



Can Digital Content Marketing (DCM) be used to influence Attitude and Purchase Intention of Consumers?

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Abstract

Digital Content Marketing –DCM- may be described 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 through a digital media. Though DCM has been attracting a great deal of attention among practitioners, academic research in this area is lagging behind. This study aims to understand what drives consumers to DCM interaction and how DCM effects consumers' attitude towards the focal brand and purchase intention. Questionnaire based survey technique was used for the study. Responses were collected from 250 consumers of Decathlon, a leading sports apparel and accessories brand, that uses DCM communication through their website, blogs and social networking sites. The validated scale items were analysed using exploratory factor analysis, and the hypothesized relations tested using path analysis. It was found that both Functional motive has a significant direct and positive effect on consumers' attitude towards the brand and purchase intention while and Hedonic motives has a significant direct and positive effect on consumers' attitude towards the brand.

Keywords: Digital Content Marketing (DCM), Purchase Intention, Attitude towards Brand, Hedonic Motive, Functional Motive

Introduction

The term Digital Content Marketing, DCM, is a relatively new terminology in the marketing domain. With consumers' growing impatience with interruptive media and with their urge to seek relevant information, branded Digital Content Marketing, DCM, is recognised by both practitioners and academic community as the best alternative to build brand awareness and customer loyalty. DCM is defined as “the creation and dissemination of relevant, valuable and consistent content to current or prospective customers on digital platforms” (Holliman & Rowley, 2014) to accomplish brand related and sales related objectives. In simple terms, with Digital Content Marketing, marketers provide consumers the content they are seeking (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). This is a revolutionary shift from the *selling* approach of marketing to a *helping* approach (Holliman & Rowley, 2014).

The use of content marketing as a preferred tool to get through to one's existing and prospective consumers is not new. John Deere's *The Furrow* magazine is often considered the first example of corporate content marketing. John Deere used *The Furrow* magazine to educate farmers on new technologies and business opportunities in the field. Instead of overtly selling their products, John Deere became the informational expert for farmer and when they had equipment needs, they turned to the firm. Free recipe books given to consumers by *JELL-O* and *Milk-maid* are example everyone can relate to. With the advancement in digital and communication technologies, the use and significance of Content Marketing has evolved a great extent. Marketers are now focusing on disseminating content through the internet platform using their web pages, blogs and social media platform, thus paving way to Digital Content Marketing communication. Every business uses some forms of content marketing; the only difference is whether they

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take a deliberate effort to build quality content or not. This is true in an Indian context where there are very few academic literatures on the importance and use of branded DCM.

Despite the heightened interest in the concept of Content Marketing in general and Digital Content Marketing in particular, very few conceptual research (Holliman & Rowley, 2014; Pulizzi, 2014; Hollebeek & Macky, 2019; Holliman & Rowley, 2014) or empirical research (Al-Gasawneha & Al-Adamat, 2020; Human, Hirschfelder & Jel, 2018; Lou, Xie, Feng & Kim, 2019; Müller & Christandl, 2019; Taiminen & Ranaweera, 2019) have found its way to peer reviewed literature. This study endeavours to overcome the knowledge gap by empirically testing what drives consumers to digital content marketing communication and its influence on brand attitude and consumers purchase intention. As one of the earliest (Indian) studies of this kind, this paper can be a good starting point for further research on the linkage between branded DCM, its antecedents and consequences.

2. Literature Review

One of the first studies on digital content marketing appeared in the *Journal of Marketing Management* in the early 2000s (Koiso-Kanttila, 2004). The author referred to digital content marketing in the context of the marketing of digital products that are distributed through digital channels, such as news, online movies, music, games, etc. The call for further research in DCM by Koiso-Kanttila (2004) was taken up by Rowley (2008). She made the first attempt to define and understand the concept of DCM in the present day context. She defined DCM as the process that involves “identifying, anticipating, and satisfying customer requirements profitably”. Content (information), in this context is considered a part of the augmented product which helps the stakeholders such as customers, retailers or other intermediaries. For example, an article on “how to take beautiful pictures” in a camera brand’s web page, in addition to the technical details of the camera itself, helps to attract and retain customers (Rowley, 2008). Today, such information are considered essential by many brands. Most cosmetics brands have their presence in video sharing networks such as YouTube with tutorial on beauty and health.

The present day accepted definition of DCM was first crafted by Joe Pulizzi (2014), who defines Content Marketing as “the creation of valuable, relevant and compelling content by the brand itself on a consistent basis, used to generate a positive behavior from a customer or prospect of the brand.” on “digital platforms to develop their favourable brand engagement, trust, and relationships” (Hollebeek and Mackey, 2019).

The key reasons for consumers to turn to a DCM is either for information or for entertainment (Lou, Xie, Feng & Kim, 2019). Hollebeek & Macky (2019) proposes the drivers to a DCM communication as the hedonic (entertainment or fun) and functional/ utilitarian (informational) motives. Functional motives can be understood as a consumer's underlying utilitarian desire for brand-related information or learning as sought through Digital Content Marketing communication. (Hollebeek and Mackey, 2019). According to Babin et al. (1994), functional/utilitarian values refer to the desire for efficient, rational, task-oriented efforts relevant to the activity on hand. Consumers motivated by utilitarian values online may seek the convenience of saving time (Childers et al.,2001) or the ease of accessing information (Childers et al., 2001; To et al., 2007). For consumers motivated by hedonic values, the experience itself is important (Babin et al.,1994). These consumers enjoy the experience without the need to make a purchase, but a purchase is a result of the experience.

Both these motivations positively influence consumers' attitudes towards the brand (Calder et al., 2009; Childers et al.,2001) and Purchase Intention (Kim and Forsythe,2007). The use of these motives determine whether an individual will interact with a branded DCM piece or not. Based on the User & Gratification (U&G) approach (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019), these motives have been used to explain consumer interaction with many traditionally forms of branded communications as well. Hedonic motives and / or functional motives to interact with DCM content ultimately lead to creation of a positive brand attitude in the minds of the consumers and ultimately leads to consumers purchasing the products. Researchers have been using purchase intention as a proxy for actual purchase (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). Thus we propose the following hypotheses:

- H₁** : Functional Motives directly and positively influences consumers’ Purchase Intention.
- H₂** : Hedonic Motives directly and positively influences consumers’ Purchase Intention.
- H₃** : Functional Motives to interact with DCM content directly and positively influences consumers’ Attitude towards the Brand.

- H₄** : Hedonic Motives to interact with DCM content directly and positively influences consumers' Attitude towards the Brand.
- H₅** : Attitude towards the Brand positively influences Purchase Intention.

3. Methodology:

3.1 Method:

The researchers have selected a leading sports apparel and accessories multi-national brand- Decathlon, to study what drives its consumers to the content marketing efforts and its effect on brand attitude and purchase intention of the target audience. Decathlon's product portfolio includes sports and adventure equipment, accessories, clothing, footwear and fitness equipment over its 800 stores worldwide. Decathlon distributes "valuable and consistent content to its target audience" through their awareness classes, local sporting events, firm website, numerous blogs and social networking sites. For the present study, the Facebook Page of the brand and its contents are selected. This page provides a wide range of content which are both hedonic (fun) and utilitarian (informative) in nature, hence ideal for a research on DCM.

3.2 Study Participants and procedure:

The sample frame for the study was demographically limited to the state of Kerala, where the first Decathlon store was opened in 2014. Presently, the firm have 4 stores in Kerala –Kottayam, Kalamassery, Vytilla and Trissur. Responses were collected from 150 willing consumers from Kottayam, Kalamessry and Vytilla stores during their visit to the stores. All the respondents have visited the Facebook Page of the brand once or more.

3.3 Instrument

Questionnaire based survey technique was used to collect responses from the sample. The first part of the questionnaire constituted demographic details. The second part of the questionnaire employed previously developed scales, to measure the subjects' hedonic motives (*HMot*), functional/ utilitarian motive (*FMot*), attitude towards the brand (*AtBr*) and Purchase Intention (*Int*). To assess the motives that influence consumers to interact with DCM communications, we used scale developed from the study of Babin et al. (1994). Though the original Babin et al. (1994) construct and scale focused specifically on shopping and purchase situations, this has been modified to study such motives in the context of online shopping, web use (Calder et al., 2009; Cotte et al., 2006), social network site usage (Xu et al., 2012) and blog usage (Park et. al., 2010). Thus borrowing from these literatures, we have adopted a 6-item scale to measure functional motives and an 8-item scale to measure hedonic motives. The scales for attitudes toward the brand *Decathlon* was an adaptations of the three five-point semantic differential items: attitude toward advertising scale developed by Muehling (1987). Purchase intention was measured using 3-item scales borrowed from Park et. al., 2010. The validated scale items were further analysed using Path analysis method to test the hypothesis.

4. Analysis and Findings:

64% of the respondents were female, with the highest percentage of participants (23%) between the ages of 31 and 35, and 40% of the respondents have a monthly income between Rs. 21,000-Rs. 30,000. All the respondents were existing customers of *Decathlon* and have visited the Facebook Page of the brand once or more.

The data passed the internal consistency and reliability test as the Cronbach's alpha values were all greater than 0.5. To check the data's appropriateness for factor analysis Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was conducted and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin was conducted to measure of sampling adequacy and found satisfactory. Using Exploratory Factor analysis, the researchers were able to clearly extract two motives- Functional motive and Hedonic motives- that drives consumers towards using DCM communication platforms of the firm, Decathlon.

Further path analysis was conducted to test the model that was developed on the basis of Literature Review. According to the model, both Hedonic Motive (*HMot*) and Functional Motive (*FMot*) is hypothesized to influence attitude towards brand (*AtBr*) and Purchase Intention (*Int*) directly and *Int* indirectly. The model fit indices of X^2 (85.75, $p=0.516$), GFI (0.998), AGFI (0.977), NFI (0.998) and CFI (1.000) indicates satisfactory model fit. The result of hypothesis testing is presented in *Table 1*.

Hypothesized Path	Estimate	C.R.	p
Functional DCM interaction → Purchase Intention	0.484	6.145	0.000
Hedonic DCM interaction → Purchase Intention	0.118	1.123	0.117
Functional DCM interaction → Brand Attitude	0.421	5.215	0.000
Hedonic DCM interaction → Brand Attitude	0.218	2.278	0.028
Brand Attitude → Purchase Intention	0.398	6.366	0.000

Results show that Functional motive has a significant positive effect on consumers' Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention. However, influence of Hedonic motives on purchase intention could not be proved, though hedonic motives do positively influence Attitude towards the Brand. Further, attitude towards brand was found to significantly influence purchase intention.

5. Implications of The Study

With the advent of social media, e-commerce and user generated content, marketers are obliged to introduce new channels of marketing communication that provide authentic and useful information to the consumers at all the phases of their buying cycle. This had led them to embrace DCM communication to provide its target audience consistent and relevant content. The findings of this study have identified the important drivers for consumers to interact with the content a firm provides to them. The consumers value functional aspects more than hedonic aspects when they are searching for valuable content. Hence firms should try to develop more informative content than entertaining content. At the same time, as every consumer is unique with varying preference, firms should also not ignore providing content to satisfy the hedonic gratifications of the consumers. As content created and distributed by firms clearly affects the attitude of consumers towards the brand and their purchase intentions, marketers should not shy away from this crucial digital marketing and relationship tool. However, this study has its limitations. This study has been conducting using one industry where content is often sought by consumers. Therefore, the results of the study could not be generalised to other industries. As research studies in the field of content marketing is scarce, this study has drawn many concepts from adjacent fields of literature such as social media marketing, User generated content, and advertisement. Thus some of the unique features of DCM may have been overlooked while generating assumptions and scales. Future researches should try to overcome these limitations. Nonetheless, this study contributes to the growing literature of content marketing.

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