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CONTENT MARKETING IN THE DIGITAL SPHERE

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U skladu sa članom 54. Pravila studiranja za I, II ciklus studija, integrisani, stručni i specijalistički studij na Univerzitetu u Sarajevu, daje se

IZJAVA O AUTENTIČNOSTI RADA

Ja, Nejra Bučo, studentica drugog (II) ciklusa studija, broj index-a 3816 na programu Management na engleskom jeziku, smjer Marketing Management, izjavljujem da sam završni rad na temu:

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pod mentorstvom prof. dr. Maje Arslanagić-Kalajdžić izradila samostalno i da se zasniva na rezultatima mog vlastitog istraživanja. Rad ne sadrži prethodno objavljene ili neobjavljene materijale drugih autora, osim onih koji su priznati navođenjem literature i drugih izvora informacija uključujući i alate umjetne inteligencije.

Ovom izjavom potvrđujem da sam za potrebe arhiviranja predala elektronsku verziju rada koja je istovjetna štampanoj verziji završnog rada.

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U skladu sa članom 34. 45. i 46. Zakona o autorskom i srodnim pravima (Službeni glasnik BiH, 63/10) dozvoljavam da gore navedeni završni rad bude trajno pohranjen u Institucionalnom repozitoriju Univerziteta u Sarajevu i Ekonomskog fakulteta i da javno bude dostupan svima.

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ABSTRACT

Content marketing has emerged as a crucial and effective strategy for businesses and organizations to engage their target audience, build brand authority, enhance online visibility, and drive sustainable growth. This paper aims to introduce the idea of content marketing, understand it better, and explore the reasons behind the growing importance of content marketing in the digital era, as well as discuss the future use. In recent years, the proliferation of digital platforms, as well as the technology development and the transformation of consumer behaviour have revolutionized the marketing landscape. Content marketing, defined as the strategic creation and distribution of valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a specific audience has emerged as a dominant approach for businesses to connect with their customers.

As the boundaries between technology and marketing continue to blur, the fusion of video games, AI, VR, and AR with content marketing holds immense potential. This convergence allows brands to create immersive, interactive, and personalized experiences that resonate with consumers in profound ways. Embracing these technologies in content marketing strategies will not only enable brands to stay ahead of the curve but also empower them to connect with audiences on a deeper, more meaningful level. As this future unfolds, marketers must be prepared to navigate this evolving landscape and harness the full spectrum of possibilities that these technologies offer.

Research to better understand the views of marketing experts, working in the market of Bosnia and Herzegovina, on this topic was carried out. Even though a limited qualitative research was actualized, the results clearly show that the market is familiar with content marketing, and its value, and that it is used, and will continue to be used even more.

SAŽETAK

Content marketing se pojavio kao ključna i efikasna strategija za preduzeća i organizacije da angažuju svoju ciljnu publiku, izgrade autoritet brenda, poboljšaju vidljivost online i pokrenu održivi rast. Ovaj rad ima za cilj predstaviti ideju content marketinga, bolje ga razumjeti i istražiti razloge koji stoje iza rastuće važnosti content marketinga u digitalnoj eri, kao i raspraviti o budućoj upotrebi istog. Posljednjih godina, proliferacija digitalnih platformi, kao i razvoj tehnologije i transformacija ponašanja potrošača revolucionirali su marketinški krajolik. Content marketing, definisan kao strateško kreiranje i distribucija vrijednog, relevantnog i dosljednog sadržaja za privlačenje i zadržavanje specifične publike, pojavio se kao dominantan pristup za poslovne subjekte da se povežu sa svojim klijentima.

Kako se granice između tehnologije i marketinga nastavljaju preklapati, fuzija video igara, AI, VR i AR s content marketingom ima ogroman potencijal. Ova konvergencija omogućava brendovima da stvore impresivna, interaktivna i personalizovana iskustva koja na dubok način odjekuju kod potrošača. Prihvatanje ovih tehnologija u strategijama content marketinga ne samo da će omogućiti brendovima da ostanu ispred krivulje, već će ih osnažiti i da se povežu s publikom na dubljem, i smislenijem nivou. Kako se ova budućnost razvija, marketari moraju biti spremni da se kreću u skladu sa ovim razvojem tržišta i iskoriste puni spektar mogućnosti koje ove tehnologije nude.

U sklopu ovog rada provedeno je istraživanje radi boljeg razumijevanja stavova marketinških stručnjaka koji rade na tržištu Bosne i Hercegovine o ovoj temi. Iako je aktualizirano ograničeno kvalitativno istraživanje, rezultati jasno pokazuju da je tržište upoznato sa content marketingom i njegovom vrijednošću, te da se koristi i da će se još više koristiti u budućnosti.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AI – Artificial intelligence

AR – Augmented reality

B&H – Bosnia and Herzegovina

CMA – Content Marketing Association

IoT – Internet of things

IT – Information technology

SEO – Search engine optimization

VR – Virtual reality

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1. INTRODUCTION

According to Google Trends, one of the fastest growing search terms in the business marketing space is something called content marketing (Pulizzi, 2012). Content Marketing Institute defines content marketing 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”* (Content Marketing Institute, 2018).

The key word here is “valuable.” It is what changes this definition from one that could describe almost any form of advertising or marketing. It could be said that if a piece of content is the sort that could be part of a content marketing campaign if people seek it out, if people want to consume it, rather than avoiding it (Steimle, 2018). Content marketing puts the customer at the heart of a brand’s messaging. Rather than spamming customers with advertising-laden messaging, content marketing provides them with valuable content and engages them throughout the customer journey. This goes beyond pushing a product or a service to a potential customer, but instead putting the relevant information out there and following the customer from the awareness phase to the decision phase. Content marketing includes presenting brand content like how-to guides or story-based ads that provide a real benefit to the consumer. The dynamism of content marketing persists in shaping modern business strategies, aligning with consumers' evolving needs and preferences. Pulizzi's foundational definition from 2012 remains pertinent, yet the contemporary landscape has propelled content marketing to new heights. A recent publication by Robert Rose and Joe Pulizzi in "Killing Marketing" (2019) further elucidates the paradigm shift in marketing dynamics, emphasizing the transition from traditional advertising models to audience-centric content strategies. Rose and Pulizzi assert that businesses must transform their marketing operations from campaigns to ongoing engagement, fostering relationships through valuable content.

Marketers send information to their audience constantly – the issue being that most of the time it’s not very relevant or valuable. Saxon (2018) states in his research that the average consumer is exposed to up to 10,000 brand messages a day, and he/she will switch between screens up to 21 times an hour, which correlates with Microsoft’s claim that the average person’s attention span is now just eight seconds. This is what makes content marketing so intriguing and relevant in today’s environment of thousands of marketing messages being sent out, per person, per day, since content should be something that audiences want to get; and consequently, something they want to spend their time on. Dzamic and Kirby (2018) explain that Content should make people feel the message is worth their time, versus the mere brute-force interruptive exposure that relies just on paid-for frequency to be noticed and mentally processed. While advertising aims to foster sales in the short run, DCM (Digital Content Marketing) is “the art of communicating with [prospective] customers without

selling products” either overtly or directly (Bicks, 2016). Or to put it simply, as comedian Jerry Seinfeld once said: *“This whole idea of an attention span is, I think, a misnomer. People have an infinite attention span if you are entertaining them.”* In an era inundated with information overload, the pivotal role of content marketing in capturing fleeting attention spans stands reinforced. Recent studies, such as those by Deighton and Kornfeld (2021), delve into the psychological underpinnings of consumer behavior in the digital age, elucidating how content marketing acts as a catalyst for audience engagement. Their research underscores the necessity of creating content that not only attracts but also sustains the audience's interest amidst the constant barrage of marketing messages.

Crucial part of content marketing is storytelling, especially the brand story that feels authentic, genuine and not purely sales-focused, unconstrained by limitations of the traditional commercial media, which marketers want to get across to their potential customers. Opposite to advertising, which is generally transmitted around someone else’s content, content marketing is the creation of valuable, relevant and compelling content by the brand itself on a consistent basis. It is used to generate positive behavior from a customer or prospect of the brand (Pulizzi, 2012). These brand stories are considered to be pillars of content, together with the right combination of the formats and outlets used. While this sounds great in theory, the process of deciding on these big questions is tricky, especially if we involve the digital sphere in the mix. Digital Market-Sphere (DMS), or digital sphere, as it will be used in this study is simply put emerging digital market phenomena. As Carter and Parameswaran (2012) explain, this description achieves the fourfold intentions. First, the term sphere transcends the physical plane while also encompassing traditional marketplace processes. The DMS configures spatial interaction based on digital cognitive sharing, which may or may not correspond to physical material situations. Secondly, sphere refers to a holistic and inclusive domain, similar to a universe or ecology. Much like a biological ecology or cosmological universe, the DMS is advanced as a holistic taxonomy of the digital market properties and parameters. Thirdly, the sphere connotes a continuous rolling motion like the digital market’s accelerating innovation. Digital market(s) dynamism and depth is not fully conveyed by terms like market, marketplace, e-commerce, Internet/ online, or “marketspace”. This being said, we can understand that in the 21st century, each day, the digital sphere is becoming a more developed, important and even crucial part of everyday life whether we want it or not. Over the past 15 years, digital media platforms have revolutionized marketing, offering new ways to reach, inform, engage, sell to, learn about and provide service to customers (Lamberton and Stephen, 2016). Both brand and direct space is being transformed into a tap or a swipe on a mobile device, and digital sphere is becoming the main reputation-building and -destroying space.

No matter if the brand goals are rooted in search engine optimization (getting found), lead generation (conversion) or leveraging social media tools, none of them will be effective without compelling storytelling. More and more, brands are starting to realize that all the technology tools available are worthless without a content marketing strategy at the center

of marketing (Pulizzi, 2012). The evolution of storytelling within content marketing is a focal point of interest in the current literature landscape. Authors like Ann Handley, in her 2019 book "Everybody Writes," emphasize the significance of crafting authentic narratives that resonate with audiences. Handley asserts that compelling storytelling transcends mere brand promotion; it fosters emotional connections, driving consumer loyalty and advocacy. This aligns with the assertion of Dzamic and Kirby (2018), who emphasize the shift from intrusive, sales-focused content to meaningful narratives that engage and captivate audiences.

Most of the traditional media modes have their own typical, even archetypal formats: jingle for radio, billboards of various sizes for outdoor, brand films and press releases for PR. Each of these previously separate disciplines, with their archetypal formats, had their own rules and sets of expertise (Dzamic and Kirby, 2018). With the digital sphere, this is not the case. Digital is the first meta-medium in our history (Manovich, 2001). This means that digital space encompasses in one user space variations of all previously known formats such as image, video, text, sound, voice, broadcast, two-way conversation as well as many others. There are no set rules to follow, nor formats to be used, and this is where the importance of content in the digital space appears.

Digital content marketing frequently takes the form of custom magazines, online newsletters, digital content, websites or microsites, webcasts/webinars, podcasts, video portals or series, interactive online, email and many other formats. As Partutiu (2015) explains, the purpose of this information is not to spout the virtues of the marketer's own products or services, but to inform target customers and prospects about key industry issues, sometimes involving the marketer's products.

Though the digital sphere is evolving and changing, some would say even too quickly, marketing has to adapt to it, in order to stay relevant. In practice, we are rapidly entering a "post digital" world in marketing, where the siloed thinking that divided marketing into "digital" and "traditional" (or everything else) is being replaced. Instead, we are at a point in practice where digital marketing is just marketing, simply because almost all marketing activities a firm might consider now can have some kind of digital aspect (Lamberton and Stephen, 2016). This is the reason why this topic of content marketing in the digital era has been written about over and over again, in various magazines, journals, books, articles and blogs, and why it continues to be interesting to researchers. The delineation between digital and traditional marketing becomes increasingly blurred in contemporary discourse. Lamberton and Stephen (2020) argue that marketing has transcended the digital divide, with virtually all marketing activities integrating digital components. This integration emphasizes the need for a holistic understanding of content marketing strategies that harmonize digital and conventional marketing avenues.

Furthermore, the landscape of content marketing continues to evolve with the rise of newer technologies and platforms. Recent studies, exemplified by Amanda Bower's research

(2023), explore the intersection of content marketing with emerging virtual spaces. Bower's work delves into the implications of content dissemination within virtual environments, highlighting the need for immersive and innovative storytelling that resonates with audiences navigating these novel digital realms. Such explorations underscore the necessity for brands to adapt their content strategies to encompass these futuristic domains for sustained relevance and engagement.

For example, many studies are focused solely on the content marketing effect on the social media, since they see it, as Forouzandeh, Soltanpanah and Sheikahmadi (2014) explain, social media networks are the part of the Digital sphere which should be the primary target to marketers, since they bring different audiences to one place, and allow them to communicate, and even advocate for the brands. In their paper, they further say: Content marketing has recently been paid prior attention in social networks. It has been introduced as an appropriate marketing trend. The interest in content marketing's impact on social media has led to extensive scholarly inquiries. Researchers Emily Boyd and Heidi Hsia (2022) delve into the symbiotic relationship between content marketing and social media, examining how brands leverage these platforms for enhanced audience engagement and advocacy. Their findings illuminate the pivotal role of social media in amplifying content reach and fostering community-driven brand narratives.

Some authors have also written several how-to books and proposed methods of conducting such marketing. CMA has trained content marketing in social networks and published its results according to conducted surveys and its comparison with other marketing methods.

Several other recent texts and researches are focused solely on Facebook, SEO (search engine optimization), or content marketing in general, its history and pre-digital era. Elkin (2017) explains that given digital channels' high reach at relatively low cost, DCM (digital content marketing) represents the most rapidly growing content marketing form. This is the main reason why I have decided to observe this topic from a broader angle, to focus on the use of content marketing in the digital sphere, advantages it brings, approaches used, the future usage, and the ways in which it could develop together with the new media which is slowly becoming mainstream. This paper also tries to, as a true devil's advocate, briefly cover the other side of the story, and that are reasons why content marketing is not important, or some may argue even nonexistent. Last part of the paper is primary research conducted for the purpose of this work. This research was focused on marketers working in five sectors (ICT, finance, SMEs, marketing agencies and international organizations) in order to see different opinions and approaches on content marketing across the B&H market.

In addition to finding out where the respondents are, in this case marketers in organizations and advertising agencies familiar with the topic, do they use this approach in their work, this research also focused on learning how they see the future of content marketing. Hence, the thesis seeks to respond to following research questions:

- RQ1: What is the level of familiarity of marketers with the topic of content marketing?
- RQ2: How do marketers use the content marketing approach in their work?
- RQ3: What is the future of content marketing, as seen by marketers in the field?

Overall, the research encapsulates a nuanced understanding of content marketing's current standing, its diverse applications across industries, and the unanimous anticipation of its evolution driven by technological advancements and shifting consumer expectations. As the marketing landscape continues to evolve, content marketing stands poised at the forefront, demanding adaptation, innovation, and strategic alignment for businesses to remain competitive and relevant in an increasingly digital and interconnected world.

2. WHAT IS CONTENT MARKETING?

2.1. Defining Content marketing

Despite the interest that the term “content marketing” has risen in the marketing community, there is still no definition which is recognized and used across the community, but rather parts of the different definitions which are repeating in most of them. According to the Marketing dictionary (2019), two most widely recognized and used definitions would be: Content Marketing Institute (CMI) “Content marketing is a technique of creating and distributing *valuable, relevant* and consistent content to attract and acquire a clearly defined audience—with the objective of driving profitable customer action.” and definition by the Association of National Advertisers (ANA), “*content marketing* involves various methods to tell the brand story. More and more marketers are evolving their advertising to content marketing/storytelling to create more stickiness and emotional bonding with the consumer.”

In their book, which aims to explain content marketing and gather as much information about it in one place, Dzamic and Kirby (2018) claim that while researching for the book, they have collected more than 70 “content marketing” definitions. In order to represent these different opinions as concisely as possible, they were clustered into five groups, based on the similar approaches to explaining the term. These groups are (Dzamic and Kirby, 2018):

1. Content as “just marketing” definition
2. Trade-discipline based definition
3. Consumer-centric definition
4. Definition based on narrative/aesthetic feel
5. Do we need a definition at all?

In further text I will explain in more detail each of these groups, as well as show definitions which are most commonly used as representative ones.

2.1.1. Content as “just marketing” definition

As the title states, this group of definitions is comprising of all of the content marketing definitions which see this term as “just another part of marketing”, something that is organic, logical and maybe even unnecessary to have “marketing” in its name, rather than just the word “content”, since it is already indistinguishable from the already established marketing practices. In these definitions one can observe that the term can usually be changed with terms such as “marketing” or “advertising” and the definition would still remain correct. Example of this definition:

Content marketing is the discipline of creating quality branded content across media channels and platforms to deliver engaging relationships, consumer value and measurable success for brands (Content Marketing Association - CMA, 2019).

Mark Ritson (2016), who is one the most well-known advocates of this opinion states: “It’s not that I don’t see the value of what content marketing does. I just don’t see how it’s any different from what we were already doing. Even content marketers cite examples from 1895 (John Deer’s customer magazine) and P&G inventing the soap opera in the 1930s as examples of early content marketing innovations. Both are amazing marketing tactics but I see them as examples of direct mail and nascent advertising respectively, not something in need of a new name. It doesn’t help that all the definitions of content marketing I read just seem to describe marketing communications.”

2.1.2. Trade-discipline based definition

Similar to the previous group, the trade-discipline based definition group also relies on the premises that content marketing is not a new phenomenon, but rather just a new term for something that has been done for a long time and required a new name in order to make it more popular. This being said, the best representatives of this group would be each of the definitions explaining these, “new” terms, together with the ones which were once used, and now discarded. Great example of this is: Content farms = copywriting agencies

A content farm is a company that uses search data to create articles, videos and other media that is designed to rank highly in the search engines. Content farms use a large pool of freelancers who choose or are assigned ideas from a list that is compiled by analyzing user search data. The main purpose of a content farm is to maximize pageviews and revenue generated by advertising on those pages while minimizing the costs and time needed to create the content. Content farms are also known as content mills and content factories (Techopedia.com, 2019).

Copywriting is the act of writing text for the purpose of advertising or other forms of marketing. The product, called copy, is content that aims to increase brand awareness and

ultimately persuade a person or group to take a particular action (Oxford Dictionaries | English, 2019).

As you can see above, both these terms are focused on the same principle, by creating attractive content, certain marketing goals should be acquired. In the past “content” was believed to be limited to text, while nowadays this term has spread to photo, video, video games, new technologies and many other formats and outlets. By having this said, trade-discipline believers would argue that it is basically the same term, just broadened by the new findings and new practices.

2.1.3. Consumer-centric definition

Customer-centric definitions of content marketing are focused on the customers and how they consume the content, in comparison to the traditional marketing. In other words, as Scott Donaton calls it “Invitation versus Interruption” (Donaton, 2006). These definitions explain that the content should be something that audiences want to get, something they want to spend time on. It must have a better “pull” force. It should make people feel the message is worth their time, versus the mere brute-force interruptive exposure that relies just on paid-frequency to be noticed and mentally processed (Dzamic and Kirby, 2018). Example of consumer-centric definition:

Content marketing is the marketing technique of creating and distributing relevant and valuable content to attract, acquire, and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience. Content marketing subscribes to the notion that delivering high-quality, relevant, and valuable information to prospects and customers drives profitable consumer action. Content marketing differs from advertising, advertising-based story-telling and other promotional vehicles in one specific way: the intent of this mode of communication is to provide useful, educational, or entertaining information on its own merit. Content marketing is a pull strategy, unlike advertising, which is push. This marketing technique intends to “pull” the consumer toward the brand and create a user experience which will ultimately increase brand awareness and preference (IAB, 2013)

2.1.4. Definition based on narrative/aesthetic feel

Content is anything that feels authentic, genuine and not purely sales-focused, unconstrained by limitations of the traditional commercial media (Dzamic & Kirby, 2018). Or, another definition: Content marketing is all about storytelling, and humans have told stories for as long as they could speak. Our attention will always go to those who tell great stories. In contrast to one-off advertising, content marketing shows that you actually care about your customers. Today, more than ever before, people want to feel like you care about them. The world is louder and noisier than ever before, and attention is our most valuable resource (Neil Patel, n.d.).

I strongly believe that these two definitions best explain the attitude which advocates of this group of definitions feel about content marketing. The only thing left to state is the difference between this and the previous group, since for now they look quite similar. Customer-centric definitions are more focused on the importance of the information which the audience receives after consuming the content, while the definitions based on narrative/aesthetic feel are more concentrated on the emotion which the content marketing is creating.

2.1.5. Do we need a definition at all?

In this group we have a mix of opinions, with the same main idea that content marketing does not need nor deserve to have a definition. Some believe this due to the fact that content marketing is just a place-holder for what is coming in the future, the evolution of media and marketing, and until that happens there is no need to define the transition. Others just simply put that they are not sold on the idea of content marketing and consider it to be another buzzword used by the marketing community.

How they see it, there is a new marketing approach/strategy/type every other week, and each of them are presented as the greatest marketing tactic since sliced bread. This makes it easy to ignore the trends, especially when some of the original pillars of marketing are working well for your brand.

In the ever-evolving marketing landscape, content marketing plays a pivotal role. While a precise definition can enhance understanding and guide practitioners, it is equally crucial to recognize that content marketing's essence lies in its execution. Whether we choose to delineate it explicitly or view it as an integral part of marketing, the focus should remain on delivering value to audiences, fostering engagement, and driving profitable customer actions.

2.2. Different approaches in Content marketing

"Content marketing is not just about creating content; it's about creating valuable, relevant content that attracts and engages a clearly defined target audience." (Pulizzi, 2012)

The diversity of opinions surrounding content marketing reflects the dynamic nature of the field and perspectives that scholars and practitioners bring to the table. This diversity is evident in the multitude of approaches, best practices, and processes that exist within the realm of content marketing. Scholars and professionals often align themselves with specific categories of definition, shaping their perspectives and influencing the strategies they advocate. The categorization of content marketing approaches into various schools of

thought allows for a nuanced understanding of the discipline, recognizing that no single approach is universally superior. This paper, in its exploration of content marketing, particularly focuses on two prominent categories: the consumer-centric approach and the narrative/aesthetic feel-based definition.

The consumer-centric approach to content marketing places the audience at the forefront of the strategy, emphasizing the creation of content that resonates with and adds value to the target consumers. This approach recognizes the significance of understanding consumer behavior, preferences, and needs. By tailoring content to align with the audience's interests and addressing their pain points, marketers aim to establish a deeper connection with consumers, fostering trust and loyalty. In this paradigm, content becomes a vehicle for building relationships and delivering meaningful experiences, rather than merely a promotional tool.

The narrative/aesthetic feel-based definition of content marketing places emphasis on the storytelling aspect and the overall aesthetic appeal of the content. This approach recognizes that consumers are not merely passive recipients of information but are actively engaged with narratives that evoke emotions and resonate with their values. By focusing on the aesthetic and narrative elements of content, marketers seek to create a memorable and immersive experience for the audience. This approach often involves crafting compelling stories, utilizing visual elements, and curating content that captivates the audience's attention and leaves a lasting impression.

While these approaches are presented as distinct categories for the sake of clarity, it's crucial to acknowledge that the boundaries between them are often blurred in practice. Many successful content marketing campaigns seamlessly integrate elements of both consumer-centric and narrative/aesthetic feel-based approaches. The purpose of this exploration is not to rigidly compartmentalize these approaches but to offer the reader a nuanced understanding of the philosophies that underpin content marketing strategies. In recognizing the coexistence and interplay of these diverse approaches, marketers can leverage a holistic understanding to create more effective and resonant content that aligns with the dynamic expectations of modern consumers.

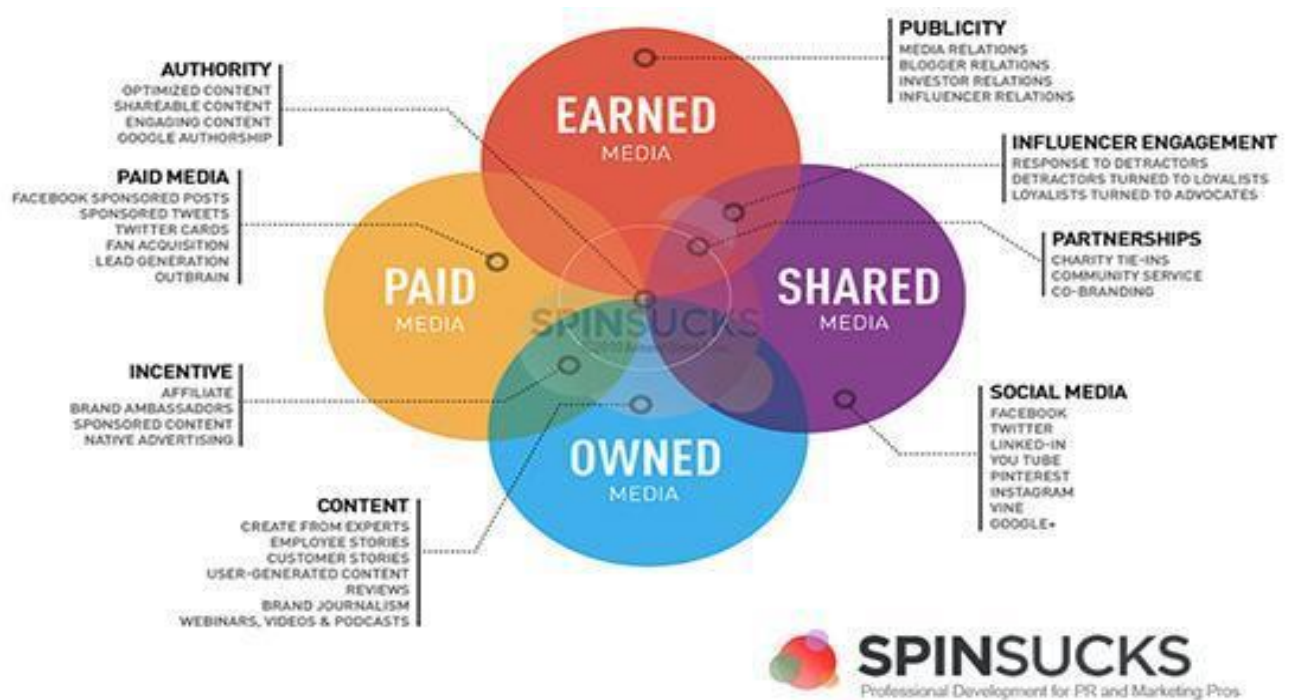
I have decided to focus on the consumer-centric and definition based on narrative/aesthetic feel. This being said, the approaches explained below belong to these definition groups and its purpose in this text is rather to better explain the content marketing philosophy to the reader, than a strict division between approaches.

2.2.1. Paid – earned – shared – owned framework

The creator of PESO (paid – earned – shared – owned) framework, Dietrich (2015) explains it as a product of the fragmentation of media that has played out over the last decade. While the industry, as a whole, has adopted a “sit back and wait” mentality when it comes to

everything but earned media, the communicators who integrate the other three media types will win. The PESO model is the smartest way to activate a public relations campaign today.

Figure 1. PESO media elements



Source: PESO framework, Dietrich, G. (2014). *Spin sucks: communication and reputation management in the digital age*.

This framework is a useful tool for planning how an organization uses different media forms to execute an integrated campaign and achieve its goals. Waddington (2019) suggests that where one media format leads in its area of strength such as paid for scale, earned for trust or owned for predictability, it can be combined with others to optimize its effectiveness and value.

Figure 2. PESO framework grid

	Trust	Scale	Cost	Predictability
Paid	Low	High	High	Yes
Earned	High	Medium	Low to medium	No
Shared	High	Low	Low	No
Owned	Low to medium	Low	Low to medium	Yes

Source: PESO framework grid, Waddington, S. (2019). PESO explained for marketing and public relation

Paid media: an investment in distribution of owned assets or creative

Paid media is becoming a mainstream area of practice. Social media and search engine algorithms are regulated in a way that organizations have to pay to maximise the reach of their content. Practitioners have a high level of control outcomes thanks to planning and predictive analytics. Paid media includes print and TV advertisements, search keywords, ads and other paid social media content, as well as paid influencer content.

Earned media: a value exchange of content versus third party validation

This is the traditional domain of public relations. Press releases or stories are pitched to a third party (journalist, analyst, influencer...) who repurpose content for their own audiences. There's typically a limited level of control over outcomes, and results are highly dependent on creative and the competing news agenda. PESO framework here includes media relations, blogger relations, and organic influencer content.

Shared media: pushing content through owned social channels; typically also requires paid

Shared or social forms of media are networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, Google+ and LinkedIn. They may also be messaging platforms such as iMessenger or WhatsApp. There's typically a moderate level of control over outcomes but the addition of paid media helps improve effectiveness.

Owned media: brand media and community relationships which requires long term investment

This describes any content and channel over which an organization has complete control. It includes apps, e-mail, marketing communication collateral and websites. If an organisation has invested in building a community with its stakeholders it can be highly effective, and there is a high level of control over outcomes.

2.2.2. Google’s HHH framework

Another great, and frequently used approach to content marketing is the hero-help-hub, 3H or HHH framework. Google introduced this approach as a guideline for marketers who want to build up a fan-share fanbase on YouTube (van Beusekom, 2015). YouTube is the world’s biggest video branding platform, as well as the world’s second largest search engine. It is also a place where cultures are created and lived all the time and where people entertain themselves, learn and look for answers to their needs and problems billions of times across many categories all year around. Youtube spotted three distinct categories that encompass various types of content and user behavior around them. Three kinds of things people really want to watch (Dzamic and Kirby, 2018). The web giant called it “hero, help, hub” referring to the three types of content upon which this framework is based.

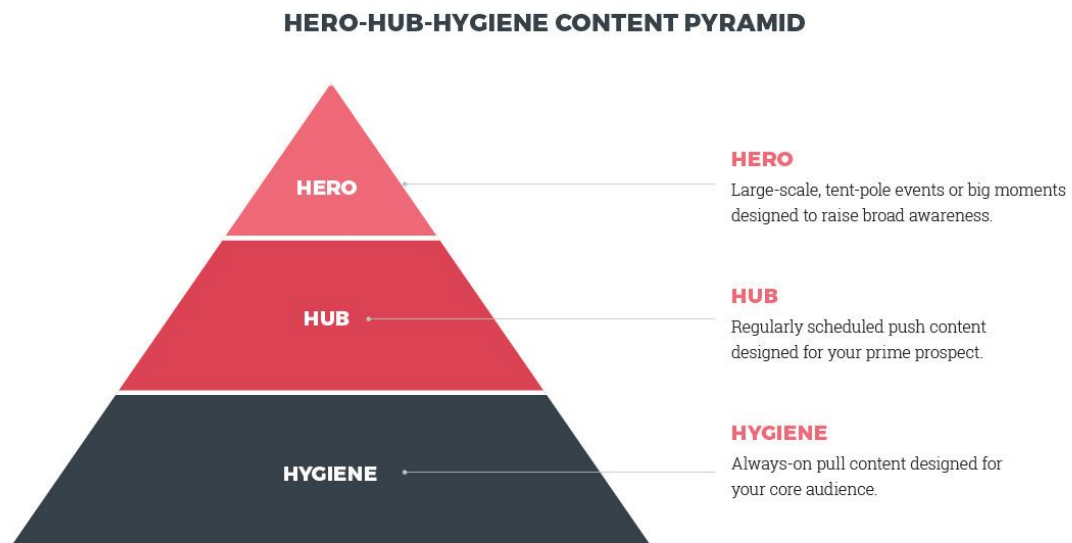
Figure 3 HHH framework - video



Source: Travers, D. (2023), Applying The Hero Hub Hygiene Framework to Your Business

Although it was originally intended to be used for video content, this applies to all types of content marketing in a more general sense (van Beusekom, 2015). This being said, I strongly believe that in addition to PESO, HHH framework is another great representation of content marketing and its usage in the real sector.

Figure 4HHH framework



Source: Cubbon, K. (2018), *WHY THE HERO-HUB-HYGIENE CONTENT MARKETING STRATEGY STILL WINS FOR DMOS*

Hero: This is the content you want to push to a big, broad audience. Most likely, you'll only have a few hero moments per year—for example, major product launches or seasonal tent poles.

Hub: Episodic or multi-part series designed to give a fresh perspective on your audience's passions and interests. This is often staggered throughout the year.

Help: Answer the questions your consumers are asking to create programming that is always relevant throughout the year. Consider making product tutorials, how-to lessons or customer service videos (Think with Google, 2019).

2.2.3. They ask, you answer framework

They Ask, You Answer is a content marketing framework with one obsession at its core: "What is my customer asking?". Its creator, Marcus Sheridan (2019) explains that if your prospects are asking questions, you must answer them — openly and honestly — on your website. That's where the name for the framework comes from: They Ask, You Answer. At the core of They Ask, You Answer are what Marcus called The Big 5: Five topics that every company needs to cover thoroughly and honestly on their website:

- **Price:** Explain the cost of everything you sell, including the factors that make that number go up and down.

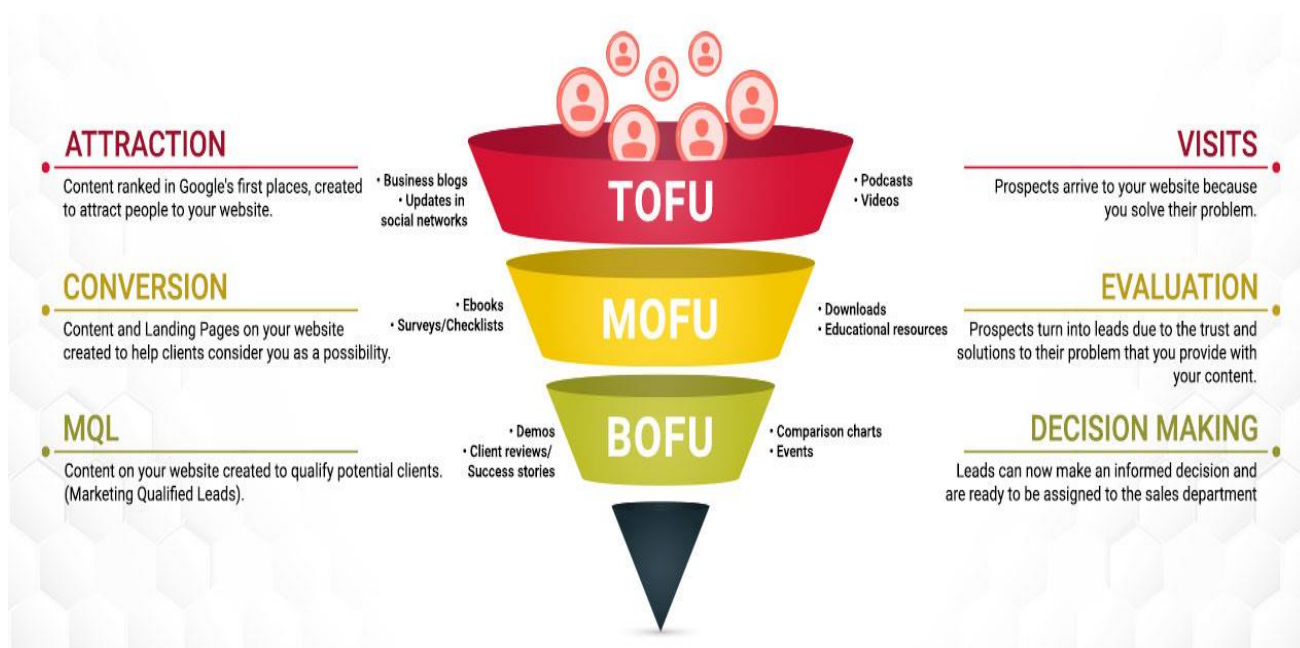
- ‘Best of’ lists: Give your buyers lists of the top options they should consider when making a purchase.
- Reviews: Provide expert reviews of everything related to what you sell — even if you don’t directly sell it yourself.
- Problems: Openly address the drawbacks of your products or services. Explain who is (and is not) a good fit to buy from you.
- Comparisons: Offer head-to-head comparisons to help buyers make an informed decision.

Together, these topics form the foundation of a content marketing framework that can build trust and ultimately build a strong connection with your intended audience. Main idea behind this approach is that in many industries there is no trusted voice for the customers to turn to. This approach was developed to help brands to become such voices, earn trust and become leaders in their industries. When an organization embraces They Ask, You Answer, they believe it is their duty to be the teacher, the go-to source within their particular industry. One that is not afraid to answer any and every question a customer may have. For them, it is a moral obligation to provide this level of education, regardless of whether the question is perceived as good, bad, or even difficult.

2.2.4. The TOFU-MOFU-BOFU Framework

Marketing and sales are often described using a funnel, which aligns with the customer’s journey. As customers progress further down the funnel, towards a purchase, the funnel becomes more narrow, and the group becomes smaller. For example, say 100 people come to the website (top of the funnel), 10 become leads (middle), and 1 buys (bottom).

Figure 5. TOFU-MOFU-BOFU Framework



Source: *TOFU-MOFU-BOFU Framework*, Becker J. (2022). *4 Content Marketing Frameworks To Add Structure to Your Strategy*

As these customers enter different stages of the customer's journey, they're looking for different kinds of content. Becker (2012) explains TOFU-MOFU-BOFU as follows: At the top of the marketing funnel, the customer is in the awareness stage. They may not know about the brand, or even be aware of the products or solutions they need yet. In this research-driven phase, the customer wants information and answers. That often takes the form of "I have a problem, and I'm looking for possible solutions." The customer might simply want to research a passion or interest, favoring content that entertains and informs. Early-stage customers, at the top of or just entering the sales funnel (TOFU = TOP of the FUNnel), are just starting to consider their options. They're looking for general content that entertains them, informs them, and answers their questions. Content formats such as blog articles, or podcasts.

The MOFU customer has clearly defined their problem and narrowed down their solutions. They are beginning to evaluate the brand as one possible option. However, they are still comparing several brands and might be considering other solutions as well. Because many TOFU customers will drop out of the funnel naturally, MOFU represents a smaller and more qualified slice of the audience. They are aware that this type of solution exists and are interested in learning more. What are the pros and cons? Which qualities should they look for? Are there options they aren't yet aware of? During the MOFU stage, marketers need to give their customers as much information as possible to make a decision. Secure their trust in the brand's expertise and the quality of products, and clarify differentiation from the competition.

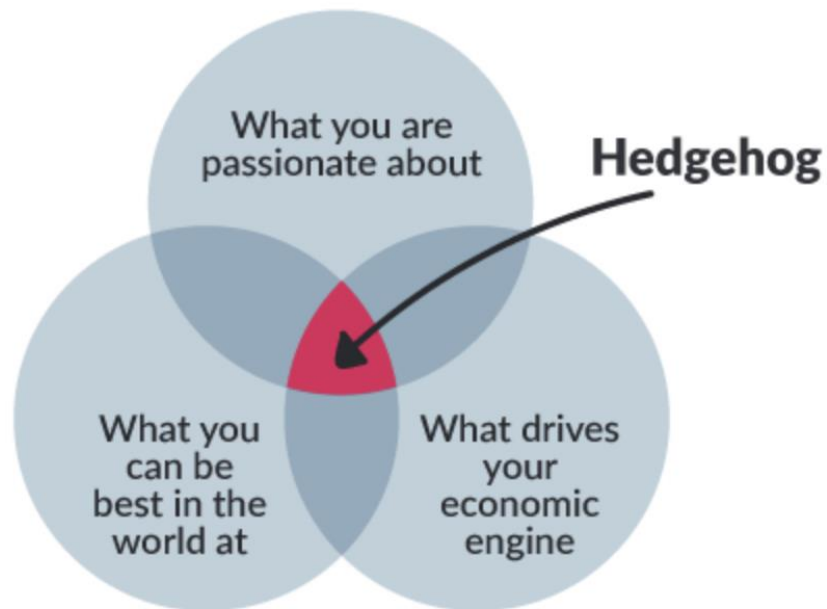
Contrast that with late-stage or Bottom-of-the-Funnel (BOFU) customers. If someone is in the final stages of a purchase decision, they are looking for different kinds of content. They want case studies and customer testimonials. A good strategy will focus on producing different content formats to resonate with leads at different stages of the customer's journey, helping move them down to the next stage, closer to making a purchase.

2.2.5. The Hedgehog Concept

Name 'Hedgehog concept' comes from a Greek fable that said: "Foxes know many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing". Collins (2001) argued that companies are more likely to succeed if they are successful in identifying one thing that they are BEST at – that is their 'Hedgehog concept'. Once the organization has identified its Hedgehog Concept, its leaders should commit all their energy to pursue it. The idea of the hedgehog concept is to find the one thing that you are really good at and put all your focus there. As the saying goes, do not try to be a jack-of-all-trades, but instead, be the master of one. Content marketers can easily adapt this to figure out what makes their brand special. Here is simple visualization of this idea:

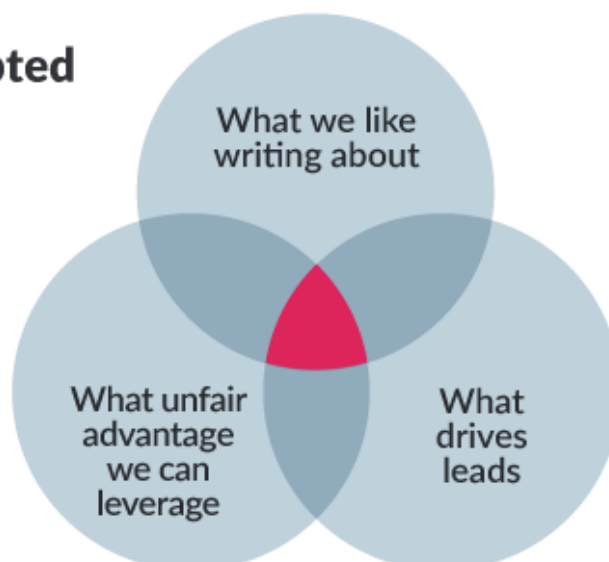
Figure 6. The Hedgehog Concept

THE HEDGEHOG CONCEPT



OUR CONTENT MARKETING HEDGEHOG

We adapted this to:



Source: Becker J. (2022). *4 Content Marketing Frameworks To Add Structure to Your Strategy*

Pulizzi (2012) explains this framework like this:

1. The Hedgehog as what we cover: In your niche, maybe you produce the best research, or the best how-to information, or the best investigative journalism.
2. The Hedgehog as how we cover it: This is channel specific. You possibly have a winning podcast like Content Marketing 360 or video series formula like Will It Blend?. Perhaps a webinar or daily blog series.
3. The Hedgehog as why we cover it: This is your higher purpose. Your content marketing mission statement. To be truly effective content marketers, we have to be creating and distributing content for, primarily, the betterment of your customer. Once you find that, then you can look for where your product or service fits in. The matching of our customers' informational or entertainment needs and what we sell is the content marketing sweet spot.
4. The Hedgehog as who we cover it for: Are there groups of people that are not getting the information they need to do their jobs better, or live their lives to the fullest extent? Your hedgehog might be covering a piece of information for that niche group, and then do it better than anyone else.

The most successful companies in content marketing have found their hedgehogs.

2.3. Why is content marketing important?

"Content marketing is the only marketing left." (Godin, 2008)

Kirby (2016) explains that there is a real danger that the content published throughout different media becomes the unimportant information that gets delivered by efficient, exciting new delivery systems. This is why it is important to understand the difference between real content, story-led marketing and marketing that just uses content, because stories are the means by which brands can connect to their customers through culture (i.e. what they talk about, watch, interact with and consume). And content marketing is just that, it is a part of marketing which is devoted to understanding, explaining and developing content as well as the most efficient ways in which it should be used.

Content marketing holds paramount importance in contemporary marketing strategies due to its multifaceted impact on brand visibility, audience engagement, and overall business success. First and foremost, content marketing serves as a potent tool for building brand awareness. Through the creation and dissemination of valuable and relevant content, businesses can establish a strong presence, ensuring that their target audience becomes familiar with their products or services. As Pulizzi (2012) explains, content marketing is not easy because you actually have to listen to your customers and know what their challenges

are. You cannot solve your marketing through buying advertising space. You must make a connection to your customers, and get new customers, by focusing on their true pain points and healing them with information. By consistently delivering content that addresses the needs and interests of the audience, companies can position themselves as authoritative figures within their industry, fostering a positive perception that enhances brand recall.

Content marketing plays a pivotal role in increasing brand awareness by creating valuable and informative content that resonates with the target audience. Through blogs, articles, social media posts, videos, infographics, and more, businesses can establish themselves as thought leaders in their respective industries. By consistently delivering valuable content, companies can increase their visibility, fostering brand recognition and trust among their audiences. With having professionals focused on the content, we ensure to have an interested and engaged audience with stronger connection to the brand.

According to an IBM Digital Experience Survey (2015), 56% of marketers believe that tough-tough content promotes higher engagement rates. Because personalized content helps consumers remember a brand, it also encourages them to engage more personally with the company in question, thus introducing a positive feedback loop and higher brand recall rates. Content marketing is not about selling, but rather about helping the audience. Consistently doing this, helping with useful, personalized content showcases not just the brand's expertise, but also the willingness to permanently be part of the audience's lives. In an era where consumers are inundated with information, content that provides genuine value stands out. By crafting content that educates, entertains, or solves problems for the audience, businesses can build trust and credibility. This engagement goes beyond mere transactions, fostering long-term relationships with customers. In essence, content marketing transforms a brand from a mere product or service provider into a valuable resource that resonates with the audience on a personal level, contributing significantly to customer loyalty and advocacy.

This means that brand is not just there to sell, but rather to affect the lifestyle of a potential buyer. Effective content marketing involves understanding the audience's preferences and needs, tailoring the content accordingly, and establishing a connection that goes beyond the traditional buyer-seller relationship. Engaging customers is the cornerstone of building long-term relationships. Content marketing allows businesses to create interactive and personalized content that speaks directly to the needs and interests of their audience. Content like that, created for a specific audience, tailored to their questions and pain points, and aimed at their perspective, is an incredible trust-builder. And a key tenant of content marketing is researching to understand your ideal customers deeply enough to accomplish all of the above.

To add on this, McCoy (2016) in her research found out that content marketing costs 62% less and generates more than three times more leads, as well as leads to higher conversion rates. One of the primary objectives of marketing is generating leads that can be nurtured

into paying customers. Content marketing serves as an effective lead generation tool by offering valuable content in exchange for user information. E-books, whitepapers, webinars, and email newsletters are some examples of content assets that can capture leads. Furthermore, by educating prospects through the sales funnel, content marketing helps build trust and credibility, increasing the likelihood of conversion. While many marketers assume that content marketing is expensive, the fact is that it is often cheaper than other traditional marketing methods. Because content marketing is effective, easy to begin, and popular with consumers, it can drastically reduce the money marketers spend on advertising their brands. What's more, it manages to do all of this while being more effective than traditional marketing, and one of the reasons why is higher conversion rates. Compared to traditional advertising, content marketing offers a cost-effective approach to reach and engage a larger audience. While it may require initial investments in content creation and distribution, the long-term benefits are substantial. Evergreen content, in particular, continues to attract and engage audiences over extended periods, providing ongoing returns on investment.

When content marketing adopters and non-adopters are compared, the adopters have conversion rates that are nearly six times higher than of those who do not still use content marketing. While content marketing requires an investment of time, money, and skill, it drives much higher conversion rates than its traditional marketing counterparts.

Above mentioned are just some of the reasons why content marketing is important and will continue to increase in its importance. Since this is still a rather unknown part of the marketing, as well as highly influenced by all the constant changes in the digital sphere we are yet to discover all other ways in which it can improve marketing strategies and plans in segments ranging from traditional media, to SEO and social media, as it can be transferred across the board and with worldwide implications.

2.4. Key arguments against content marketing

Throughout this chapter, we have learnt what content marketing is, or better put, what are different schools of thought on what is content marketing, as well as different approaches to it, and its importance. However, our exploration wouldn't be complete without addressing the counterarguments that challenge the delineation of content marketing. Throughout scholarly discourse and industry insights, a notable contention emerges: the contention against segregating content marketing from broader marketing strategies. This dissenting viewpoint posits that content marketing should not be perceived as an isolated discipline but rather as an integral component of the overarching marketing framework.

Within the realm of marketing discourse, dissenting voices advocate for a holistic understanding that integrates content marketing seamlessly into conventional marketing practices. Scholars and practitioners alike contest the notion that content marketing warrants a distinct category, arguing instead for its assimilation into comprehensive marketing

strategies. They argue that fragmenting content marketing may limit its potential impact and overlook its synergistic potential with other marketing channels. By integrating content marketing into the broader marketing landscape, proponents assert that businesses can leverage its strengths more effectively, fostering cohesive and integrated marketing campaigns that resonate with diverse audiences.

Furthermore, critics of the standalone classification of content marketing underscore the interconnectedness of various marketing functions, emphasizing the symbiotic relationship between content creation and traditional marketing endeavors. They advocate for a paradigm shift that recognizes content marketing as a complementary tool rather than a standalone discipline, urging marketers to embrace a more holistic approach to crafting compelling narratives and engaging with consumers.

As we have seen in the text above there are many marketers as well as scholars who disagree with the idea that content marketing should be separated from marketing. In further text their point of view is covered.

2.4.1. Argument no. 1 - Just a “new” name

Content marketing opposers often use the argument that what is seen as content marketing, a fresh new approach is actually something that has always been and will always be an integral part of marketing. Professor Mark Ritson (2016) believes that the existence of such terms reflects the ignorance of people coming into marketing without training and, therefore, thinking they are genuinely discovering a wheel and not realizing they are reinventing an old one because they never studied a wheel in the first place. Marketing is full of thought leaders and gurus who really should go and study it first before they start writing books on it, give video series on it and similar. He continues to explain that this is a reflection of the naivety and ignorance that goes in the corners of marketing at the moment.

“Nobody reads advertising. People read what interests them, and sometimes that is advertising.” (Gossage and Goodby, 2006)

Creatives meaning marketers in charge of creating content, approach every brief (it being agency brief, project brief, design brief and so on) as an opportunity to create content. What we often forget is that most of these creatives are actually that, creatives. These people are novelists, film creators, designers and such. Their job was always to create interesting content, marketing just turned their focus to specific brands they work for. This leads to a conclusion that content is an integral part of marketing, and as such does not need to be singled out. Bob Hoffman (2014), one of the world’s most influential advertising and marketing blogs by Business Insider, in his own words reminded us that content is everything you can upload online, and as such it should not get so much credit.

2.4.2. Argument no. 2 - Content marketing is not measurable

You can not measure all of marketing by return on investment or the revenue it generates because you cannot measure every single step in the customer journey, nor can you calculate with absolute certainty how much each touchpoint influenced the decision to buy. Everyone is doing content marketing. There is a problem, though. Just because everyone is doing content marketing does not mean that they are doing it right. And how can we know if something is done in the right way or not? Results. Well, that is where this issue occurs. Many marketing disciplines are not easily measurable, and why, because they are so intertwined that it is not possible to state where one discipline begins and another ends. How can we then even split them up, and call them different names? How can we decide what yields results and what not, if it cannot be measurable separately? For example: If you are doing content marketing but have poor SEO, you will probably have low results such as views, website visits and similar. No one is going to find your content. But if you are doing content marketing and have SEO and good results, to what do you attribute those good results?

2.4.3. Argument no. 3 - Too much focus on new tech delivery systems

Marketing has witnessed an evolution catalyzed by technological advancements, resulting in a paradigm shift towards embracing new delivery systems. The advent of various technological platforms and delivery mechanisms, such as AI-driven content generation, AR/VR experiences, and personalized algorithms, has indeed widened the landscape for content dissemination. This has led to our third argument against content marketing, and that is that content marketing is too much focused on new technologies and the ways in which they can be used to distribute content to the audience. While high-tech solutions offer immersive experiences, they might inadvertently alienate segments of the audience who lack access to or familiarity with these sophisticated platforms. Inadvertently excluding these demographics contradicts the inclusive essence of what effective marketing is perceived to be.

In addition to this, if such focus is put on new technologies usage, then what is the difference between social media marketing, digital marketing, integrated marketing and content marketing.

3. DIGITAL SPHERE

3.1. What is Digital sphere?

Digital sphere/Digital world/Virtual world/Modern world/Digital age and other similar terms, as Collins English dictionary (2020) explains, are used to describe the availability and

use of digital tools to communicate on the Internet, digital devices, smart devices and other technologies. Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary and Thesaurus (2020) has offered a bit more simplified definition, explaining it as the time when most information is in a digital form, especially when compared to the time when computers were not used. The term "digital sphere" encapsulates the extensive and ever-expanding realm of digital tools, smart devices, and the internet that permeate modern society. It signifies the interconnected ecosystem of technologies that have become integral to various facets of contemporary life. Researchers envision the digital public sphere as a communicative sphere provided or supported by online or social media – from websites to social network sites, weblogs and micro-blogs – where participation is open and freely available to everybody who is interested, where matters of common concern can be discussed, and where proceedings are visible to all. (Ferree, Gamson, Gerhards, and Rucht, 2002)

For the purpose of this master's thesis, I decided to use the term "digital sphere" when dealing with this trend. The term "digital sphere" refers to the virtual environment encompassing the internet, technologies, and online platforms that have become an integral part of modern society as we know it today. It represents the dynamic and interconnected ecosystem of technologies, platforms, and networks that define the modern era. As the internet and digitalization continue to shape various aspects of human life, from communication and education to commerce and entertainment, comprehending the digital sphere's nature and implications has become essential.

The digital sphere has undergone significant transformations since its inception. Initially conceived as a means of information exchange, the internet rapidly evolved into a multifaceted environment fostering social connections, online commerce, and global communication. The rapid evolution of the digital sphere has not only transformed the way individuals communicate but has also revolutionized the dynamics of social and political participation. As the digital sphere encompasses a wide array of online platforms and technologies, it has become a powerful force shaping public discourse.

The rise of Web 2.0 brought user-generated content, interactivity, and social media, further shaping the digital landscape. Today, the digital sphere continues to evolve with emerging technologies like artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain, and virtual reality (VR), expanding its potential and impact. Its evolution has ushered in unprecedented opportunities for communication, innovation, and connectivity. This encompassing virtual environment has become an integral aspect of contemporary society, influencing various aspects of human life. Recognizing the impact and dynamics of the digital sphere is crucial as it continues to shape communication, education, commerce, and entertainment. The transformative nature of the digital sphere underscores the need for ongoing exploration and analysis to comprehend its complexities fully. Nevertheless, understanding the nuances and challenges of the digital sphere is essential to harness its potential responsibly and create a positive impact on individuals and communities. Embracing digital literacy, data ethics, and

cybersecurity measures can foster a healthy digital ecosystem and empower individuals to navigate the ever-expanding digital sphere with confidence.

In order to properly understand the content formats of new technologies on which I will focus in the further text, and what part of the “digital sphere” will be in the focus, I would like to start this chapter with explaining them one by one. It should be taken into account that the term digital sphere/digital world/digital age is much broader than the following formats, which were selected for the purpose of this work.

3.1.1. Websites and blogs

What is the difference between a blog and a website? “Blog” and “website” are terms we often use, and believe to understand, but yet the difference between them is difficult to explain. What we know for sure is that blogs and websites have important roles to play in successful content marketing.

Blog is an abbreviation of “Web Log”. The idea of creating an online diary became popular in the late 1990s. Blog is seen to be more dynamic, easier to adapt, to offer extensive information and generally to attract larger SEO (search engine optimization) opportunities. On the other hand, the website is more static and offers basic information (Smith, 2020). Search engines prioritize relevant and valuable content in their ranking algorithms. As content marketing focuses on producing high-quality, informative, and shareable content, it aligns with search engine requirements for higher rankings. By implementing SEO best practices, such as incorporating targeted keywords, optimizing meta tags, and building backlinks, content marketing can significantly improve organic search visibility and attract qualified traffic. Whether companies incorporate their blog sections into their primary websites, or decide to have it as a separate entity, SEMrush global report (2019) has shared some key finding into customer preferences and opinions on text content published:

- The longer the better. Articles that have long headlines and contain more than 3000 words perform better in all respects (traffic, backlinks, and social shares). This may be related to the value they deliver compared to bite-sized content.
- Headlines can improve performance. Really long headlines of 14+ words turned out to be the most effective for driving traffic, social shares, and backlinks. Moreover, 36% of articles of the “high performance group” contained at least H2 and H3 in their structure.
- “Listicles” (list articles) drive shares and traffic. Articles with lists were found to be the most shared and traffic-yielding content format, followed by guides and “how to” articles. In general, blog posts with a special title (lists, guides, questions) are more likely to have a higher performance in terms of shares and traffic.

3.1.2. Social media

Social media refers to websites and applications that are designed to allow people to share content quickly, efficiently, and in real-time. The ability to share photos, opinions, events, etc. in real-time has transformed the way we live and, also, the way we do business. Organizations which use social media as an integral part of their marketing strategy usually see measurable results. (Hudson, 2020) Similar to the explanation above, Evans (2010) states that social media involves natural, genuine conversation between people about something of mutual interest, a conversation built on the thoughts and experiences of the participants.

Nowadays marketers have more than enough social media networks to choose from. Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Snapchat, TikTok are just some of the most popular ones, but there are endless other networks, with new ones appearing each day. Each of these networks offers unique ways to connect with audiences if used the right way by the right type of brand. Peterson (2020) In order to represent the diversity amongst these networks, I will just briefly explain a few, showing the contrast between them. Explanations below were taken from Lua (2020) blog for one of the biggest social media scheduling platforms, Buffer:

- Facebook is the biggest social media site around, with more than two billion people using it every month. It's easy to get started on Facebook because almost all content format works great on Facebook — text, images, videos, live videos, and Stories. But note that the Facebook algorithm prioritizes content that sparks conversations and meaningful interactions between people, especially those from family and friends.
- Besides being the second biggest social media site, YouTube (video-sharing platform) is also often known as the second largest search engine after Google.
- Tik Tok (also known as Douyin in China) is a rising music video social network. It was the world's most downloaded app in the first quarter of 2018, beating Facebook, Instagram, and other social media apps.
- Twitter is a social media site for news, entertainment, sports, politics, and more. What makes Twitter different from most other social media sites is that it has a strong emphasis on real-time information — things that are happening right now.
- Reddit, also known as the front page of the Internet, is a platform where users can submit questions, links, and images, discuss them, and vote them up or down.

3.1.3. Augmented Reality (AR)

Augmented reality (AR) is an enhanced version of reality created by the use of technology to overlay digital information on an image of something being viewed through a device (such as a smartphone camera) (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2020). Unlike virtual reality, with which it is often mixed up, and which immerses users entirely into a computer-generated virtual world, AR enhances the reality/physical world by supplementing it with digital elements. These digital elements can include text, images, videos, 3D models, animations, and more, which are displayed through AR-enabled devices such as smartphones, tablets, smart glasses, or headsets.

Kenton (2018) for Investopedia explains this technology, its rise and usage as following. The enhanced version of the real physical world through the use of visual elements, sound or other sensory stimuli is a growing trend among companies involved in mobile computing and business applications in particular. Amid the rise of data collection and analysis, one of augmented reality's primary goals is to highlight specific features of the physical world, increase understanding of those features and derive smart and accessible insight that can be applied to real-world applications. Augmented reality works by using different sensors, cameras, and processing capabilities to detect and analyze the user's surroundings. It then imposes the digital content onto the real-world view, creating an interactive and seamless experience for the user. AR applications can be designed for various purposes, ranging from entertainment and gaming to practical applications in industries like healthcare, education, architecture, and marketing. Some common examples of AR applications include:

- Games like Pokémon GO or Snapchat's/Instagram filters that allow users to interact with virtual objects and characters in the real world.
- Navigation apps can provide real-time directions and points of interest by overlaying them on the user's camera view.
- AR is used by brands to offer virtual try-on experiences for products or to showcase interactive 3D models of products.
- Learning experiences which are enhanced by providing interactive visualizations and simulations in educational content.

Augmented reality continues to develop and become more pervasive among a wide range of applications, and not just the before mentioned ones. There is evidence that consumers are beginning to derive tangible benefits from this functionality and expect it as part of their purchasing process. For example, some early adopters in the retail sector have developed technologies designed to enhance the customer shopping experience. By incorporating augmented reality into catalog apps, stores let consumers visualize how different products would look like in different environments. For furniture, shoppers point

the camera at the appropriate room and the product appears in the foreground. Customers can use in-app filters to try on make-up and decide on the product or a shade even before entering the store, and making the shopping process much quicker and easier, as well offering the in-store experience while shopping online as well.

3.1.4. Virtual reality (VR)

Often linked to or mistaken for augmented reality, virtual reality is the next term in hand. Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2020) explains this term as an artificial environment which is experienced through sensory stimuli (such as sights and sounds) provided by a computer, in which one's actions partially determine what happens in the environment.

While augmented reality uses the existing real-world environment and puts virtual information on top of it to enhance the experience, virtual reality involves users into an entirely new environment, notably a virtual one. VR typically involves the use of a head-mounted display (HMD) or VR headset that covers the user's eyes and ears, blocking out the real-world and replacing it with a computer-generated 3D environment. The user can then navigate and interact with this virtual world using hand controllers, gesture recognition, or other input devices. Users may be immersed in an actual location that has been photographed or videographed and embedded in a virtual reality app or animated scene. In this new, virtual setting users can look up, down or any which way, as if they were physically present there.

VR has found applications in various fields, including gaming, education, e-business, architecture, and entertainment. In gaming, VR enables players to be fully immersed in the game world, offering a heightened sense of presence and realism. In education and training, VR can simulate realistic scenarios for learners to practice skills in a safe and controlled environment. In healthcare, VR is used for pain management, exposure therapy, and medical training. VR advertising should be considered as a responsive storytelling ad. Instead of sitting and passively seeing a display or watching a video for a few seconds, this is a completely immersive and interactive experience which can even allow audience to be included in the ads decision-tree and ultimately affect the content it is exposed to. This is an inherent advantage VR advertising has over traditional advertising: Users are placed in a distraction-free environment, and companies are incentivized to create high-quality content to engage the viewer for as much time as possible. (D'Angelo, 2017)

VR technology continues to evolve rapidly, with ongoing improvements in hardware, software, and content creation. As VR becomes more accessible and affordable, its potential impact on various industries and everyday life is expected to grow significantly.

3.1.5. Artificial intelligence (AI)

When most people hear the term artificial intelligence, the first thought they usually have is robots. Artificial intelligence (AI) is based on the principle that human intelligence can be defined in a way that a machine can easily mimic. This term is recognized under the following two definitions by Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2020), a branch of computer science dealing with the simulation of intelligent behavior in computers, and the capability of a machine to imitate intelligent human behavior. With technology advances, previous benchmarks that defined artificial intelligence become outdated. For example, machines that calculate basic functions are no longer considered to embody artificial intelligence, since this function is now taken for granted as an inherent computer function. AI is continuously evolving to benefit many different industries, and the applications for artificial intelligence are endless. Most advanced commercially used AI technology at the moment is called AI assistant. As Google's VP of Marketing, Marvin Chow (2017) explains it, these assistants use speech recognition and natural language understanding to help people get things done in the real world—from managing their calendars to helping them control their lights. Part of its to-do lists are also tasks such as creating shopping lists, or proposing hotels and restaurants, which are particularly interesting to marketers.

AI assistants like Alexa or Siri are not able to create emotional responses marketers expect to have from their audience and are instead focusing on facts, that being price, market shares, or peer reviews. It is important to notice that not only advertising space which will be available through AI assistants will be changed by its more popular day-to-day usage, additional pressure will be put on those channels where direct communication with customers is happening. It will be expected from these touch points to have clear and concise messaging and make significant impact, and lead to high brand awareness resulting in sales. Either way, AI assistants will revolutionize the way in which marketers think of the advertising space. (N. Dawar and N. Bendle, 2018)

3.1.6. Video games

Terms very much familiar to all of us, but maybe difficult to put in a definition. Video game, as explained by the Dictionary.com (2020), is any of various interactive games played using a specialized electronic gaming device or a computer or mobile device and a television or other display screen, along with a means to control graphic images. Video games often feature high-quality graphics and audio to create immersive and visually appealing virtual worlds. Realistic or stylized visuals, along with sound effects and music, contribute to the overall gaming experience. Video games span a wide range of genres, catering to various interests and preferences. Common genres include action, adventure, role-playing, simulation, sports, puzzle, strategy, and many others. Most video games have specific objectives or goals that players must achieve. Completing these objectives often involves overcoming challenges, solving puzzles, or defeating opponents. Video games have become

a significant part of popular culture and entertainment, appealing to people of all ages worldwide. They offer a diverse range of experiences, from adrenaline-pumping action and competitive gameplay to emotionally engaging narratives and thought-provoking storytelling. With millions of users playing video games every minute of every day, gaming has undoubtedly become one of the biggest, if not the biggest form of entertainment on the planet.

The popularity and growth of this channel poses a significant and lucrative opportunity for marketers to connect with highly engaged consumers, given the right context. Large-scale global brands and advertisers are now working closer with video game companies to produce what is known as 'Advergaming'. As the name suggests, advergaming is the blend of both advertising and gaming, which is accomplished by advertising products within a given game. It is a form of in-game advertising where the promotion of products, services, or brands is seamlessly integrated into the gameplay or game environment. Game developers create games with branded content or themes that align with a specific brand or product. These games are often designed to be fun and engaging, promoting the brand in a positive light. Brands or products are strategically placed within the game world, such as billboards, posters, or virtual objects, to raise brand awareness. Brands may offer virtual items or accessories within the game that players can use or wear, creating a connection between the brand and the gaming experience. Advergaming can also involve offering players in-game rewards or bonuses for engaging with advertisements, encouraging players to interact with the brand.

This concept has existed for some time already, most notably with the LEGO video game series in which LEGO produced games in conjunction with Marvel, StarWars, Harry Potter, Lord of the Rings, etc. which advertise both LEGO and the film series. (Abbruzzino, 2019) The appeal lies in its ability to reach a highly engaged and targeted audience. Since players are actively involved in the game, they are more likely to notice and interact with the branded content, increasing brand exposure and potential conversion rates. Advergaming can be particularly effective in reaching younger audiences who are tech-savvy and spend significant time playing video games.

While advergaming can be a successful marketing strategy when executed well, it also comes with potential challenges and ethical considerations. Advertisements should be integrated seamlessly into the game without disrupting the player's experience or feeling intrusive. Additionally, transparency and disclosure are essential to ensure players are aware that they are engaging with branded content. As the video game industry continues to grow, advergaming is expected to play an increasingly significant role in marketing campaigns, offering brands innovative ways to engage with their target audiences within the gaming environment.

3.1.7. Wearable technology

As its name states, wearable technology is simply technology which could be worn. Wearable technology is a category of electronic devices that can be worn as accessories, embedded in clothing, implanted in the user's body, or even tattooed on the skin. The devices are hands-free gadgets with practical uses, powered by microprocessors and enhanced with the ability to send and receive data via the Internet (Kenton, 2019). Wearable technology has emerged as a transformative force, revolutionizing various aspects of our lives as well as the way in which industries function. From fitness trackers and smartwatches to augmented reality glasses and health-monitoring devices, wearable technology has become increasingly popular due to its ability to seamlessly integrate into users' daily routines, as well as offer valuable data to be analyzed in order to better understand the customer.

The growth of mobile networks, as well as breakthroughs in various fields, including microelectronics, material sciences, and sensor technology enabled the fast development of wearable technology. Miniaturization of components, improvements in battery life, and advances in wireless communication have enabled wearable devices to become smaller, more efficient, and capable of collecting and processing vast amounts of data. The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning algorithms has further enhanced the capabilities of wearables, enabling them to provide personalized and context-aware experiences for users. Fitness activity trackers were amongst the first pieces of wearable technology to catch on with consumers. After that, the wristwatches became screens and more and more mobile applications were added. Bluetooth headsets, smartwatches, and web-enabled glasses all allow people to receive data from the Internet, as well as send it back. Because of this wearable technology finds its applications amongst diverse fields, impacting areas such as healthcare, fitness and wellness, entertainment, fashion, and productivity. In the healthcare sector, wearables have facilitated remote patient monitoring, providing real-time health data to healthcare professionals for timely interventions. Fitness enthusiasts use wearables to track their physical activity, heart rate, and sleep patterns, empowering them to make informed decisions about their health and wellness. Augmented reality glasses have revolutionized the gaming and entertainment industries, providing users with immersive and interactive experiences. Wearables have also found utility in workplace productivity, facilitating hands-free communication and access to information for professionals in various industries.

Wearables allow for hyper-targeted messaging. Marketers can capitalize on this by producing content tailored to specific niches. Whether it's health enthusiasts, travelers, or gamers, wearables enable personalized communication that resonates with distinct user segments

4. DIGITAL SPHERE AND CONTENT MARKETING

4.1. The evolution of Content formats (from text to social media to AI)

“Content marketing implies that the marketing message is built around fact rather than fiction. Omnichannel means that a company wants to ensure their message is consistent across every customer touchpoint, and that the full potential of every channel is leveraged using the richest media and content possible.” (Sitecore, 2019, p. 5)

I find this to be great explanation of content marketing, its use and purpose, through the periods. As we mentioned in the text before, content marketing has been changing together with the technology available to it. In the further text we will talk about the evolution of content marketing through the above mentioned channels.

First digital use of content formats were replications of the old/offline ones. For example blogs substituted newspaper columns, commercial newspaper ads were changed by online banner ads. It took some time for marketers to adjust to the new scenery and realize that these are new channels, with its own sets of opportunities and threads and should not be treated as offline channels counterparts in the digital sphere. Content used to mean, and still does to a large extent, “text” in various forms. An analysis of 11,8 million Google search results in 2019 had found that the average Google first-page contains 1,447 words (Dean, 2020). And Dzamic and Kirby (2018) explain that blogs and articles are still some of the most common content formats in the digital sphere, for many companies. Even a great number of social media networks are organized with this in mind.

Kaushik (2012) explains that initially social media may have begun for social engagement, but the commercial value soon became apparent and it has become the marketer’s new best friend too. As social media use became popular and the number of social media users has increased more than the population of some of the countries, marketers have had to seriously alter their game plan to take this shift in the media landscape into account. Social media has given marketers the opportunity to reach consumers in a 24/7 capacity through a variety of mediums. It enhances the chances of messaging being seen.

Social media has also revealed a new way of targeting customers in the digital sphere, as Rohit Ohri, executive chairman, Dentsu India, says: “Communication has moved from „one-to-many“ to one-to-one“ to „one-to-community“. Evolved marketers are increasingly looking at targeting communities.” These communities, he adds, are not just defined by occupation or industry. Increasingly, communities are defined by interests. “Bikers, hikers, new mothers, lovers...these are just a few examples of interest groups, marketers are talking to these days,” points out Ohri. This has even further developed content marketing allowing it to customize the content to each of these communities even more than ever before.

Volkswagen ran an Application Programme Interface (API) based on LinkedIn's viewer pages. Women professionals online could see an ad for Beetle, young male professionals interested in sports saw the polo ad, and senior executives got to see an ad for family car Jetta – with all viewing taking place at the same time. This helped the company get 2700 product recommendation in 30 days. (Kaushik, 2012)

The rise of social media marked a pivotal shift in content marketing. Initially designed for social engagement, social media platforms swiftly became invaluable tools for marketers. As the number of users surpassed the population of entire countries, marketers had to adapt their strategies to leverage the 24/7 accessibility and diverse communication mediums provided by social media. Beyond its reach, social media introduced a novel approach to targeting customers—one-to-community. Marketers began tailoring content to specific interest groups, as the quote said, from bikers to new mothers, allowing for more personalized and impactful messaging. This shift towards community-based targeting has reshaped content marketing, offering unprecedented opportunities for customization and relevance.

New challenge, which marketers are currently facing is to adhere to the new technologies and even newer channels it offers. Tradition split between “reality” and “virtual world” is hard to grasp, and marketers need to learn how to incorporate their brand story into it. Your smart watch is collecting data from reality and processing it and offering it to you in a virtual world. Mixed realities such as VR and AR are becoming a very important part of an entertainment industry but also education. Video games have become an irreplaceable part of our global culture. These are all changes on global markets which are going beyond trends, they are shaping all of our lives in a completely new, and probably irreversible way, and marketers should be on board with it.

One of these technological improvements which is being used more and more in content marketing, and marketing in general is AI. It has the potential to both curate and generate content, then place it in front of the right people on the right platforms. This technology is already automating content generation on a basic level, but eventually, AI could generate viable topics for writers, or even develop initial drafts of content based on certain parameters. (Hall, 2019) The Seattle Times' Geoff Baker (2020) recently published an article explaining the Microsoft decision to lay off 50 workers due to the company's advanced AI usage. These people were in charge of content creation and curation for the company portals, which will from now on be delivered through automated AI and supervision of editors.

4.2. Future of the Content marketing in the Digital Sphere

As the new technologies develop and become widely adopted by the broader audiences, so should the ways in which brands tell their stories adapt to them as well. During the last decades the world is in a permanent state of change due to the rapid development of

information technologies. Digital technologies are being integrated with marketing activities continuously or disruptively to reach Marketing 4.0, a new generation of marketing approaches, methods, tools, and practices (Jara, Parra and Skarmeta, 2012). Content marketing is part of it.

Interactive ads, brand video-games, AR apps and so much more is nowadays finding its way to marketing plans across industries. All these new content formats have been developed for specific new outlets which are part of the Digital sphere. What is very important to mention is that these formats follow a content marketing mindset. This means that it is well targeted based on the context of the customer needs and wants, rather than segments they belong to, and customers are happy to follow it through and find new information which they were either looking for or just decided to be interesting enough to focus on. These new methods are in a sense reinventing “the story”. Questioning what the story is, and could potentially be, without limitations of the reality and plain possibilities of the physical world. As Yapp (2017) states out during his speech: *“in the new age of storytelling, the user is in complete control. Advertising is out and communication is the only way forward. Your communication has to be always on. Notice what I said, communication. Not your advertisement, which is important. One of the most interesting things about that change is that the power has shifted. We are no longer talking to an audience. It’s very rare that we do this online anymore. The users are in control.”*

One of the most valuable yearly reports focusing on Content Marketing, SEMrush 2019 global report, written by Petrova (2020) has discovered some interesting trends and valuable insights into this developing part of the industry. For starters, the report focused on all topics content marketing was linked to in the digital sphere, and what they discovered was that: strategy (29%); social media (11%) and SEO (10%) were leading the way, with AI (4%) and blogging (4%) following. This shows us that content marketing is starting to be more and more planned and strategies respond to the market needs and wants, as well as the channels and approaches marketing specialists are researching and potentially using in their practices.

Moore's Law refers to Moore's perception that the number of transistors on a microchip doubles every two years, though the cost of computers is halved. It states that we can expect the speed and capability of our computers and other devices to increase every couple of years, and we will pay less for them (Tardi, 2019).

4.2.1. AR/VR and content marketing in the future

Virtual and augmented reality technologies have emerged as powerful tools that enhance the storytelling potential of content, enabling brands to deliver more immersive and interactive experiences and create engaging content that captivates audiences on a whole new level. Brands will leverage these technologies to offer interactive product demonstrations, virtual tours, and personalized experiences, enhancing customer engagement and brand loyalty.

Storytelling lies at the heart of content marketing, and AR and VR technologies provide new avenues for brands to tell compelling stories. Through immersive experiences, brands can transport consumers into virtual worlds that evoke emotions, spark curiosity, and convey brand narratives more effectively. By blending the real and virtual realms, brands can create unique and memorable experiences that resonate with their target audiences, forging stronger emotional connections.

To put it simply, VR and AR technologies can be easily used to allow audiences to experience something from someone else's shoes. Customers can experience the hard day their wives have and opt to buy the gift we are selling them, or we can experience seeing our older avatar and decide that insurance truly is the right way to go and secure our family. Retailers can use AR for virtual try-ons, enhancing the customer experience and reducing returns. RTFKT, a company recently acquired by Nike, is revolutionizing clothing design through the integration of AR technology. By employing intricate and unique animations through NFC chips in hoodies, clothing bought in the real world can come to life virtually, offering consumers an immersive and personalized experience. Similarly, AR can also provide interactive and immersive learning experiences in education, making complex concepts more accessible and engaging. Or healthcare providers can harness AR for remote consultations and visualization of medical data. Furthermore, real estate companies can use AR to create virtual tours, allowing potential buyers to explore properties remotely. An example of one company doing this with Web3 technology is Ouse Token, which allows users to walk through virtual tours of their metaverse homes. AR technology can also be utilized to go through high-end real estate and then sell versions of it in existing metaverses. Apple is going heavy on AR as well with its new product, Apple Glasses. I believe large companies like Apple and Nike investing in this technology clearly indicate where future trends are heading. (Leroy, 2023)

Gilliland (2021) shared some of the best usages of AR and VR in brand experiences. Here, it is also explained how pandemic directly influenced quicker progress of this technology being used in marketing. Adoption of AR try-on technology has massively increased as a result of Covid-19, but Adidas was one of the first brands to introduce it – just a few months before the pandemic hit. As Gilliland (2012) explains, in November 2019, Adidas added the feature to its iOS app, helping shoppers to decide on a purchase without ever entering a store, something that was soon to become unavoidable for all consumers. The AR app tracks foot movements, enabling users to see how sneakers look on their feet in real-time, with or without shoes, hence making them feel safe at home while also spending money on their products.

IKEA uses AR to help customers test and visualize products in their own space before making a purchase. It offers multiple tools for customer needs, like the IKEA Place app that superimposes to-scale models of furniture in real-life rooms or the IKEA home planner that helps people build furniture sets, like kitchen cabinets, to ensure they are satisfied before

placing an order. Another great example is Sephora. Sephora is known for allowing in-store customers to test products on themselves before buying them, but not everyone may be comfortable doing so. For those not as comfortable, it offers an in-store virtual try-on kiosk where customers can using AR see how products look on them.

4.2.2. AI and content marketing in the future

Hall (2019) in his Forbes column states that if this law remains to hold steady for a while, there's no telling what AI will be able to do in the near future. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is already transforming the way content is created and distributed. AI-powered tools can analyze vast amounts of data to understand audience preferences and behavior, enabling brands to deliver personalized content at scale. Natural Language Generation (NLG) algorithms are being used to create written content, while AI-driven video editing tools are revolutionizing video marketing. As AI continues to advance, content marketers will rely on its capabilities to create highly relevant and engaging content, maximizing the impact of their campaigns. Hall (2019) also explains that AI has the potential to help marketers map out an end-to-end content strategy. Some marketing tools are already providing this feature. It is predicted that it will also be able to generate comprehensive reporting on content initiatives, with little to no human labor involved.

Lisa Murton Beets (2023) prepared very interesting research for the Content Marketing Institute called Content marketing stats you should know. As a part of her research, she obtained how content marketers use AI. Some of the results she found were:

- Nearly half of content marketers use AI to brainstorm new topics, and 46% use it to research headlines and keywords. More than one-third (36%) use AI tools for writing, though many feel conflicted about the idea.
- 62% of content marketers are concerned that AI will result in less respect for skilled writers/editors.
- Among their other worries about generative AI: writing/editing viewed as a commodity (55%), lower compensation for writers/editors (46%), fewer jobs for content marketers (45%), and larger workload for writers/editors (17%). Seventeen percent are not concerned.
- 18% of marketers use AI to assist with video creation, which means 82% do not. (Thirty-three percent of those who don't do so plan to within the next year. 69% of those who use AI to assist with video creation use it to create video scripts (the most common use cited by far).
- Learning how to work with new technologies (such as AI) was the most popular skill of interest cited by content marketers (48%) – up two points from the previous year

– followed by improving data analytics/data science skills (42%), and leadership skills (42%).

4.2.3. Video games and content marketing in the future

The landscape of video games has undergone a remarkable evolution, not merely as a form of entertainment but also as a burgeoning platform for content marketing. This text delves into the symbiotic relationship between video games and content marketing, examining the current landscape and forecasting the future trends and opportunities. By analyzing the integration of marketing strategies within games and the transformative potential of immersive experiences we can explore the evolving synergy between video games and content marketing, projecting its trajectory in the future. As already explained in the text above, in recent years, video games have transcended their traditional role as a form of entertainment and have emerged as an influential medium for marketing and brand engagement. With the rapid advancements in technology, the immersive nature of video games provides an unparalleled opportunity for brands to connect with consumers in innovative ways.

The evolution of video games from simple pixelated graphics to sophisticated, immersive experiences has paralleled the integration of marketing strategies within gaming environments. Brands have recognized the potential of engaging with a captive audience within these virtual worlds, leading to the inclusion of in-game advertising, branded content, and product placements. Examples such as dynamic in-game billboards, sponsored in-game events, and collaborations between game developers and brands highlight the evolving nature of marketing within video games. The immersive nature of modern video games presents an unprecedented opportunity for brands to create memorable and interactive experiences. Virtual and augmented reality technologies further blur the lines between the real world and the gaming environment, offering brands the canvas to craft compelling narratives and experiences that resonate with players. Immersive storytelling within games allows for subtle integration of brand messaging, fostering organic engagement and emotional connections with consumers.

Looking ahead, the future of video games as a content marketing platform holds immense promise. Advancements in artificial intelligence, personalized gaming experiences, and interactive storytelling will enable brands to tailor content and advertisements dynamically, catering to individual player preferences. Moreover, the rise of cloud gaming and streaming services will revolutionize accessibility, potentially transforming how brands reach global audiences through gaming platforms.

4.2.4. Wearable technology and content marketing in the future

Wearable technology has evolved from its nascent stage to become an integral part of everyday life, transcending its initial purposes to offer a seamless blend of convenience and connectivity. Wearable devices have transitioned from primarily monitoring health metrics to serving as an extension of one's digital identity. Marketers have recognized the potential of these devices as an intimate platform to engage with consumers. From personalized notifications and targeted advertisements to branded applications and interactive content, wearable technology has opened avenues for marketers to create tailored experiences that align with users' lifestyles and preferences.

The intrinsic nature of wearable technology, closely entwined with an individual's daily routine, presents an opportunity for brands to deliver hyper-personalized content. By leveraging data analytics and user behavior insights obtained through wearable devices, marketers can construct highly targeted and contextually relevant content. Customized messages, augmented reality experiences, and interactive notifications can all be seamlessly integrated into wearable devices, fostering deeper connections between brands and consumers. The future of wearable technology in content marketing is poised for remarkable innovation. As these devices become more sophisticated and interconnected with the Internet of Things (IoT), the potential for real-time data utilization and context-aware content delivery will expand. Integration with artificial intelligence and machine learning algorithms will enable wearable devices to anticipate user needs, enabling brands to deliver anticipatory and personalized content experiences, thereby revolutionizing consumer engagement strategies.

Wearable technology represents an evolving frontier for content marketing, offering a pathway for brands to establish deeper connections with consumers through personalized, contextually relevant experiences. As wearable devices continue to evolve, the symbiotic relationship between technology and marketing will flourish. The convergence of personalized content delivery, real-time data utilization, and seamless user experiences heralds an exciting future for wearable technology as a pivotal platform for content marketing strategies.

So, to finalize this chapter, regardless of the new channels and its use in the content marketing, which are needless to say crucial for its further development, still storytelling and strategy are the two main components of content marketing which we should be focused on. Understanding our customers, and allowing them to connect with brands through the stories they want to hear and channels they feel comfortable with will remain the most important thing in the future to come.

5. RESEARCH

5.1. Methodology

As far as research design is concerned, primary research was conducted with focus on gathering empirical data. Primary research refers to developing information by the researcher specifically for the research project, as stated by Burns and Bush (2014). What is also important to add is that the research is conducted as an exploratory research, which is defined by Dudovskiy (n.d.) as research which intends merely to explore the research questions and does not intend to offer final and conclusive solutions to existing problems. It is a research design in which the major emphasis is on gaining ideas and insights, and is particularly helpful in breaking broad, vague problem statements into smaller, more precise sub-problem statements. Hence, qualitative exploratory research was the next logical step, since content marketing is a relatively new approach on the chosen market of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Silverman (2010) explains that interviews best reveal evidence of the nature of phenomena, including the context and situations in which it appears, as well as insight into the cultural frames people use to make sense of these experiences and social words. This is why, in order to obtain valuable and useful data, semi-structured in-depth interviews were used as a research tool in this study.

5.2. Data collection

Regarding interviewees, nine (9) representative responses were collected. In order to reach this goal, experts in the field – marketers – were contacted. Study was decided to involve representatives from the marketing departments from different organizations as well as marketers from marketing agencies. In order to have better representation, five sectors were chosen, and decided to have two representatives from each of these sectors. Four sectors therefore have two representatives, only one sector (finance) has one representative, as I could not manage to get one more representative willing to contribute to this research. Sectors chosen were: ICT, finance, SMEs, marketing agencies and international organizations. Logic behind this was to try and see different opinions and approaches across the B&H market. The main requirement was that the person chosen to be an interviewee is in charge of marketing management at his/her organization. Interviews were analyzed using a content analysis method, based on which propositions were formed in order to give responses to the research questions of the thesis. In addition to finding out where the respondents are, in this case marketers in organizations and advertising agencies familiar with the topic, do they use this approach in their work, this study also focused on learning how they see the future of content marketing. Hence, the thesis seeks to respond to following research questions:

RQ1: What is the level of familiarity of marketers with the topic of content marketing?

RQ2: How do marketers use the content marketing approach in their work?

RQ3: What is the future of content marketing, as seen by marketers in the field?

Semi-structured in-depth interviews (Granot, Brashear, and Motta, 2012; Strauss and Corbin, 1998) were conducted, where the questions scheme was based on three main topics (see Appendix):

- Familiarity with the topic
- Content marketing in B&H
- Future of content marketing.

An interview itself consisted of nine fixed and several additional questions through which detailed and thorough information about interviewee's opinion on the topic was gathered. In order to ensure the research question validity, I have approached the task well prepared and used available secondary data to get better insight about this topic. Most of the interviewees also requested to receive the questions in advance, so they came prepared for the interview, as they also had some time to think about their answers.

The interviewer is the most important factor in securing cooperation and interaction with the sample. In this research only one interviewer was used. Good communication is crucial to finding out information and leading research in the right direction. It is of great importance to be a good listener and to have clarity in judgments, and also to have a proper perspective as it leads to better decisions in every step of the process. I have clearly defined and explained the topic to our interviewees, so they feel confident and provide information which is valuable for the research.

Regarding interviewees, it was decided, as already mentioned above, that nine responders will be enough for this research. Research was conducted both face-to-face and online. It was conducted during a period of three months and each interview lasted approximately 20-40 minutes. Throughout the data collection process, some of the respondents requested to stay anonymous, so each individual interview has been given a code which will be used in later text as a reference to the discussions and elaborations related to the interviews (shown in Table 1). In order to enable better understanding of the settings in which the institutions operate, a description of each organization has also been presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Description of sample

Code	Sector	Organisation description	Responders position in the organisation
MA-1	Marketing agency	Creative media agency, part of the regional network	Managing director
MA-2	Marketing agency	Digital marketing agency, one of the biggest in the country, with focus on US, UK and B&H markets	SEO manager
IT-1	IT company	Largest software engineering company in B&H	Communications Lead
IT-2	IT company	Software, system integration, and Cloud provider company	Marketing Communications Manager
IO-1	International organization	Foreign assistance program to the B&H	Public Outreach and Communication Specialist
IO-2	International organization	Global development network, an implementing international organization advocating for change and connecting countries	Project assistant
SE-1	SME	Promotional materials agency	Sales manager
SE-2	SME	Real estate agency	Director
FI-1	Finance	Bank offering several types of financial services to retail and corporate clients in the B&H market	Marketing manager

Source: Master thesis author

5.3. Findings

In order to best summarize the information gathered through the research, it was decided to answer the main research questions combining the data and main points which came up during individual interviews. As written above, the research was designed with three main research questions in mind. In further text answers to each of these questions were provided.

5.3.1. RQ1: What is the level of familiarity of marketers with the topic of content marketing?

All of the interviewees were familiar with the term, as it was in one hand expected of them. They all agreed in their own words that content marketing is very present at the global, as well the B&H market and that it is here to stay. As one of the interviewees, FI-1 stated:

“Content marketing provides a refreshing and engaging way for brands to connect with their audience by creating valuable and relevant content that people actually want to see.”

SE-2 added on this:

“...content marketing should be in focus as much as the opportunities allow. For SMEs those opportunities are smaller, but still equally important as for any other type of organization..”

IT-1 stressed out her opinion on the importance of content marketing:

“If your target audience is older than 13 or younger than 60 (approximately), content marketing needs to be part of your overall marketing strategy. Having a good marketing strategy is paramount.”

This does not only show the understanding, but also positive attitude towards the content marketing from the side of our interviewees. Only one interviewee, SE-1 responded that she is not so much familiar with the topic, but through the conversation it is understood that she is familiar with the name, and the concept, just that her professional experiences did not involve content marketing as a part of the structured approach, but more of a trial-error approach where something was recognised to be working for some other brand, and they tried to replicate it in-house due to the limited marketing budget.

The opinion of how to classify content marketing, as well as in the literature used for preparing this paper was divided. Question posed in the interview was: “Should it (content marketing) be considered as a strategy/separate marketing discipline/natural evolution of marketing?”. All three proposed answers were represented, almost in equal parts, and the reasoning behind each answer was in each case well explained, showing that the

interviewees thought this through, and it was not an impulsive answer. For example, IT-2 holds that content marketing is a separate marketing discipline, and here is why:

“Content marketing should absolutely be considered a separate marketing discipline. It requires a unique skill set and approach that's different from traditional advertising or PR.”

IO-1 shared with me during our conversation that for him content marketing is closest to a strategy, and if he had to choose how to describe it, strategy would be the word to use. In his opinion, it is a new approach within PR, and more of an answer to the new trends emerging, both in the past and in present time.

MA-2 represents the school of thought that content marketing is a natural evolution of marketing, and here is why:

“Greater technological advancements allowed marketing to grow towards nurturing the demands of modern consumerism, which, as it grew, developed into different channels of direct consumer outreach, exactly through a great variety of content creations, forms and platforms.”

As you can see, the reasoning interviewees gave were in their own words explanation from the first chapter of this paper. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that most of them needed some time to think about it, and were changing their answer. Since not even the academia agrees on this, it is expected that professionals would get confused when asked to limit content marketing to a strategy, marketing discipline or a natural evolution of marketing. I believe if there was a fourth option, being all of the above, most of the interviewees would choose that one.

The level of deeper familiarity of the topic varied, as again expected, as we had different sectors involved in the research. ICT and marketing agencies were very familiar and involved in the topic, where representatives from the international organization had knowledge about it, but also limited options for testing their knowledge and ideas. Finance sector representative was aware and familiar with the topic, but not to the extent of the previous three groups. SMEs had quite limited knowledge compared to others, mostly because people in charge of marketing in these organizations are usually split roles, with 20-30% of their work time being devoted actually to marketing, hence them focusing on the most pressing issues.

5.3.2. RQ2: How do marketers use the content marketing approach in their work?

Again, having representatives from different sectors showed value here, as the data collected varied quite a lot. ICT representatives (IT-1 and IT-2) shared with me that they have content

marketing as a part of their marketing strategy (in some cases up to 80% of overall marketing strategy focus is on the content marketing), and for years now. They see the great importance of it, and keep seeking new ways in which it could be improved. Marketing agencies representatives (MA-1 and MA-2) shared with me that they are trying to present the importance of content marketing to their clients and that to a great extent they are succeeding. For now, the biggest acceptance of content marketing is entering overall marketing strategies they see in the FMCG market, but they shared with me that other companies, from all sectors are also becoming more and more educated about this topic, as well as willing to try and incorporate it in its marketing strategy. They also mentioned the financial sector, which is for the MA-1 amongst biggest clients, and to which they are trying to introduce content marketing at a deeper level. FI-1, representative of the financial sector, said that they use content marketing, but what seems very cautious. Newsletters and social media for now remain to be segments in which they allow content marketing to penetrate their systems, while carefully testing other possibilities. International organizations (IO-1 and IO-2) have great institutional knowledge, which they can use and adapt for the local purposes, and this goes for content marketing as well. Starting from the already ready content, which they have offered to them, to successful campaigns and strategies that they can use as a base for further work. Interviewees from this sector on the other hand both agreed that their structures do not recognise content marketing as an outstanding discipline, and that in their marketing strategies, global, as well as project ones for which they are in charge content marketing is best described as a crosscutting marketing tool.

SMEs representatives in this research shared the problem, which is expected to be found in such environments, especially since both organizations are rather small and medium in size. They are aware of the freedom that they have, and the great importance in having just one person with ideas for such a small system, yet the “burden of marketing” often falls on someone for whom this role is an add-on in their everyday work. As expressed in the interviews, in both cases they try to focus on social media, even though they are not sure if they are doing the right job, as it is often trial-error approach which they use and newsletters which have shown as very effective for them, but still they are using them in quite traditional way.

Across all sectors, social media and newsletters are most common content created, with blog posts and podcasts following them. IO-2 notices that our market is adapting quicker and quicker to the global trends, and he is seeing TikTok is taking over our market as well, which is a great example of content going even beyond photo and video, but having direct call to action and participatory role of audience.

Regarding their opinion of usage of content marketing in general in the B&H market, all of the interviewees agreed that they believe that content marketing is being used, sometimes without even people being in charge, nor audience understanding that it is content marketing, but just purely following the trends, or what they see works. As IO-2 explains:

“Most marketers are merely following trends. They are maybe not even aware that that strategy has a name, or that someone is calling it content marketing. They just see it working for other brands and try to copy what they see if it attracts attention.”

IT-1 said:

“Content marketing is ever-present, even if the audience doesn’t see it or define it as such. The mere fact that social media and video content falls under content marketing, we can safely say that hundreds (if not thousands) of national and international brands we are surrounded with in our everyday lives are using it. How effectively they are doing so and are they using the full power of content marketing across multiple channels - is a whole different topic.”

IT-2 expanded on this:

“Content marketing is definitely present in the B&H market, but I think there's still room for growth and improvement. International and national brands, as well as agencies, are using content marketing across a variety of industries, including tech, finance, and tourism. However, there's a lack of education and resources around content marketing in the region, which can hinder adoption.”

5.3.3. RQ3: What is the future of content marketing, as seen by marketers in the field?

“I think the more technology progresses in its advancement, the more content will become interactive and more interesting to consume.” SE-2

This is consensus amongst all interviewees, as they all showed excitement about the future of content marketing, having more and more technology possibilities being offered to the market.

“Digital is the space where content marketing gets its full meaning. But considering the huge clutter, it is necessary to constantly find new solutions that will attract the attention of customers and make us stand out from the crowd. With the development of AI, we can also expect a boost in content marketing, because AI will enable us to create more interactive and more personalized content more easily.” MA-1

AI was mentioned in almost half of the conducted interviews as a hope to have easier and better content creation processes. In addition to this, AR and VR, but mostly AR was mentioned in most of the interviews as something that marketers expect to push content

marketing to even higher levels, both in importance and usage. IO-2 even added Internet of Things (IoT) to the list. Another agreement was that they all see content marketing growing in importance, and businesses and organizations having to adapt and innovate to stay ahead. IT-2 said:

“I believe content marketing will continue to grow in importance as digital channels become even more central to how consumers interact with brands. As technology advances and new formats and platforms emerge, businesses will need to adapt and innovate to stay ahead.”

Regarding thoughts on the development of content marketing in B&H market, again the opinions were very similar, regardless of the sector interviewed. They all see this market being tied to the growth of digital channels and globalization, and hence the spill over of global trends being more and more recognisable in time to come, not just for content marketing, but marketing in general, and content marketing of course being part of it. Some of the interviewees believe that especially due to the globalization and mixing of markets through digital marketing and all the options it offers that content marketing importance will be even more significant as marketers will have to learn to use it in order to remain profitable. One of the interviewees, IT-1 said:

“We are becoming a fully digital global village where content is the main currency and way of communication. You are either in the game, or you are out.”

As she continues on, the undeniable fact is that our, B&H market audience consumes content from global brands and is already used to content marketing being done a certain way. This pushes businesses to adapt to what their customers expect from them to deliver.

On the other hand, IO-1 believes that B&H market is lagging behind not only global, but regional trends and standards, and that will continue to be seen in the future, in all segments of marketing, including content marketing as well. Only saviors he sees, who could change this are big clients who demand from the local agencies more, and thus build up the market.

FI-1 expressed her concerns for other branches of marketing becoming less and less important, and even not being used in the future, as the content marketing will be taking over, especially due to the usage of the technology, the ones we currently have and all the future ones to come. Others were a bit more careful about this idea, or better say they expect the spill over to happen in some sectors which are traditionally big spenders, such as FMCG, while in others not so much, or at least not so soon in such a big and recognizable way.

5.4. Research conclusions

This research was focused on marketers working in five sectors (ICT, finance, SMEs, marketing agencies and international organizations) in order to see different opinions and approaches across the B&H market. I believe that the goal was met as the research yielded in clear answers to the research questions posed at the beginning of the process.

In conclusion, the research effectively addressed three core questions surrounding marketers' familiarity with content marketing, its utilization in their strategies, and their perspective on its future trajectory. The findings revealed a unanimous awareness of content marketing among interviewees, showcasing not just recognition but a positive attitude toward its significance in today's marketing landscape. The varying viewpoints regarding classifying content marketing as a strategy, a separate discipline, or a natural evolution within marketing highlighted the complexity and divergence of opinions in both academia and professional spheres. This diversity of perspectives signifies the intricate nature of content marketing, reflecting its multifaceted role in contemporary marketing strategies. Across diverse sectors, the application of content marketing varied considerably. While some industries, like ICT and marketing agencies, integrated it extensively into their strategies, others, particularly SMEs, faced limitations due to resource constraints and a trial-and-error approach. Social media and newsletters emerged as primary channels for content creation, with glimpses of experimentation in newer platforms like TikTok indicating an evolving landscape. Moreover, interviewees unanimously anticipated a tech-driven evolution in content marketing. The excitement and expectation around advancements like AI, AR, VR, and IoT underscored the anticipation for more interactive, personalized, and innovative content delivery methods. The consensus on the growing importance of content marketing aligned with the anticipated shift towards digital channels and globalization, predicting its continued ascendancy in the marketing realm. However, perspectives on the B&H market's pace in adopting global trends varied. While some saw a swift convergence with global standards, others cautioned about potential lag, indicating disparities across sectors and the need for influential players to drive market evolution.

5.5. Research limitations

Every research has its own restrictions, something that puts limits on finding out information, which could be of use for the research. Below are listed limitations of this research. Primary limitation, which I have met up with while conducting this research, was that there is insufficient secondary data on this topic. This created a situation in which I did not have the proper image of the situation before the interviews started.

Something that could be considered as a second limitation of this research could be the number of respondents that were used. Every respondent brings something new to the research, which leads us to the conclusion that bigger research, with more respondents could

yield more information and eventually more conclusions. In addition to this, the pool of potential interviewees for this research are all business people in high positions with busy schedules and it was very difficult to approach and convince them to take a part in this research, as well as for them to find time for the interviews.

The Zoom platform showed to be very useful to try to combat this. It saved some time, still felt personal as we were actually seeing each other and conversing, while also having an option to record audio for further analysis. Significant part of the interviewees wanted to have an opportunity to write their answers rather than have a face-to-face interview, which was not something I expected to happen. They were more open to the idea to have the questions, and in their own time to think about it, and answer. With these interviewees, short follow-up interviews over the phone were held in case that I had some additional questions that were not answered by the received material.

Moreover, the geographical scope of the research may introduce a potential limitation, as the interviews primarily targeted business professionals in specific sectors within a particular region. The findings may not be universally applicable to different cultural contexts or diverse business environments. Expanding the scope to include a more diverse set of industries and geographic locations could provide a broader perspective on the subject matter. While the research has provided valuable insights within its chosen parameters, acknowledging the potential regional and sectoral biases is crucial for researchers seeking to draw more generalized conclusions about the role and impact of content marketing strategies across various business landscapes.

5.6. Recommendations for further research

Below is listed a couple of recommendations for the research team who might do similar inquiries or wish to continue with investigating this exact topic. First, do the quantitative research primary to the qualitative, since there is a lack of quantitative information on this topic. This will help to identify companies/organizations, which are using content marketing. When a researcher has input on who is using it and who is not, it is much easier to limit sample and potential interviewees, since the research can focus on primary target group (it being representatives of teams who are using or not using content marketing, as well as to which extent they are using it or explore involving it in their plans). As always, choose your responders wisely and make sure that each side is represented to get better overall understanding. In the research, which I have conducted, the interview with representatives from five sectors showed to be a great way to do introductory research, as each sector brought a fresh perspective on the strategy; hence this is something that I personally would recommend as well, if there is possibility.

Additional recommendation is the one regarding the language of the interviews, which was not something I personally went into thinking too broadly about. As the paper is written in

English, so was the research and interview questions prepared in this language. It help during the research when I also prepared the local (Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian) language version of the interview questions, on the request of one of the interviewees. I continued to share both language versions, as an option for my interviewees and they valued this a lot. Some of them used the BCS version, and were more open to responding in their language, as there was more space for them to express their opinion. I would highly recommend for this practice to be continued in further researches as well.

Despite the valuable insights gained from the interviews conducted through the Zoom platform, another notable limitation of this research stems from the inherent nature of remote interactions. While the virtual setting facilitated flexibility and convenience for both the researcher and the busy business professionals interviewed, it potentially introduced an element of detachment that might have influenced the depth and authenticity of the responses. The absence of non-verbal cues and the formality associated with online meetings could have hindered the establishment of a more profound rapport with the interviewees, impacting the richness of the gathered data. Future researchers should carefully weigh the benefits of remote interviews against the potential drawbacks, considering factors such as the cultural preferences of the participants and the sensitivity of the subject matter. This is of course taken into account that there are resources for this to be carried out in such fashion.

Furthermore, an additional recommendation for researchers venturing into similar inquiries involves exploring diverse data collection methods to enhance the depth and breadth of the findings. While interviews are a crucial qualitative tool, supplementing them with other techniques such as surveys or observational studies could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the topic. This multifaceted approach not only allows for triangulation of data but also enables researchers to cross-verify information and uncover nuances that might remain elusive through a singular method. Also, focus groups are something which should be investigated as a part of further research, as there was significant impact of the conversations which I held with interviewees on the final data which I gathered. Putting them into groups and moderating conversation could yield to very fruitful research.

In addition, considering the dynamic nature of the business environment, periodic follow-up interviews or surveys with the same respondents over an extended period could capture evolving perspectives and contribute to a more longitudinal understanding of the subject under investigation.

6. CONCLUSION

In the digital era, where information flows ceaselessly across virtual landscapes, content marketing has emerged as a pivotal strategy for businesses to engage, educate, and convert their target audience. This paper delved into the multifaceted importance of content

marketing, particularly in the digital sphere, and concluded with the research focused on the market of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The digital revolution has drastically transformed how businesses interact with their audiences. Content marketing, a marketing strategy/separate marketing discipline/natural evolution of marketing (whichever you decide to support after reading the paper) focuses on creating valuable and relevant content to attract and retain a defined audience, has emerged as a linchpin in the digital landscape. Unlike traditional advertising, content marketing seeks to inform, entertain, and educate rather than overtly sell. This paper underscored the significance of content marketing, elucidating its pivotal role in building brand authority, bolstering online visibility, nurturing customer relationships, and catalyzing lead generation. In an age where consumer skepticism towards traditional advertising is on the rise, establishing brand authority is paramount. Content marketing enables brands to position themselves as industry thought leaders by consistently producing high-quality, informative content that addresses audience pain points and queries. By providing valuable insights, tips, and solutions, brands can foster trust and credibility among their audience, resulting in increased customer loyalty and a competitive advantage in the market. In addition to this, digitalization has provided consumers with unprecedented access to information and options. Content marketing enables brands to forge deeper connections with their audience by tailoring content to address their preferences, needs, and aspirations. Through personalized content, brands can create an emotional bond with customers, enhancing customer loyalty and advocacy. Moreover, interactive content formats such as polls, quizzes, and comment sections encourage two-way communication, transforming the brand-consumer relationship into a dynamic dialogue. A core objective of marketing is to generate leads that can be nurtured into loyal customers. Content marketing excels in this regard by attracting and engaging potential customers at various stages of the buyer's journey. By offering valuable content that addresses different pain points and concerns, brands can capture leads through email sign-ups, subscriptions, and downloads. Furthermore, content that showcases a brand's expertise and problem-solving capabilities can motivate leads to convert into paying customers.

In the dynamic landscape of the digital sphere, content marketing stands as an indispensable strategy for businesses to navigate the complexities of online engagement. Through its ability to build brand authority, enhance search engine visibility, foster customer relationships, and drive lead generation, content marketing empowers brands to connect with their audience on a deeper level. As the digital sphere continues to evolve, a well-crafted content marketing strategy remains a key determinant of success in the competitive online marketplace. Embracing the power of content marketing is not merely an option but a necessity for businesses aspiring to thrive in the digital age.

The landscape of content marketing is rapidly evolving, with emerging technologies like video games, artificial intelligence (AI), virtual reality (VR), and augmented reality (AR)

reshaping how brands engage with their audiences. In an era marked by digital innovation, the integration of video games, AI, VR, and AR into content marketing strategies has the potential to redefine how brands connect with their target audiences. As consumers increasingly seek immersive experiences, personalization, and meaningful interactions, the convergence of these technologies offers new avenues for marketers to captivate, educate, and convert customers. This paper explored the future landscape of content marketing, examining how video games, AI, VR, and AR are poised to reshape the way brands tell their stories, engage consumers, and drive results. As video games have transcended their traditional entertainment role to become powerful tools for engagement and brand exposure, the future of content marketing holds the promise of interactive branded games that blend entertainment with brand messaging. Artificial intelligence is poised to revolutionize content curation, making it more efficient and personalized than ever before. Additionally, AI-driven chatbots and virtual assistants can provide instant responses to customer queries, further improving user experiences. Virtual reality and augmented reality offer the potential to transform storytelling into immersive, sensory-rich experiences, allowing marketers to transport consumers to virtual showrooms, to interact with products in a lifelike environment.

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APPENDIX

Interview questions

QUESTION GROUP: Familiarity with the topic

1. Are you familiar with the term “content marketing”?
2. What is your professional opinion on the subject (do you believe it is important/or not)?
3. Should it be considered as a strategy/separate marketing discipline/natural evolution of marketing?

QUESTION GROUP: Content marketing in B&H

4. Have you been using content marketing in your work practice, in your current or previous positions?
 - **If yes**, how and to which extent?
 - **If not**, why?
5. Do you believe this type of marketing is present/used in B&H market?
 - **If not**, why not and what could be done to change that?
 - **If yes**, who is using it (international, national brands, agencies), in which industry, how did you find that information, do you know any company/institution sharing information on this topic? Maybe they are using it without calling it “content marketing”?!
6. What are the biggest challenges in B&H in this regard (market development, capabilities of marketers, old school of viewing marketing)?
 - Could we now go back, and rank these challenges (5 challenges, from biggest to smallest)?
7. Is the company, which you are the representative of exploiting this topic or possibly even using content marketing in its marketing strategies?
 - Why yes/no?
 - Are you aware that your company is using it in other markets, and if yes do you expect it to spill over to our market?

QUESTION GROUP: Future of content marketing

8. How do you see the future of content marketing in the digital sphere?

9. How does this future affect B&H market?

- And what about your industry in particular?