) Bachelor of Commerce Honours in Marketing and Digital Marketing course and nine years' experience	Johannesburg
Manager – Brand, Growth and Digital Transformation	1	1) Postgraduate Management – major in Marketing and 18 years' experience	Johannesburg
Chief Marketing Officer	1	1) Bachelor of Commerce, Marketing courses and a Digital Marketing diploma and 18 years' experience	Johannesburg
Marketing Director	1	1) Bachelor of Commerce and 42 years' experience	Johannesburg

Job Description	Number sampled	Marketing education and experience	Location
Head of Marketing	2	1) Bachelor of Commerce and 24 years' experience	Johannesburg
		2) Bachelor of Commerce – major in Marketing and 16 years' experience	Johannesburg
Head of Board and Executive Programmes (previously Senior Marketing Manager)	1	1) Bachelor of Commerce and 22 years' experience	Cape Town
Owner of a Digital Marketing Agency	1	1) Online courses in digital marketing, analytics and content marketing and four years' experience	Johannesburg
Total	20		

4.2 Proposition 1: CM tactics employed by marketing professionals.

Content and thematic analysis of the respondents' comments led to the following three key themes around the determinants of CM tactics:

4.2.1 CM tactics are determined by the suitability of the medium.

Some of the respondent comments supporting this theme were:

“There is infinite content on the internet, and consumers are looking for a **single point of contact** to access a comprehensive set of information. We provide this through our **content hub**, a **microsite** that hosts curated information.”

“Selecting **appropriate platforms** to share content is as important as the content you share when planning your CM initiatives. It is what you say and how and where you say it. If the channel does not reach your target audience, is not affordable and does not drive feedback and engagement from the target audience, it should not be used. Some of our channels include **webinars, podcasts and emails.**”

4.2.2 CM tactics are determined by how beneficial the content is.

Some of the respondent comments supporting this theme were:

“Quality content that provides **free and useful information** interests the target audience, causing them to **click** on the call-to-action, generating leads and influencing conversions.”

“The objectives of CM are to **educate, entertain or convince** the target audience. The content should provide **value** that did not exist before.”

4.2.3 CM tactics are determined by the relevance of the content.

Some of the respondent comments supporting this theme were:

“During the Covid-19 pandemic, we provided our clients with **business operations tips and information** to help them navigate the changing environment and uncertainty brought about by the crisis. This information was shared through **articles, infographics and reports.**”

“We sought to produce helpful content by amplifying our clients' voices. We partnered with them in jointly producing **reports and articles** that interested them. We managed to stay relevant and connected to our clients.”

Table 2 below shows a list of CM tactics as presented by the respondents. These tactics were categorised according to whether they are formed on online or offline platforms. These tactics were linked to the proposition's six elements as follows:

- Tactics 1 - 28 are linked to the ‘medium’ element because they indicate a channel for disseminating the brand content.
- Tactics 29 - 34 are linked to the ‘corollary’ and ‘formation’ elements because they indicate the expected outcome of the content and tangible creation of content through partnerships, respectively.
- Tactics 35 - 38 are linked to the ‘medium’ element because they indicate a channel for disseminating the brand content.
- Tactics 39 – 40 are linked to the ‘strategic’ and the ‘intrinsic’ elements because they indicate an approach of using a combination of different tactics, and they show that content can be adaptable to ensure relevance to the target audience.

Table 2: List of CM Tactics

CM Tactics employed by marketing professionals in South Africa			
1. Email marketing	11. Webinars	21. Digital advertising	31. Earned media
2. Blogging	12. Real-time video	22. Media releases	32. Storytelling
3. Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)	13. Podcasts	23. Gamification	33. Referral
4. Conversion Rate Optimisation (C.R.O.)	14. White papers	24. Marketing A.I.	34. Sponsorships
5. Microsites	15. Research and surveys	25. Case studies	35. Print magazines
6. Mobile applications	16. Online magazines	26. Contest	36. Print newsletters
7. Mobile content	17. Infographics	27. Content curation	37. Traditional media
8. Social content	18. eBooks	28. Crowdsourcing	38. Events
9. Video content	19. Digital newsletters	29. Testimonial	39. Repurpose
10. Virtual conferences	20. Advertorial and native advertising	30. Influencer content	40. Republish
Key			
		Online CM tactics	
		Offline CM tactics	
		Online and Offline CM tactics	

The respondents’ views indicate consistency with proposition one, where CM tactics employed include the six elements: medium, strategic, formation, intrinsic, communication, and corollary, so the proposition is *effectively supported*.

4.3 Proposition 2: Factors for successful CM

Content and thematic analysis of the respondents’ comments led to the following three key themes around the determinants of CM success:

4.3.1 The success of CM is influenced by organisational support.

Some of the respondent comments supporting this theme were:

“The workforce's **quality, skill and capacity** are key factors affecting CM objectives. A motivated and well-trained workforce can deliver market-leading content and productivity to create a competitive CM advantage and credibility.”

“An integrated **CM system** is important to integrate many systems such as content management, marketing automation, CRM, analytics, business intelligence and collaboration tools for effective and successful CM campaigns.”

“Given the very close link between CM, customer experience optimisation, sales enablement, integrated marketing and the consistency required by today’s customer, there is a need to work through and across silos in an organisation. Obtaining buy-in and support from sponsors and partners is important to drive CM.”

4.3.2 External factors influence the success of CM

Some of the respondent comments supporting this theme were:

“The **economic environment** is a key factor in determining demand for CM. When the economy is growing, it presents a good opportunity for businesses to grow. As consumer or client spending is high, businesses can invest more in marketing. On the other hand, during times of recession, economic uncertainty, and pandemics such as the current Covid-19 pandemic, spending is low for consumers, clients and businesses.”

“**New laws and regulations** such as the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) affect how CM can be implemented. Email marketing, a component of CM, must comply with the conditions set out in POPIA, including acquiring consent from individuals before sending any direct marketing to them. Slow adaptation to such changes to legislation may prevent or limit CM opportunities.”

“**Data protection and the privacy environment** have shifted significantly in recent years, and increased focus on privacy negatively impacts our ability to collect and derive insights quickly to incorporate in our CM.”

4.3.3 The success of CM is influenced by the execution of the CM strategy

This theme, ‘CM strategy execution,’ is linked to all the factors influencing the success of CM. Some of the respondent comments supporting this theme were:

“Often, content for CM purposes is created in different organisational divisions for varied reasons. It is important to undertake a **content gap analysis** across all divisions to inventory what is available and consider what is needed and valued by the prospects.”

“The **quality, skill and capacity** of the workforce is a key factor in affecting delivery of CM. A motivated and well-trained workforce can deliver market-leading content and productivity to create a competitive advantage.”

“**Content co-creation** with third parties, such as other organisations and influencers, rewards companies with creative content, a wider audience or reach, increase in sales and **brand recognition, credibility, and trust**.

“Incorporating storytelling in the CM strategy allows for a vivid description of ideas, beliefs, personal experiences, and life- lessons through stories or narratives that **evoke powerful emotions and insights**. It connects the company with its target audience and creates a strong, personal relationship.”

Table 3 below shows a list of internal and external factors influencing the success of CM as presented by the respondents and linking these to the propositions:

Table 3: Internal and External factors influencing the success of CM

Proposition 2 factors	Internal factors from the study	Conclusion
	1. Business Objectives	Represents new finding
	2. Strategy	Represents new finding
	3. Brand and customer experience	Represents new finding
	4. Data	Represents new finding
Provision of co-creation opportunities	5. Collaboration	Identified
	6. Product or service development	Represents new finding
Delivery of emotive and personalised content	7. Content	Identified
Presentation of an ethical and honest organisation	8. Business culture	Identified
Availability of resources such as relevant systems, human capital and financial resources	9. Finance	Identified
Availability of resources such as relevant systems, human capital and financial resources	10. Human resources	Identified
Availability of resources such as relevant systems, human capital and financial resources	11. Operational issues	Identified
Availability of resources such as relevant systems, human capital and financial resources	12. System integration	Identified
	External factors from the study	
	1. Technological change	Represents new finding
	2. Prospects and their preferences	Represents new finding
	3. Competition	Represents new finding
	4. Economic environment	Represents new finding
	5. Legislation	Represents new finding
	6. Market dynamics	Represents new finding
	7. Social and Political change	Represents new finding

While the success factors from the proposition were identified, the respondents highlighted several new insights in terms of internal and external factors. Consequently, this proposition is *partially supported*.

4.4 Proposition 3: Best practices of Content Marketing

Content and thematic analysis of the respondents' comments led to the following two key themes around the determinants of CM best practices:

4.4.1 Effectiveness criteria underpin CM best practices.

This theme of 'effectiveness criteria' is linked to all five proposition criteria. Some of the respondent comments supporting this theme were:

“CM best practices involve a **strategic approach** to understanding your audience by creating **audience personas and identifying their demographics and interests**. A clear understanding of the customers purchasing decisions helps develop an effective CM strategy.”

“**Measuring ROI** to weigh the cost of your CM against the revenue you earn from it is part of best practices. **Metrics** that can be used include lead quality, sales, web traffic, onsite engagement, social media engagement, and SEO success, and these inform the CM strategy.”

4.4.2 CM best practices are underpinned by effective content.

This theme of 'effective content' is linked to four of the five criteria of the proposition. Some of the respondent comments supporting this theme were:

“**Consistent, high-quality, and engaging content** forms part of CM best practices as it impacts audience decision-making, builds trust with your audience, **improves conversions**, connects with your customers, and **generates leads**.”

“CM best practices involve building a brand narrative that guides the **messaging of the content**. Furthermore, developing a content roadmap is important as it outlines the content's messages, themes, and topics, the **content's format**, the channels to use, and the **personalisation** tools.”

Table 4 below shows best practices criteria as shared by the respondents. These criteria are matched with the corresponding elements from the proposition. The criteria that are not matched are considered new findings.

Table 4: CM best practices criteria

Proposition 3 elements	CM best practices from the study	Conclusion
Initiating Behavioural responses	Set objectives	Effectively found
Formulating Targeted content	Define target audience	Identified
	Assessment of the macro and micro-environment	New finding
Formulating Targeted content	Develop content	Identified
Incorporating a Strategic approach to CM	Plan implementation	Effectively found
Delivering Essential content	Conduct campaign	Effectively found
Ensuring CM is Measurable	Feedback and measurement of results	Identified

The study results indicate fair consistency with the proposition, aligned to the B.E.S.T. criteria, so the proposition is *effectively supported* by adding the new finding.

5. Managerial Implications

The managerial implications for organisations are to apply the best practices in Content Marketing to ensure successful CM strategies are implemented. Organisations should test innovative tactics to determine those most suited for the target market to build a successful CM programme.

To enable organisations to pursue CM best practices, the following Content Marketing Best Practices Framework has been developed as illustrated in Figure 2 below:



Figure: 2: Content Marketing Best Practices Framework

The above framework highlights the seven best practices:

1. Set objectives
2. Define target audience
3. Assessment of the macro and micro-environment
4. Develop content
5. Plan implementation
6. Conduct campaign
7. Feedback and measurement

For each best practice, the corresponding factors are listed that would need to be considered or factored in the CM journey. The complementary factors comprise the CM Tactics and the internal and external factors influencing the success of CM. Applying the best practices framework will also address the factors influencing CM's success in the digital age.

5.1 Implementation of the Content Marketing Best Practices Framework

The seven best practices are implemented in seven stages, as described below.

Step 1: Set objectives

Establish Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-based (SMART) CM goals aligned to the broader marketing and business goals and strategy while considering the available systems to produce and distribute the content. Set Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the goals.

Step 2: Define the target audience

Create buyer personas with information about the target audience, such as demographics, interests, needs, and channel-specific preferences and map the buyer's journey to deliver content that guides their purchasing decisions and is most relevant to them. An example of the best content formats for each stage includes, during the Awareness stage, a white paper would be suitable, followed by a webinar in the Consideration stage and a product guide or free trial in the Decision stage.

Step 3: Assess the macro and micro-environment

Assess the market to understand the economic shifts, social, political, technological and legislative landscape changes, competitor behaviour, ongoing market trends and changing customer needs. Use the information to guide decision-making in developing content that best responds to these factors and is relevant to the customers.

Step 4: Develop the content

Build a succinct brand narrative that is the guiding principle for developing content. Define your content mix, identify the content types, select suitable tactics and integrate them with your content management, marketing automation, Customer Relationship Management (CRM), analytics, business intelligence and collaboration tools for effective campaigns to reach your target audience.

Step 5: Plan the implementation

Align the plan with the KPIs. Determine the investment required for the type of content to be created and the selected channels for marketing the content. Regularly run a content audit to assess what you already have, then review it for quality and relevance. Further, use analytics platforms to identify your most successful content. Work with a skilled team and your product development teams through the conceptualization, design, development, and marketing of newly created or newly rebranded products or services to ensure consistency in the marketing message.

Step 6: Conduct the campaign

Schedule your campaign in a content calendar to ensure consistent production and distribution of content among prospects and customers. Use the appropriate content channel according to the type of content selected to ensure it reaches the target audience. Examples of content channels include websites, social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube and Instagram, podcasts, emails and mobile apps. Schedule regular content inventories and audits to maintain, update, republish, and repurpose content when suitable. Given the close link between CM, customer experience optimisation, sales enablement, integrated marketing, and the consistency required by today's customers, work closely with the respective teams to conduct the campaign and achieve positive results.

Step 7: Obtain feedback and measure the results

Analyse and measure your results to make necessary changes to enhance CM efforts and reach more audience members. Assess the SMART goals and KPIs to determine the success of the CM strategy. While, in the end, CM aims to drive profitable action from the target audience, the power of content in a brand and customer experience context is important. It is widely known that consumers buy not only the product or service but also the brand's promise. It is important to articulate what the brand stands

for and ensure that all touchpoints with your business, from in-store interaction and website visits to content ‘consumption’, have a branding impact and constitute a positive customer experience.

5.2 Impact of the Content Marketing Best Practices Framework

Implementation of the framework is set to yield positive results because it gives organisations a balanced view of their internal objectives, resources and capabilities, and the external environment in which it operates, which helps plan and implement successful CM. The framework guides the content creation and marketing process in a way that attracts and retains targeted audiences, ultimately for the commercial benefit of an organisation. This outcome follows the Content Marketing Institute’s (2018) definition of CM as a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience—and, ultimately, to drive profitable customer action.” Therefore, the framework aims to achieve this definition.

Moreover, the framework helps marketing departments function more efficiently and produce content more effectively, as it serves as an organisational and communication tool that guides marketers on how to uniformly approach CM, making it easier to collaborate, allocate tasks, do performance reviews or analyses, and predict customers’ behaviour.

6. Conclusions, Limitations and Future Research

6.1 Conclusions to the Research Propositions

The study aimed to determine the best practices for CM as perceived by marketing professionals. This was addressed through analysing the following three Research Propositions, developed from the initial Research Questions:

Proposition 1: CM tactics employed by marketing professionals

Proposition 1 stated that the CM tactics employed by marketing professionals in South Africa include the following six elements: medium, strategic, formation, intrinsic, communication and corollary.

The themes that emerged following the views of the respondents included:

- CM tactics are determined by whether a medium is suitable
- CM tactics are determined by whether the content is beneficial
- CM tactics are determined by whether the content is relevant

The themes’ focus on ‘medium’, ‘content’ and ‘relevance’ respectively aligned with the Du Plessis’ (2015) elements of ‘medium’, ‘formation’ and ‘intrinsic’. In conclusion, because of the alignment of the 40 CM tactics and the three themes that emerged (see Table 2) to Du Plessis’ (2015) six elements of CM and S.E.T. (Homans, 1958), Proposition 1 is *effectively supported*.

Proposition 2: Factors determining successful CM

Proposition 2 stated: Successful CM is determined by the following factors:

- Availability of resources such as relevant systems, human capital and financial resources
- Delivery of emotive and personalised content
- Provision of co-creation opportunities
- Presentation of an ethical and honest organisation

The three themes that emerged following the analysis of the research findings were: ‘the success of CM is influenced by organisational support’, ‘the success of CM is influenced by external factors’, and ‘the success of CM is influenced by the execution of the CM strategy’. The first theme is consistent with the organisational resources required, while the third theme partly embraces the other three factors. The proposition did not identify the second theme of external factors and thus represents a new factor. Consequently, given the additional insights, the Proposition is *partially supported*.

Proposition 3: Best practices of CM

Proposition 3 stated: Best practices of CM include addressing the following B.E.S.T. criteria:

- Initiating Behavioural responses
- Delivering Essential content
- Incorporating a Strategic approach to CM
- Formulating Targeted content
- Ensuring CM is Measurable

The two themes that emerged following the analysis of the research findings were: ‘CM best practices are underpinned by effective criteria’ and ‘CM best practices are underpinned by effective content’. The findings were aligned to the five criteria for best practices above, with the addition of a new criterion: Conducting a market assessment was revealed by the respondents as it provides insights into shifts in the economy, competitors, and ongoing market trends, thereby informing decision-making in CM. Consequently, given the alignment of findings with the proposition but with the additional criterion, Proposition 3 is *effectively supported*.

6.2 Theoretical contribution: application of the SET and other theories

The study contributed to the body of knowledge by applying the Social Exchange Theory of Homans (1958), which provided a guideline for understanding social behaviour in the interaction of organisations and their target audiences.

In addition, Du Plessis’ (2015) six elements of CM tactics were validated, as well as Pulizzi and Barrett’s (2009b) B.E.S.T.’s formula. Additional insights were provided through other criteria for best practices and further insights into the factors determining successful CM.

A framework was developed, the Content Marketing Best Practices Framework, from this study and prior studies to assist organisations in pursuing successful CM strategies.

6.3 Limitations and future research

The number of participants available for the interviews in this study was small, as CM is a specialist field in South Africa, and only experts with at least a few years of experience in the field were recruited; this ensured relevance and reliability. As this was a qualitative study with a small sample size, results could not be generalised to the population, although the findings may usefully be transferred to similar contexts.

As CM is still a growing field, there are many avenues of future research in this field that can benefit the local CM industry:

- Conduct a longitudinal study of the impact of content marketing in the B2C environment
- Develop a content marketing strategy and assess its impact on customers under regional market conditions
- Using the determinants of content marketing effectiveness, test the conceptual framework and empirical findings from a South African perspective
- Conduct a longitudinal study of content marketing strategies targeting millennials
- Determine content marketing best practices in the digital age from an African perspective
- Research the role of B2B content marketing in the metaverse.

References

- Adams, J., Khan, H. T., Raeside, R., & White, D. (2007). *Research Methods for Graduate Business and Social Science Students*. Response Books.
- Barnett, S.T., Dascher, P. E., & Nicholson, C.Y. (2004), "Can school oversight adequately assess department outcomes? A study of marketing curriculum content," *Journal of Education for Business*, vol. 79 no. 3, pp.157–162.
- Blau, P. M. (1964). *Exchange and power in social life*. NY: John Wiley & Sons.
- Bloomstein, M. (2012), *Content Strategy at Work*, Elsevier, Waltham, MA.
- Botha, E., & Reyneke, M. (2013). To share or not to share: the role of content and emotion in viral marketing. *Journal of Public Affairs* vol. 13 no. 2, pp. 160-171. <https://doi:10.1002/pa.1471>.
- Bowden, J. and Mirzaei, A. (2021), "Consumer engagement within retail communication channels: an examination of online brand communities and digital content marketing initiatives", *European Journal of Marketing*, vol. 55 no. 5, pp. 1411-1439. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-01-2018-0007>
- Brenner, M. (2018). *How much budget do you need for content marketing?* Available from: <https://marketinginsidergroup.com/content-marketing/how-much-budget-do-you-need-for-content-marketing/>.
- Bryman, A. & Bell, E. (2007). *Business research methods*. Oxford University Press, U.S.A.
- Chaffey, D., (2016) *S.O.S.T.A.C. marketing planning model guide*. Available from: <https://www.smartinsights.com/digital-marketing-strategy/sostac-model/>.
- Christodoulides, G., Jevons, C., & Bonhomme, J. (2012). "Memo to Marketers: Quantitative Evidence for Change. How User-Generated Content Really Affects Brands", *Journal of Advertising Research*, vol. 52 no. 1, pp. 53-64. <https://doi:10.2501/JAR-52-1-053-064>.
- Cohen H, 2016. *Content Marketing Definition*. Available from: <https://heidicohen.com/content-marketing-definition/> .
- Content Marketing Institute. (2018) *2018 Content Management & Strategy Survey*. Available from: <https://contentmarketinginstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/2018-content-management-strategy-survey-research.pdf>
- Content Marketing Institute (2021) *2021 Content Management & Strategy Survey*. Available from <https://contentmarketinginstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/2021-content-management-strategy-survey-research.pdf>
- Content Marketing Institute & MarketingProfs (2023) *Enterprise Content Marketing: Benchmarks, Budgets and Trends*. Available from <https://contentmarketinginstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/enterprise-research-final-05-24-23.pdf>
- Cooper, D.R & Schindler, P.S. (2014) *Business Research Methods*. 12th ed. McGraw-Hill Education.
- Corcoran, S. (2009). *Defining owned, earned and paid media*. Available from: http://blogs.forrester.com/interactive_marketing/2009/12/defining-earned-owned-and-paid-media.html.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Daly, R. (2017). *The Content Marketer*. Available from: http://www.narrativemedia.co.za/digital_magazines/narrative/2017/contentmarketer/index.html#1_.
- Du Plessis, C. (2015) *An Exploratory Analysis of Essential Elements of Content Marketing*, 2nd European Conference on social media, July, Porto, Portugal, pp. 122-129.

- Du Plessis, C. (2017). The role of content marketing in social media content communities, *South African Journal of Information Management*, Vol. 19, No 1, pp. 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajim.v19i1.866>
- Du Plessis, C., (2022). A scoping review of the effect of content marketing on online consumer behavior. *Sage Open*, vol. 12 no. 2, p.1 - 17.
- Duke, C. R. (2002), "Learning Outcomes: Comparing Student Perceptions of Skill Level and Importance," *Journal of Marketing Education*, vol. 24 no. 3, pp. 203 – 217.
- Elisa, R. & Gordini, N. (2014), "Content marketing metrics: Theoretical aspects and empirical evidence," *European Scientific Journal*, vol. 10, no. 34, pp.92 – 104.
- Forero, R., Nahidi, S., De Costa, J., Moshin, M., Fitzgerald, G., Gibson, N., McCarthy, S. & Aboaguy-Sarfo, P. (2018), "Application of four-dimension criteria to assess rigour of qualitative research in emergency medicine". *B.M.C. Health Services Research*, vol. 18: 120, pp. 1-11. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-18-2915-2>.
- Fuller, J. (2010). Refining Virtual Co-Creation from a Consumer Perspective. *California Management Review*, vol. 52 no. 2, pp. 98-122. <https://doi.org/10.1525/cm.2010.52.2.98>
- Goldenberg, J., Oestreicher-Singer, G., & Reichman, S. (2012). "The Quest for Content: How User-Generated Links Can Facilitate Online Exploration." *Journal of Marketing Research*, vol. 49 no. 4, pp. 452-468. <https://doi:10.1509/jmr.11.0091>.
- Gulbrandsen, T. I., & Just, S. N. (2011). The Collaborative Paradigm: Towards an Invitational and Participatory Concept of Online Communication. *Media, Culture & Society*, vol. 33 no. 7, pp. 1095–1108. <https://doi: 10.1177/0163443711416066>.
- Halligan, B. & Shah, D. (2010), *Inbound Marketing*, Wiley, Hoboken, NJ.
- Halvorson, K. (2010) *Content strategy for the web*. New Riders: Berkeley.
- Handley, A. & Chapman, C.C. (2012). *Content Rules*. John Wiley & Sons: New York.
- Harad, K. C. (2013). "Content Marketing Strategies to Educate and Entertain," *Journal of Financial Planning*, vol. 26 no. 3, pp. 18-20.
- Hennig-Thurau, T., Malhotra, E. C., Frieger, C., Gensler, S., Lobschat, L., Rangaswamy, A., & Skiera, B. (2010). The impact of new media on customer relationships. *Journal of Service Research*, vol. 13 no.3, pp.311-330. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1094670510375460>
- Homans, G. C. (May 1958). "Social Behavior As Exchange", *American Journal of Sociology*. vol. 63 no.6: pp. 597–606. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1086%2F222355> .
- Horrigan, D., (2009). "Branded Content: A new Model for driving Tourism via Film and Branding Strategies," M.P.R.A. Paper 25419, University Library of Munich, Germany.
- Human, G., Hirschfelder, B., & Nel, J. (2018). The effect of content marketing on sponsorship favorability. *International Journal of Emerging Markets*, vol. 13 no. 5, pp. 1233–1250. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJoEM-06-2017-0215>
- Hussain, A. (2013). *How to pull off Coca-Cola marketing on a diet coke budget*, Hubspot Blogs. Available from: <http://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/coca-cola-marketing-budget-ht> .
- Hyoryung N. & Kannan, P.K. (2014). "The Informational Value of Social Tagging Networks", *Journal of Marketing*. vol. 78 no. 4, pp. 21-40.
- IAB (2022). The State of Marketing Content in South Africa 2022, White paper, *Interactive Advertising Bureau*. Available from: https://www.iabsa.net/assets/Usedebbieciabsanet/IAB_SA_State_of_Content_Marketing_2022_White_Paper_Mar_2022.pdf
- Ind, N., Iglesias, O., & Schultz, M. (2013). "Building brands together: emergence and outcomes of co-creation", *California Management Review*, vol. 55 no. 3, pp. 5-26.

- Izogo, E.E. and Mpinganjira, M., 2023. "Digital content marketing consumption motives in the age of social media: an investigation of relational and monetary outcomes." *Aslib Journal of Information Management*, <https://doi.org/10.1108/AJIM-07-2022-0347>
- Jefferson, S. & Tanton, S. (2013). "*Valuable Content Marketing. How to make quality content the key of your business success*", Kogan Page: London.
- Kaplan, A. & Haenlein, M. (2010). "Users of the World, Unite! The Challenges and Opportunities of Social Media." *Business Horizons*, Vol. 53, pp. 59-68.
- Keyes, J. (2006). *Knowledge management, business intelligence and content management*, Auerbach Publications: Broken South Parken.
- Khairani, A. & Fachira, I., (2022). "The influence of cognitive and emotional engagement on digital content marketing in the tourism industry". *Journal of Tourism Leisure and Hospitality*, vol. 4 no.1, pp.14-29.
- King, N. & Horrocks, C. (2019). *Interviews in Qualitative Research*, 2nd ed, SAGE, London
- Koiso-Kanttila, N. (2004) Digital Content Marketing: A Literature Synthesis, *Journal of Marketing Management*, vol. 20 no. 1-2, pp 45-65, <https://doi: 10.1362/026725704773041122>
- Leibtag, A (2013). *The Digital Crown: Winning at Content on the Web*. Newnes, pp. 242-243.
- Lieb, R. (2011). "Content Marketing: think like a publisher. How to use content to market online and in social media". *Que Publishing*: Indianapolis.
- Light, L. (2014). "Brand journalism: How to engage successfully with consumers in an age of inclusive individuality", *Journal of Brand Strategy*, vol. 3 no. 2, pp. 121-128.
- Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Lopes, A.R. (2022). Digital Content Marketing: Conceptual Review and Recommendations for Practitioners, *Academy of Strategic Management Journal*, vol.21 no.2, pp 1-17.
- Merz, M.A., He, Y., & Vargo, S.L. (2009). "The Evolving Brand Logic: A Service Dominant Logic Perspective", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, vol. 37 no. 3, pp. 328-344. <https://doi: 10.1007/s11747-009-0143-3>.
- Degutis, M., Urbonavičius, S., Hollebeek, L.D. and Anselmsson, J., (2023). "Consumers' willingness to disclose their personal data in e-commerce: A reciprocity-based social exchange perspective". *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 74, p.103385.
- Muniz Jr A.M. & Schau H.J. (2011) "How to inspire value-laden collaborative consumer-generated content", *Business Horizons*, Vol 54, No.3, pp. 209-217.
- Odden, L. (2012), *Optimise*, Wiley, Hoboken, NJ.
- O'Reilly, L. (2014). Huffington Post C.E.O. on native ads, content personalisation and U.K. plans. *Marketing Week (Online Edition)*, 3.
- Palmer, R. (2002), "Managerial Understanding of Contemporary Industrial Marketing Issues", *Qualitative Marketing Research: An International Journal*, vol. 5 no. 2, pp. 135 – 143.
- Payne, A., Storbacka, K., Frow, P. & Knox, S. (2008) "Co-creating brands: diagnosing and designing the relational experience", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol 62, pp 379-389.
- Prajapati V, (2018). *The Importance of Content Marketing in the Digital Age*. Available from: <https://www.techprevue.com/importance-of-content-marketing/> .
- Pulizzi, J. (2012). *Content Marketing Definition - Examples*. [online] Content Marketing Institute. Available from: <http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2012/06/content-marketing-definition/> .
- Pulizzi, J. & Barrett, N. (2009a) *Get content. Get customers*. McGraw Hill: New York.
- Pulizzi, J. & Barrett, N. (2009b). "Get Content Get Customers-Turn Prospects into Buyers with Content Marketing", *N.S.B. Management Review*. vol. 2 no. 2, pp. 98–100. Available from:

https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Abdul_Qadir16/publication/301224579_The_Art_of_Feedback_An_Interpersonal_Transaction/links/570db9bc08ae3199889bc8ad/The-Art-of-Feedback-An-Interpersonal-Transaction.pdf

- Pusack, A. (2017). "Using the Scientific Method to Produce Better Content". Available from: <https://kapost.com/b/scientific-method-content-strategy/>.
- Rakic, R., Beba, R. & Mira, R. (2014). "Digital Content Marketing for organisations as buyers", *Ekonomika Journal of Economic Theory and Practice and Social Issues*, vol. 1, pp. 109-123, 2014.
- Redmond, M.V. (2015), "Social Exchange Theory", Iowa State University. Available from: [https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1003&context=engl_reports#:~:text=Blau%20\(1964\)%20defined%20social%20exchanges,from%20coerced%20behavior%20such%20as](https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1003&context=engl_reports#:~:text=Blau%20(1964)%20defined%20social%20exchanges,from%20coerced%20behavior%20such%20as).
- Rose, R. & Pulizzi, J. (2011). *Managing Content Marketing*. The real-world guide for creating passionate subscribers to your brands. CMI Books: Cleveland.
- Rowley, J., (2008). "Understanding digital content marketing", *Journal of Marketing Management*, vol.24 no.5-6, pp. 517-540, <https://doi.org/10.1362/026725708X325977>.
- Sage (2023), "Content Marketing" Available from: <https://uk.sagepub.com/en-gb/afr/product/content%20marketing%20journals>
- Singla, J., Singh, B., & Pruthi, N. (2022). Three Decades of Content Marketing: A Performance Analysis. *International Journal of Advance Research in Computer Science and Management*, vol. 10 no. 10 pp. 9-15. Available from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/364939088_Three_Decades_of_Content_Marketing_A_Performance_Analysis
- Swart, C., Du Plessis, C., & Greeff, E. (2021), "An integrated social media communication view on content marketing by South African non-profit sectors". *South African Journal of Information Management*, vol. 23 no. 1 pp. 1-9. Available from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/sajim.v23i1.1366>
- Scott, D. M. (2007). Attention Corporations: Hire a Journalist. *EContent*. p. 48.
- Terho, H., Mero, J., Siutla, L. & Jaakkola, E. (2022). Digital content marketing in business markets: Activities, consequences, and contingencies along the customer journey, *Industrial Marketing Management*, vol. 105, pp. 294-310.
- Trochim, W. M. K. (2020), *Research Methods Knowledge Base*. Available from: <https://conjointly.com/kb/#using-the-kb-in-a-course>.
- Weinberg, B.D. & Pehlivan, E. (2011). Social spending: Managing the social media mix, *Business Horizons*, vol. 54, no. 3, pp. 275-282.
- Wong, A. & Yazdanifard, R. Dr, (2015). "The Review of Content Marketing as a New Trend in Marketing Practices", *International Journal of Management, Accounting and Economics*. vol. 2, pp. 1055-1064.
- Wylie, A. (2014). The Awwwww Factor: How Content Marketing Messages Go Viral. *Public Relations Tactics*, vol. 21 no. 4, pp. 7.