

Content Marketing and Customer Loyalty of GSM Service Provider Companies in Asaba

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Abstract: *This study examined the interplay between content marketing and customer loyalty of GSM service provider companies in Asaba. The study adopted an explanatory research design and collected data from eighty-five (85) respondents using a structured questionnaire. The Spearman's Rank Order Correlation was used to test the hypotheses. The study observed that content marketing has a positive and statistically significant relationship with customer loyalty. The study thus concludes that content marketing significantly relates to customer loyalty and customer loyalty expressed as repeat patronage and word of mouth depends on the GSM service providers companies' content marketing strategy. Based on the conclusions, the study recommends that GSM service provider companies that wish to improve their customers' loyalty should consider content marketing as a strategy. GSM service provider companies should consider content marketing as an imperative strategy to improve repeat patronage and positive word of mouth.*

Keywords: *Content Marketing, Customer Loyalty, Repeat Patronage, Word-of-Mouth.*

INTRODUCTION

Marketing is regarded as the pivotal force behind strategic planning and business operations, and, hence, as an intrinsic component of organizational efforts. Accordingly, over the last few years, customer loyalty has attracted increased attention among academic researchers and business practitioners (Dunn et al, 2014). The issue of customer loyalty is essential to every business endeavor of particular importance to those associated with the management of services companies. The inclination of consumers to choose a particular brand and its merchandise above that of its rivals is known as customer loyalty, and it is a result of their positive experiences with the brand's offerings. Customers who like a brand do so for many psychological, social, or economic reasons, as well as because they are satisfied with the brand's products (Idenedo et al., 2023). When customers are loyal, they tend to shop more frequently, and consistently, and report higher purchase volumes or values (Sima & Elham, 2015; Idenedo & Goodie-Okio, 2022). The introduction of digital technology and the pervasive usage of the Internet have significantly changed how companies interact with their stakeholders and meet their needs (Rancati & Niccolo 2014). In digital communication, content is more important than traditional methods. The phrase "content is king" is, in fact, one of the most widely used in the digital economy, analysing new communication

models that differ greatly from the typical formats utilized by businesses is part of the focus on content.

Content marketing (CM), as defined by Rancati and Niccolo (2014), is the process of creating, disseminating, and sharing free content that is valuable, relevant, and able to inspire confidence in both current and potential customers. It also increases consumer engagement and empowerment. According to Amanda and Albin (2017) as in Frank and Idenedo (2023), content marketing is a strategic marketing technique that focuses on producing and disseminating worthwhile, timely, and consistent material to draw in and hold on to a precisely defined audience and, in the end, encourage profitable consumer behavior. Having said that, CMI (2017) asserts that content marketing is the process of producing valuable content that is tailored to a specific, engaged, and engaging audience. Compared to other marketing techniques, content marketing engages the audience more through mostly two-way contact, claim Amanda and Albin (2017). Digital communities and channels are effective for content marketing because they allow users to participate and engage with the material being given (Lieb, 2011). To increase or alter consumer behavior, the material must be produced and presented regularly to draw in and keep viewers (Pulizzi, 2013). The content must be released on the companies' own media platforms, such as their webpage, and must be owned and controlled by the organization (Qiao, & Peng, 2015).

Several research studies have examined the relationship between content marketing and different variables (Halvorson, 2010; Handley & Chapman, 2010; Gunelius, 2011; Frank & Idenedo, 2023), but comparatively few have examined the relationship between content marketing and customer loyalty of GSM service provider companies in Asaba, Delta State. Therefore, this work seeks to advance understanding by filling in the noted vacuum in the literature.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Foundation

This study ascertained the relationship between content marketing and customer loyalty. The study is anchored on the Core Competency Theory.

The Core Competency Theory

Prahalad and Hamel introduced the Core Competency Theory in 1990 as a means of achieving long-term competitive advantage. This managerial theory explains the unique advantages that businesses need to have in order to stand out from the competition. It is more strategically advantageous to structure a firm around its competencies rather than around the sales of end products, according to Prahalad and Hamel (1990), who have been cited by other academics (Lavina, 2014; Idenedo & Didia, 2017; Idenedo et al., 2020). This is because organizations are already competing to gain a competitive advantage in terms of competence. According to Kawshala (2017), a core competency can take many different forms, such as strong client relationships, dependable suppliers and distributors, technical know-how, committed staff, a deeply ingrained core principle, and the like. With core skills in place, organizations become proactive and adaptable to changing environmental dynamics (Prahalad & Hamel, 1990; Idenedo & Ebinuwa, 2022). Based on the idea that content marketing is a strategic tool that businesses may employ to stay afloat in an industry, this study adopts the core competencies theory as its theoretical underpinning. As a result, this study suggests that content marketing should be considered a capability of GSM service providers since its application would boost word-of-mouth advertising and repeat business.

Conceptual Framework

This study is built on the assumption conceptualized below.

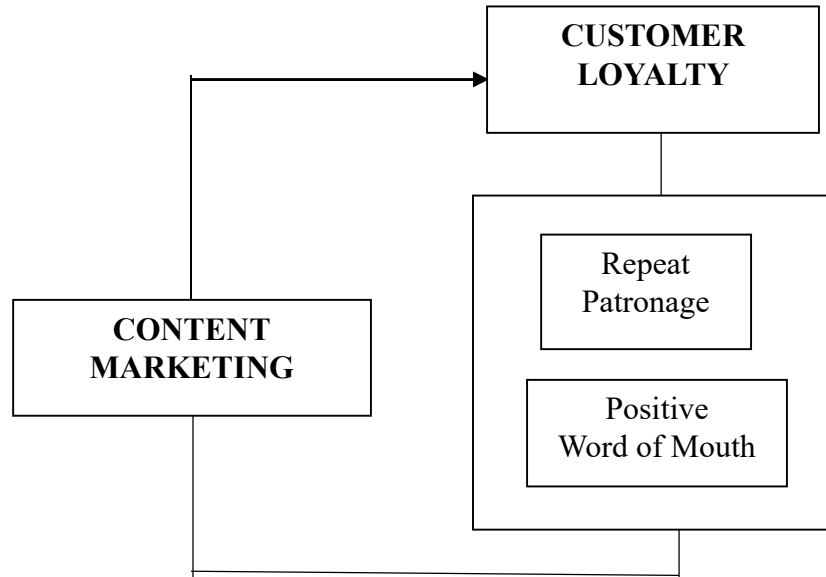


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Content Marketing and Customer Loyalty

Source: Desk Review, 2024.

Conceptual Review

Content Marketing

Content marketing is one of the newest developments in marketing communication. Because content marketing serves both businesses and consumers, it has garnered remarkable interest from academics worldwide (Lustik, 2004). Content marketing conceptual definitions have been studied by a number of authors. According to Rowley (2008) as in Frank and Idenedo (2023), content marketing is the process of determining, evaluating, and meeting consumer needs to maximize profit through the utilization of data that is instantly disseminated via electronic platforms. He continued by saying that while information is essential to marketing, it should not always be used to promote products; instead, some information could be entertaining, enlightening, or motivating. The definition given above aligns with the opinions of Odden (2012), who defines content marketing as a tactic for drawing in, enthusing, and motivating consumers to support a company by sharing content that relates to their interests and purchasing patterns. This is necessary since today's consumers are astute and knowledgeable, and they educate themselves by looking up information on a variety of platforms. According to Kilgour et al. (2015), businesses must offer their customers material that helps them identify with a brand and, if successful, influences their purchasing decisions.

The Content Marketing Institute (2015) defines content marketing as a strategic marketing approach that centers on producing and disseminating meaningful, relevant, and consistent

information to attract and retain a clearly defined audience to generate profit. Customers should be informed, entertained, and given solutions to common problems by content marketers so that, even if they do not use the brand at that moment, they can recommend it based on their good online experiences (Moran 2016; Frank & Idenedo, 2023).

Concept of Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty has become an essential area of focus for every organization to acquire since Khan (2013) has shown that it is the most valued outcome of marketing efforts. If the company can gain the trust of the client via the caliber of its service and product offerings, then there is mutual benefit in the partnership (Khan, 2013). Consumers show their loyalty by doing things like turning down offers from rival businesses, remaining loyal to the brand, referring others to the company and its products, and cooperating with the company in case of a service malfunction. These actions help businesses build their brand and increase sales (AchieveGlobal, 2008). In addition, the company gains from decreased price sensitivity and cheaper costs associated with bringing in new clients (Khan, 2013).

This supports the reason that, when it comes to how businesses can enhance their performance to secure a long-term top spot in a competitive market, customer loyalty has been one of the most frequently studied subjects (Didia & Idenedo, 2017; Adepoju & Suraju 2012). The need for customer loyalty is becoming increasingly recognized by managers, which is reflected in business mechanisms like internal marketing (Idenedo et al., 2023).

Repeat Patronage

According to Jere et al. (2014), repeat patronage refers to a customer's willingness and desire to continue doing business with a specific company. According to Panda (2013), a customer consistently acquiring their needs from a certain business despite numerous companies offering the same services is known as repeat patronage. As defined by Kumar (2016), repeat patronage is the practice of a client regularly using a specific company's goods and services without taking into account those provided by other businesses. Repeat patronage from customers is a critical component that raises organizational competitiveness. Amelia (2017) asserts that a company's ability to attract repeat patronage offers it an advantage over rivals. It contributes to maintaining sales growth and raising profit margins. Every corporation wants to see repeat patronage since it keeps its customer base strong (Idenedo & Goodie-Okio, 2022; Nwadike et al., 2020). A company has a better chance of succeeding in business if its clients continue to use it. According to Panda (2013), business managers should prioritize boosting recurring business because it strengthens the company's client base and boosts profit margins.

Word-of-Mouth: satisfied and devoted clients demonstrate both conscious and unconscious loyalty in behavior by eagerly giving to the organization again, keeping up relationships with it, and displaying favorable attitudes about it and its offerings in the form of willingly telling others about it (Idenedo & Ebenuwa, 2019; Didia & Idenedo, 2017). Positive word-of-mouth is an indirect marketing strategy when a business or its products are highly recommended and praised to future customers by a satisfied and loyal client (Susanta et al., 2013). Academics and business professionals recognize this as one of the reasons why customer loyalty is valued so highly, given that prospective customers view information from friends or even strangers as being more objective and trustworthy than that of an economic entity (Didia & Idenedo, 2017; Peter et al., 2013).

According to Didia and Idenedo (2017), retaining consumers is the key to boosting loyalty, while positive word-of-mouth is the key to growing market share. This highlights the importance of positive word-of-mouth. Positive word-of-mouth is regarded as one of the most effective marketing strategies because empirical research has supported that it improves a company's capacity to attract new customers and keep hold of existing ones (Alhulail et al., 2018; Peter et al., 2013).

Empirical Review

Content Marketing and Customer Loyalty

Fabrian et al. (2021) investigated the use of digital content marketing strategy in Indonesia to raise customer involvement during the COVID-19 pandemic. Purchase intention, customer engagement, user-generated content, and use and generation are the study's variables. The study found that consumer engagement and purchase intention are significantly impacted by two content marketing theories: use and generation and user-generated content. The investigation also demonstrated that the impact of digital content marketing on purchase intention is mediated by customer interaction.

Bezbaruah and Trivedi (2020) wrote about branded content as a means of fostering a relationship with generation Z customers. The study looked into how Generation Z consumers were affected by videos with branded content. The research was conducted using a descriptive research approach. 470 online respondents completed a standardized questionnaire. Data analysis was done using Cronbach alpha, exploratory, confirmatory factor analysis, structural equation modeling, SEM, and hierarchical regression analysis. The outcome demonstrates that informational videos with branded material have a highly substantial impact on brand attitude, which in turn influences purchase intention. The outcome additionally demonstrated that the association between branded content videos and brand attitude is not moderated by consumer engagement.

Ajina (2019) conducted an empirical study on Saudi Arabian private hospitals to examine the impact of content marketing on customer loyalty. The dimensions of the study were consumer engagement, loyalty, and trust. A simple random sample strategy was used to pick 400 respondents, who were either patients or family members attending private hospitals, in order to obtain their perceptions regarding the hypothesized factors. The results show that customer engagement, trust, and loyalty are all positively impacted by content marketing. Furthermore, research has shown that consumer involvement has a good impact on trust, and to fully capitalize on this, private healthcare institutions should use a multi-channel content marketing strategy.

Weerasinghe (2018) conducted an empirical investigation into the effects of content marketing on Sri Lankan customers' online engagement. The study used the five characteristics of content marketing-shareable, intelligible, incentive-based, accessible, and absorbing as defined by Andac et al. (2016). The research data were analyzed using bivariate and descriptive analysis in this study. Convenience sampling was used to distribute 75 online questionnaires. The results showed that online engagement and content marketing strategy were positively correlated.

Based on the empirical review, the researcher's hypotheses that,

- I. There is no significant relationship between content marketing and repeat patronage of GSM service provider companies in Asaba, Delta State.
- II. There is no significant relationship between content marketing and word-of-mouth of GSM service provider companies in Asaba, Delta State.

RESEARCH METHODS

The design employed in this study was an exploratory one. AIRTEL, 9MOBILE, GLO, and MTN make up the study's population. Twenty-two (22) management employees from each GSM service provider were chosen at random to be the study's sample units (respondents), based on their ability to supply the information required for the study. As a result, a total of eighty-four (86) respondents took part in the trial. Primary and secondary sources were used to gather data. A thorough validity test and reliability test were conducted. The dependability coefficient Cronbach's alpha, which shows how well a set's entries are related to one another, was employed. A test of the reliability was conducted using SPSS version 20.0. Validity tests demonstrate a scale's ability to ascertain the suggested idea and the extent to which an observation or measurement aligns with the construct for which it was intended to be made. Face validity and content were applied. To test the null hypotheses, Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was employed. To ascertain how the explanatory variables, affect the dependent variable, regression analysis will be used.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Table 1: Questionnaire Analysis

| Numbers | Questionnaire | Percent |
|------------------|---------------|---------|
| No. Sent out | 88 | 100.0 |
| No. Returned | 85 | 96.60 |
| No. Not Returned | 3 | 3.40 |

Source: Field Survey Data 2020

Table 1 shows that a total of 88 copies of the questionnaire were distributed, out of which 85 representing (96.60%) were retrieved while 3 representing (3.40%) were not retrieved. However, 85 representing (96.60%) of the retrieved questionnaires were useful. The 3 (3.40%) of the not retrieved questionnaires were not correctly or filled and were consequently discarded.

Having analyzed the questionnaire, the various hypotheses proposed for this study were subjected to statistical tests using Spearman’s Rank Order Correlation Co-Efficient Statistical Tool.

Table 2: Description of the Degree of Association between Variables

| Correlation Coefficient (r) | Description/Interpretation |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| ± 0.80 – 1.0 | Very Strong |
| ± 0.60 – 0.79 | Strong |
| ± 0.40 – 0.59 | Moderate |
| ± 0.20 – 0.39 | Weak |
| ± 0.00 – 0.19 | Very Weak |

Source: SPSS Output of Data Analysis on Content Marketing and Customers Loyalty (2024).

The positive (+) sign in the value of r indicates a direct/positive relationship while negative (-) sign in the value of r indicates an indirect/negative or inverse relationship. Therefore, the sign of the r value explains the direction of association or nature of the relationship between the variables.

Decision Rule

Reject the null hypothesis (H0) if $PV < 0.05$ for a 2-tailed test and conclude that a significant relationship exists.

Table 3: Correlation Analysis of Content Marketing and Repeat Patronage

Correlations

| | | | Content Marketing | Repeat Patronage |
|----------------|-------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Spearman's rho | Content Marketing | Correlation Coefficient | 1.000 | .712** |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | . | .000 |
| | | N | 85 | 85 |
| | Repeat Patronage | Correlation Coefficient | .712** | 1.000 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | . |
| | | N | 85 | 85 |

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS Output of Data Analysis on Content Marketing and Customer Loyalty

Table 3 above shows that Spearman’s correlation coefficient (r) = 0.712**, this value is high and shows that; a strong relationship exists between content marketing and repeat patronage. The positive sign of the correlation coefficient shows that the relationship between the variables is positive. Therefore, an increased in repeat patronage is associated with the GSM service provider’s content marketing strategies. As shown in Table 3, the probability value $i(0.000) < (0.05)$ level of significance; hence the researcher rejects the null hypothesis and concludes that there is a significant relationship between content marketing and repeat patronage.

Table 4: Correlation Analysis of Content Marketing and Word-of-Mouth

Correlations

| | | | Content Marketing | Word-of-Mouth |
|----------------|-------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|---------------|
| Spearman's rho | Content Marketing | Correlation Coefficient | 1.000 | .681** |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | . | .000 |
| | | N | 85 | 85 |
| | Word-of-Mouth | Correlation Coefficient | .681** | 1.000 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | . |
| | | N | 85 | 85 |

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS Output of Data Analysis on Content Marketing and Customer Loyalty (2024)

Table 4 explains that Spearman's correlation coefficient (r) = 0.681**, this value is high, which means that a strong relationship exists between content marketing and word-of-mouth. The positive sign of the correlation coefficient connotes a positive relationship and that implies that an increased in word-of-mouth is associated with the level of content marketing of the studied GSM service provider firms. The probability value is (0.000) < (0.05) level of significance; hence the researcher rejects the null hypothesis and concludes that content marketing significantly relates to customers' word-of-mouth.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study hypothesized that there is no significant relationship between content marketing and repeat patronage of GSM service provider companies in Asaba, Delta State. There is no significant relationship between content marketing and word-of-mouth of GSM service provider companies in Asaba, Delta State. However, the tested hypotheses showed a strong positive relationship between content marketing and the measures of customer's loyalty. In Table 3, the Spearman's correlation coefficient (r) = 0.712**, this value is high and shows that; a strong relationship exists between content marketing and repeat patronage. In Table 4 Spearman's correlation coefficient (r) = 0.681**, this value is high, which means that a strong relationship exists between content marketing and word-of-mouth. These findings cohere with the results of previous studies on content marketing. For instance, Ajina (2019) conducted an empirical study on Saudi Arabian private hospitals to examine the impact of content marketing on customer loyalty. The results show that customer engagement, trust, and loyalty are all positively impacted by content marketing. Furthermore, research has shown that consumer involvement has a good impact on trust, and to fully capitalize on this, private healthcare institutions should use a multi-channel content marketing strategy. Also, Weerasinghe (2018) conducted an empirical investigation into the effects of content marketing on Sri Lankan customers' online engagement. The results showed that online engagement and content marketing strategy were positively correlated

CONCLUSION(S) AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the study concludes there is a significant relationship between content marketing and customers loyalty. Also, customer loyalty expressed as repeat patronage and word of mouth depends on the content marketing of the GSM service providers companies. As such, the study recommends that the GSM service providers companies that seek to improve customers' loyalty should consider content marketing as a strategy and the GSM service providers companies should consider content marketing as an imperative strategy to improve on repeat patronage and positive word of mouth.

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