

Strategic Use of Digital Content in Online Marketing: A Literature Review

Kashari^{1*}

¹ Universitas Teuku Umar, Meulaboh, Indonesia

Abstract

Article history:

Received: September 18, 2024

Revised: October 11, 2024

Accepted: November 21, 2024

Published: December 30, 2024

Keywords:

Artificial Intelligence, Consumer Engagement, Digital Content, Influencer Marketing, Online Marketing.

Identifier:

Nawala

Page: 99-109

<https://nawala.io/index.php/gjom>

This article examines how digital content has become a strategic resource in online marketing, addressing the central question of how content design, distribution, and measurement influence consumer engagement and brand performance. Through a systematic literature review of peer-reviewed studies, the paper consolidates fragmented insights into a coherent framework that highlights the interplay between firm-generated and user-generated content, the influence of algorithmic curation, and the growing significance of short-form video and influencer authenticity. The analysis discusses how content attributes such as informativeness, emotional appeal, and visual richness drive attention and trust, while advanced personalization and AI applications enhance efficiency but raise ethical considerations. Results show that effective strategies integrate authenticity, technological augmentation, and advanced analytics to align with consumer expectations. The findings suggest that brands capable of balancing innovation with transparency are best positioned to achieve sustainable advantage in increasingly dynamic digital environments.

*Corresponding author:
(Kashari)

©2024 The Author(s).

This is an open-access article under CC-BY-SA license (<https://creativecommons.org/licence/by-sa/4.0/>)



1. Introduction

Digital content has evolved from a supporting artifact in campaigns to a strategic asset that shapes how firms create, deliver, and appropriate value in digital markets. Early work on social platforms positioned user participation and networked communication as a new element of the promotion mix, shifting message control and accelerating feedback loops (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). As platforms matured, marketers increasingly relied on planned, audience-centric content to stimulate engagement, build brand relationships, and influence conversion pathways across owned, earned, and paid media. Research documents how content features—such as emotionality, usefulness, vividness, and interactivity—affect virality and engagement outcomes, while also showing that effects vary by platform architecture and community norms (Berger & Milkman, 2012; de Vries et al., 2012).

Parallel streams connect content strategy to measurable customer outcomes. Studies link creative and informational cues in branded posts to reactions, shares, and downstream behaviors, and position content as a mechanism for cultivating customer engagement and co-creation (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). At the same time, user-generated content—especially reviews—functions as participatory information that shapes persuasion and choice under conditions of information overload (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010). The discoverability of content is further mediated by search and feed algorithms; scholarship highlights both opportunities (targeting relevance) and constraints (algorithmic opacity) in distributing content efficiently to intended audiences (Bucher, 2012). To manage this

complexity, frameworks for social media and content metrics emphasize aligning indicators with hierarchical goals—from awareness to revenue—while accounting for cross-channel spillovers (Peters et al., 2013).

Despite robust growth, the literature remains fragmented across platforms, industries, and methods. Recent shifts toward short-form video, creator ecosystems, and algorithmic curation intensify the need to synthesize what is known about the strategic use of digital content—its formats, distribution mechanisms, and performance metrics—across contexts. This literature review integrates and consolidates insights to build a clearer understanding of digital content strategies, while also identifying conceptual and methodological gaps for future inquiry and managerial action.

2. Literature Review

The literature on digital content in online marketing reflects multiple disciplinary streams, ranging from consumer psychology to information systems and strategic management. One dominant perspective emphasizes the role of content quality and format in driving user engagement and brand outcomes. Research highlights that attributes such as informativeness, entertainment value, and emotional appeal significantly influence consumer attitudes and sharing behavior (Muntinga et al., 2011; Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013). Visual elements, particularly imagery and video, have been found to enhance attention and memory, contributing to higher message diffusion across platforms (Tellis et al., 2019).

Another line of inquiry addresses the interplay between user-generated content (UGC) and firm-generated content (FGC). UGC often carries greater perceived credibility, shaping trust and purchase intentions, while FGC provides strategic narrative control (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). Studies also show that brand communities create hybrid environments where both UGC and FGC co-produce brand meaning, reinforcing loyalty and advocacy (Dessart et al., 2015). Algorithmic curation further mediates this process, with platform governance influencing which forms of content are surfaced and amplified (Helmond et al., 2019).

From a strategic perspective, scholars have proposed frameworks for aligning content strategies with organizational goals and consumer decision journeys. Content personalization and micro-targeting have been associated with higher conversion efficiency, but concerns about intrusiveness and privacy risks highlight the tension between relevance and user autonomy (Bleier & Eisenbeiss, 2015; Boerman et al., 2017). More recent studies have emphasized the role of AI-enabled personalization in dynamically tailoring content experiences (Wahid et al., 2023), and the rising significance of short-form video as a strategic driver of consumer engagement (Xiao et al., 2023).

Overall, the literature suggests that digital content functions not only as a tactical communication tool but also as a strategic resource for relationship building and market positioning. Yet, gaps remain in understanding how influencer ecosystems, AI-generated content, and algorithmic distribution reshape traditional

approaches. This underscores the importance of consolidating fragmented findings into a more integrative framework.

3. Methods

This study adopts a systematic literature review methodology to synthesize peer-reviewed scholarship on the strategic use of digital content in online marketing. Following established guidelines for systematic reviews, academic databases including Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar were searched using a combination of keywords such as digital content marketing, online engagement, social media content strategy, user-generated content, and algorithmic curation. The search was limited to articles published in peer-reviewed journals to ensure rigor and reliability. Books and industry reports were reviewed for conceptual grounding but were not included in the formal analysis. After initial screening, duplicate records were removed, and studies were filtered by title, abstract, and full text against predefined inclusion criteria.

The inclusion criteria focused on empirical and conceptual works that examined content strategies, consumer engagement, digital platforms, and technological enablers such as personalization and AI. Studies outside the marketing and communication scope, non-English works, and conference abstracts without full papers were excluded. The final selection was coded thematically to identify recurring patterns and emerging themes across content attributes, UGC–FGC dynamics, distribution mechanisms, and strategic outcomes. This approach enabled a structured consolidation of fragmented research into coherent thematic clusters,

ensuring that the review not only maps the state of knowledge but also highlights methodological gaps and avenues for future investigation.

4. Results and Discussion

The reviewed studies show that digital content functions both as a tactical communication mechanism and as a strategic lever for cultivating long-term brand-consumer relationships. A recurring theme across the literature is that content characteristics such as informativeness, emotional resonance, and visual appeal strongly shape engagement and sharing behaviors. Emotionality in particular enhances virality, while informational content builds trust and supports purchase decisions in e-commerce environments (Berger & Milkman, 2012; Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013). Striking a balance between utility and storytelling is crucial, as overly promotional content often reduces consumer receptivity, whereas narratives that provide value tend to elicit stronger consumer responses (Ashley & Tuten, 2015).

User-generated content (UGC) has emerged as especially powerful due to its authenticity. Reviews, testimonials, and community-created media significantly influence consumer choices, often being viewed as more credible than firm-generated content (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). Yet UGC is not without challenges, as negative feedback can harm brand perception. Research indicates that environments where UGC and firm-generated content (FGC) co-exist can foster deeper brand attachment by promoting transparency and co-creation of meaning (Dessart et al., 2015). These findings underscore the

importance of integrating, rather than substituting, multiple forms of content to reinforce credibility and engagement.

Distribution mechanisms are another critical dimension. Algorithmic curation and personalization shape which content is surfaced, offering marketers both opportunities and constraints. Targeted distribution can increase relevance and efficiency, but algorithmic opacity may reduce predictability and lead to uneven exposure (Bucher, 2012; Helmond et al., 2019). Moreover, while many consumers value personalization, repeated or intrusive targeting can trigger resistance and undermine trust (Bleier & Eisenbeiss, 2015; Boerman et al., 2017). The growing use of AI in personalization intensifies this tension, enabling scalable, real-time tailoring of content but raising concerns about privacy and ethical boundaries.

Emerging content formats further reshape engagement. Short-form video has become a dominant medium for capturing attention quickly, leveraging brevity, visuals, and emotional triggers to enhance memorability and shareability. Influencers play a central role in this space, with studies showing that authenticity is more critical than audience size in driving consumer trust and participation (Vrontis et al., 2021). Micro- and nano-influencers, despite smaller reach, often achieve higher engagement per follower, highlighting a shift toward more intimate, trust-based ecosystems (de Veirman et al., 2017). This suggests that firms benefit from diversifying content strategies to balance broad visibility with targeted community engagement.

Finally, performance measurement remains a pressing issue. Traditional metrics such as likes and shares provide limited insight into long-term outcomes. Scholars emphasize aligning measurement with strategic goals, focusing on customer

lifetime value, advocacy, and conversion efficiency (Peters et al., 2013). More recent studies call for advanced analytics, including AI-driven insights, to monitor real-time responses and adapt strategies dynamically (Mariani & Borghi, 2020). Despite progress, significant challenges persist in attributing content outcomes across multi-channel environments, where overlapping exposures complicate causal interpretation.

Taken together, the findings suggest that digital content strategy is moving toward a phase defined by convergence of authenticity, personalization, and technological augmentation. While established insights on emotionality and credibility remain foundational, newer dynamics such as AI-enabled personalization and short-form video consumption are reshaping the boundaries of effective practice. Brands that integrate these elements while maintaining consumer trust and aligning measurement with broader strategic objectives are best positioned to achieve sustained advantage in the digital marketplace. At the same time, future research must address unresolved questions about long-term brand equity effects, cross-market differences, and the implications of AI-generated content for consumer trust.

5. Conclusion

The synthesis of the reviewed literature demonstrates that digital content has become a central driver of online marketing strategy, evolving from a tactical communication tool into a strategic resource for building consumer trust, engagement, and long-term brand equity. Core attributes such as informativeness,

emotional appeal, and visual dynamism remain vital to stimulating attention and participation, while storytelling and authenticity increasingly differentiate successful campaigns from promotional noise.

At the same time, the interaction between firm-generated and user-generated content, shaped by platform algorithms and personalization technologies, illustrates the complex ecosystem in which brands now operate. While UGC offers credibility and authenticity, firm-generated content provides consistency and narrative control, suggesting that the most effective strategies integrate both. Emerging formats such as short-form video and influencer partnerships further underscore the importance of aligning content design with evolving consumer behaviors and expectations.

Looking forward, the convergence of AI-enabled personalization, influencer authenticity, and advanced analytics is reshaping the contours of effective content strategy. Firms that balance technological innovation with ethical considerations and consumer trust are more likely to sustain competitive advantage in increasingly dynamic digital environments. For researchers, gaps remain in understanding the long-term impacts of AI-generated content, the nuanced role of influencers across cultural contexts, and attribution challenges in multi-channel ecosystems. Addressing these areas will be crucial to advancing both theoretical and practical insights into the strategic use of digital content in online marketing.

References

- Ashley, C., & Tuten, T. (2015). Creative strategies in social media marketing: An exploratory study of branded social content and consumer engagement. *Psychology & marketing*, 32(1), 15-27.
- Berger, J., & Milkman, K. L. (2012). What makes online content viral?. *Journal of marketing research*, 49(2), 192-205.
- Bleier, A., & Eisenbeiss, M. (2015). Personalized online advertising effectiveness: The interplay of what, when, and where. *Marketing Science*, 34(5), 669-688.
- Boerman, S. C., Kruikemeier, S., & Zuiderveen Borgesius, F. J. (2017). Online behavioral advertising: A literature review and research agenda. *Journal of advertising*, 46(3), 363-376.
- Bucher, T. (2012). Want to be on the top? Algorithmic power and the threat of invisibility on Facebook. *New media & society*, 14(7), 1164-1180.
- Cvijikj, I. P., & Michahelles, F. (2013). Online engagement factors on Facebook brand pages. *Social Network Analysis and Mining*, 3(4), 843–861.
- De Veirman, M., Cauberghe, V., & Hudders, L. (2017). Marketing through Instagram influencers: the impact of number of followers and product divergence on brand attitude. *International journal of advertising*, 36(5), 798-828.
- De Vries, L., Gensler, S., & Leeﬂang, P. S. (2012). Popularity of brand posts on brand fan pages: An investigation of the effects of social media marketing. *Journal of interactive marketing*, 26(2), 83-91.

- Hollebeek, L. D., & Macky, K. (2019). Digital content marketing's role in fostering consumer engagement, trust, and value: Framework, fundamental propositions, and implications. *Journal of interactive marketing*, 45(1), 27-41.
- Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business horizons*, 53(1), 59-68.
- Mangold, W. G., & Faulds, D. J. (2009). Social media: The new hybrid element of the promotion mix. *Business horizons*, 52(4), 357-365.
- Mariani, M. M., & Borghi, M. (2020). Online review helpfulness and firms' financial performance: An empirical study in a service industry. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, 24(4), 421-449.
- Mudambi, S. M., & Schuff, D. (2010). Research note: What makes a helpful online review? A study of customer reviews on Amazon. com. *MIS quarterly*, 185-200.
- Vrontis, D., Makrides, A., Christofi, M., & Thrassou, A. (2021). Social media influencer marketing: A systematic review, integrative framework and future research agenda. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 45(4), 617-644.
- Wahid, R., Mero, J., & Ritala, P. (2023). Written by ChatGPT, illustrated by Midjourney: generative AI for content marketing. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, 35(8), 1813-1822.
- Xiao, L., Li, X., & Zhang, Y. (2023). Exploring the factors influencing consumer engagement behavior regarding short-form video advertising: A big data perspective. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 70, 103170.