

From Digital Content Marketing to Purchase intentions: discovering the Mediating Role of eWOM and Customer Engagement

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Abstract:

This study explores the effect of Digital Content Marketing (DCM) on Purchase Intentions (PI) in the foodservice sector, focusing on the mediating roles of Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) and Customer Engagement (CE). Despite the growing importance of digital marketing and content marketing, few studies have examined how both eWOM and CE together influence the DCM and PI relationship. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected through a Likert-scale questionnaire with 283 valid responses. Analyses included Validity, Reliability, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) via AMOS, along with SPSS-based descriptive and normality tests. Results show that DCM positively impacts PI, with eWOM partially mediating this

effect. DCM also enhances CE, but CE does not mediate the link between DCM and PI.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Digital Content Marketing, Purchase Intention, Customer Engagement, Electronic word of mouth.

الملخص :

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل تأثير التسويق بالمحتوى الرقمي (DCM) على نية الشراء (PI)، مع دراسة الدور الوسيط لكل من التسويق الشفهي الإلكتروني (eWOM) وتفاعل العملاء (CE) في قطاع المطاعم. الأبحاث التي تناولت الدور الوسيط لكل من eWOM و CE بشكل متزامن ما زالت محدودة، مما يترك فجوة في الفهم. ولتغطية هذا الجانب، تم اعتماد منهج بحث كمي باستخدام استبيان مبني على مقياس ليكرت، وتم توزيعه عبر الإنترنت باستخدام Microsoft Forms ، ليتم جمع 283 استجابة صالحة. لضمان دقة القياس، أجريت اختبارات الصدق والثبات، تلتها تحليلات العامل التأكيدي (CFA) للتحقق من نموذج الدراسة. كما تم اختبار الفرضيات باستخدام تحليل الارتباط ونموذج المعادلات الهيكلية (SEM) عبر برنامج AMOS ، بالإضافة إلى التحليلات الوصفية وتحليلات التوزيع الطبيعي باستخدام SPSS. أظهرت النتائج أن DCM له تأثير إيجابي على نية الشراء، كما أن eWOM يتوسط هذا التأثير جزئيًا، بينما لا يتوسط CE العلاقة بين DCM ونية الشراء.

الكلمات المفتاحية : التسويق الرقمي، التسويق بالمحتوى الرقمي، نية الشراء، تفاعل العملاء، الكلام الشفهي الإلكتروني

1. Introduction

Technology is developing at a very rapid and massive rate these days. In addition to technology, the internet's development has made information sharing simple for all. Additionally, as the internet has developed so quickly, more

people are able to connect virtually. Research has proven that the number of internet users has increased from year to year. Kemp (2022) disclosed that the world's internet users in 2022 reached 4.95 billion, a 4% increase from 2021. The global expansion of the internet has resulted in the emergence of social media usage trends. The presence of social media provides effective and efficient steps to reach customers (Dewi et al., 2022). According to DataReportal's global digital overview report, the uptakes or active users have increased over the last few years because there were about 4.72 billion users in 2022, 5.04 billion in 2023, and as of July 2024, it is 5.17 billion. This means that global trends in people's interest in social media platforms grow with each passing day because it is the easiest way to relate to and engage with online communities.

In particular, digital marketing has emerged as an important tool for engaging modern consumers, offering a dynamic and data-driven approach to delivering value, enhancing brand visibility, and driving purchase decisions (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Unlike traditional marketing, digital marketing leverages interactive platforms, real-time analytics, and user-generated content to foster two-way communication and create more personalized experiences.

Digital Content Marketing (DCM) has gained strategic significance. It involves the creation and distribution of valuable, consistent, and relevant content aimed at attracting and retaining a clearly defined audience—ultimately to drive profitable customer action. The role of DCM becomes especially critical in the foodservice sector, where consumer decisions are often influenced by visual appeal, storytelling, and peer recommendations. In Egypt, the increasing reliance on mobile food delivery apps, social media influencers, and branded content campaigns has made DCM a key driver of consumer behavior.

Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) the digital counterpart of traditional word of mouth communication. eWOM refers to any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or service, which is made available to a wide range of people over the Internet (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Electronic word-of-mouth (EWOM) has gained substantial importance in marketing, largely because consumers perceive it as highly credible and easily accessible compared to traditional marketing communications, enabling it to sway extensive consumer networks (King et al., 2014). In the specific context of the foodservice industry, EWOM typically appears as online customer reviews and numerical ratings on platforms like content shared by users on social media platforms, and

endorsements or testimonials from online influencers and food bloggers (Litvin et al., 2008; Jalilvand et al., 2017; Leung et al., 2017).

In parallel, Customer Engagement (CE) has emerged as another critical construct in understanding how DCM influences consumer decision-making. CE represents the intensity of an individual's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral investment in interactions with a brand (Brodie et al., 2011). Through interactive digital content such as polls, recipe videos, quizzes, or influencer challenges, brands in the foodservice industry are increasingly able to foster engagement that goes beyond mere consumption. CE serves as a bridge between content exposure and action, with recent studies confirming its mediating role in translating content marketing into actual purchase behavior (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). In the Egyptian foodservice context, where young digital communities constitute a significant portion of the consumer base, creating engaging content is not just advantageous it is essential for achieving commercial success.

DCM is a marketing strategy dedicated to generating, disseminating, and sharing relevant, attractive, and timely content to capture consumers' attention and enhance their engagement in the purchase deliberation process. In DCM practice, marketers often deliver valuable product or brand content to potential consumers via digital platforms such as

brands websites and digital platforms (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). On the other hand, using digital media is an effective way to communicate with customers. As (Martha et al., 2024) stated, it is simpler for customers who were the focus of targeted marketing to get information. However, before purchasing, customers would research specific products and read reviews about them. Very few researchers have tackled the role of digital content marketing on purchase intentions, As a result, the purpose of this research is to investigate the impact of digital content marketing on purchase intentions and how Customer engagement and EWOM mediate this relation. According to (Haan, 2024), companies from a variety of industries understand how important content marketing is for connecting with customers, increasing brand awareness and boosting sales. As a result, they are investing more money in content marketing tools and strategies. Moreover, (Haan, 2024) mentioned that 90% of marketers include content in their marketing strategies. With 90% of marketers implementing it into their approach, he also indicates that this high adoption rate indicates the critical role that content marketing plays in establishing brand identity, fostering audience connections, and boosting online visibility The food service industry has only recently become prominent in Egypt and has received very limited scholarly attention. According to (Mordor Intelligence, 2025) Egypt Foodservice Market size is

estimated at 10.35 billion USD in 2025, and is expected to reach 21.25 billion USD by 2030, growing at a CAGR of 15.47% during the forecast period (2025-2030). Also the increasing adoption of food delivery platforms has revolutionized how Egyptians interact with restaurants, with approximately 38.7% of the population utilizing online food delivery applications. Moreover the dining culture in Egypt remains deeply rooted in social interactions, with statistics showing that 90% of outings revolve around food-related activities, highlighting the significant role of foodservice establishments in Egyptian social life.

Research gap:

Digital content marketing (DCM) is a well-established driver of consumer behavior, but limited research has looked at its indirect impact on purchase intentions through mediating variables in the foodservice sector, especially in emerging markets like Egypt. Most studies focus on direct effects or broader sectors like retail or e-commerce, and ignore the unique consumer behavior in foodservice where immediacy, trust and experience are key drivers. Also the combined mediating roles of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) and customer engagement are not explored in this context. Although academics have studied digital marketing research for decades, their understanding of content marketing remains

limited (Bubphapant, & Brandão, 2024). Also there is a lack of research in that area as most of research conducted in US making a gap needed to be explored within different geographical areas (Salonen, A. et al., 2024). Moreover (Fan et al., 2024) in digital content marketing, it's crucial to analyze diverse product categories beyond conventional search trends. Additionally, further research is required to better understand how customers interact with digital content and its role in driving engagement. This study bridges a critical gap by differentiating the mediating effects of eWOM and CE, providing valuable insights for marketers aiming to highlight the impact of DCM on PI within the foodservice sector.

Research problem:

Despite the growing importance of digital content marketing in influencing consumers purchase intentions, brands using digital content on different digital platforms to market for their products and services in a growing sector in Egypt which is the foodservice sector, still there is a limited research covering the digital content impact on purchase intentions, there is also a significant lack of research covering the mediator effect of eWom and customer engagement as the effectiveness of DCM may be unnoticed by insufficient attention to the psychological and social processes that mediate consumer response. This gap is particularly evident

in the context of emerging markets like the Egyptian market, this raises a critical questions: what is the impact of digital content marketing in influencing consumer purchase intentions? Also how electronic word of mouth and customer engagement might influence customer purchase intentions.

Research objective

Based on the research gap, the objectives of this study are to investigate the impact of digital content marketing on consumer purchase intentions in Egypt's foodservice industry which is a growing and digitally active industry. The study aims to see how digital content disseminated across different platforms influence the purchase intentions. Also it aims to examine the mediating role of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) and customer engagement as these psychological and social mechanisms may play a big role in how digital content translates into actual purchase behavior. Through quantitative research approach the study will provide a holistic understanding of how digital content marketing drives consumer actions in an emerging market for the foodservice sector and how eWOM and customer engagement influence this process.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Digital Content Marketing (DCM)

Digital content marketing (DCM) refers to the strategic creation and distribution of valuable, relevant, and consistent

content to attract and engage a clearly defined audience ultimately to drive profitable customer action. Over the past decade, it has emerged as a dominant force in digital strategy, reshaping how brands build trust, generate leads, and convert audiences into loyal customers. Marketers use social media as a key tool to promote brand names, aiming to increase brand awareness and strengthen customer loyalty. They often rely on different message styles and emotional appeals to encourage users to engage with their content, which helps improve its visibility and reach (Swani et al., 2017). Since each social media platform has a unique user base, content must be tailored to fit the context of each platform. Reusing the same content across different platforms may not be effective, as audience preferences and behaviors vary.

For content marketing to be effective, every piece of content should have a clear purpose and measurable objectives. Content marketing refers to the strategy of creating and sharing valuable content to attract and retain customers (Nosrati et al., 2013). Originally, it was used to spread information about brands and build their reputation. The types of content used in this strategy can include blog posts, white papers, case studies, videos, photos, and articles (Holliman & Rowley, 2014; Pulizzi, 2014; Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016; Opreana & Vinerean, 2015; Rancati et al., 2015). However, content marketing is more than just providing information or

commentary for customers to read. It should be engaging and interactive. A key element of effective content is that it allows customers to respond and give feedback across different channels throughout the content marketing process (Pulizzi, 2014). According to Järvinen and Taiminen (2016), creating high-quality content is a continuous learning process. It requires regular assessment to understand what kind of content drives audience engagement. Most importantly, content should be designed around customer needs. High-quality content creates value by helping customers rather than simply promoting a company's products or services. The best content is often educational or problem-solving in nature, sometimes not even mentioning the company itself. Instead, it focuses on topics where the company has expertise and can offer meaningful insights. To produce such content, companies must understand what information their customers are looking for. This understanding is achieved by actively listening to customers, which includes collecting feedback and monitoring conversations on social media.

According to (Dewi et al., 2022), the goal of content marketing is to plan, distribute, and produce engaging content in order to attract the target audience, persuade them to become clients and build long-lasting relationships. High-quality content is delivered via content marketing and is specifically designed to interact with a target audience. For this reason, understanding

how content can be strategically used in marketing to encourage customer engagement is critical to developing effective marketing campaigns. In general, engagement activities conducted through digital platforms may produce higher audience involvement than offline (Barari et al., 2020) and in-person interaction (Wang et al., 2019). Moreover, (Dewi et al., 2022) mentioned that digital content marketing positively affects both consumers and the company. It also stated that there is an influence of digital content marketing on customer behavior. The study shows that quality content affects consumers' choices for products and services, forms a long-term relationship, and positively affects repetitive purchases. According to (Hasani et al., 2023), content marketing influences audience growth and purchase intentions. Also the impact of content marketing on audience growth and purchase intentions has been noted (Gupta & Nimkar, 2020). Additionally, we find that the impact of digital marketing material on purchase intention is consistent across previous studies (Prasetya & Susilo, 2022; Kajtazi & Zeqiri, 2020).

Therefore, based on the above, this hypothesis has been formulated:

H1: DCM has a positive impact on Purchase intention

2.2 Electronic Word of mouth (e-WOM)

Electronic word-of-mouth is any comment—positive or negative—made by prospective, existing, or previous customers regarding a company or its offerings (Salhab et al., 2023). Through social media, E-WOM is very much realized since people who spend on social media increase the frequency of recommending a product.

With the growth of social media, online reviews, and discussion forums, eWOM has become a powerful force in shaping consumer attitudes and purchase decisions. According to Rosario et al. (2020), eWOM is perceived as more credible and trustworthy than traditional advertising due to its user-generated nature, which reduces the perception of bias. The accessibility and durability of online reviews further amplify their influence, making eWOM an essential component in digital marketing strategy. Recent studies also highlight the multidimensional nature of eWOM, involving variables such as message valence either positive or negative, source credibility, argument quality, and platform type (King et al., 2014; Ismagilova et al., 2020).

High-quality content—whether in the form of videos, blogs, infographics, or social media posts—encourages users to engage, share, and comment, thereby generating eWOM. As Tuten and Solomon (2017) argue, content that provides entertainment,

emotional value, or practical utility has a higher likelihood of being shared, which multiplies the brand's exposure through consumer-driven networks. Moreover, interactive content, such as polls, quizzes, or live sessions, increases engagement and prompts consumers to voice their opinions online, thereby fostering both volume and quality of eWOM.

Furthermore, digital content marketing can shape the tone and direction of eWOM by guiding the narrative consumers adopt when talking about a brand. According to Sabate et al. (2014), the emotional appeal and aesthetic value of visual content significantly affect user engagement levels, which in turn influence eWOM valence and reach. More recently, research by Alalwan et al. (2022) confirmed that content credibility and consistency are key drivers of positive eWOM on social media platforms. This link suggests that brands can indirectly manage and stimulate favorable eWOM by investing in authentic, engaging, and audience-centered content.

While digital content marketing seeks to inform, entertain, and emotionally engage audiences, the extent to which this content influences purchase behavior often depends on how it is received, interpreted, and shared by other consumers. A study by Alalwan et al. (2022) emphasizes that the credibility and consistency of digital content are crucial in stimulating positive eWOM, which in turn strengthens consumers'

purchase intentions. This underscores the importance of crafting content that not only captures attention but also encourages sharing and discussion among consumers. These peer-generated signals enhance the perceived credibility and social validation of a brand, acting as a persuasive layer that bridges content exposure and behavioral outcomes. Thus, eWOM serves as a social proof mechanism that reinforces or redirects the consumer's purchase decision based on communal sentiment rather than direct brand messaging alone. Further empirical evidence supports the mediating role of eWOM in this dynamic. Research by Kartika and Pandjaitan (2023) demonstrates that eWOM significantly influences brand image, which subsequently affects purchase intentions. Their findings suggest that digital content marketing strategies that foster positive eWOM can enhance brand perception and drive consumer purchasing decisions.

Moreover, several empirical studies have confirmed that the presence of eWOM significantly strengthens the link between digital content marketing and consumer purchase intentions. For instance, Erkan and Evans (2018) found that eWOM serves as an essential intermediary variable in the online consumer decision-making process, particularly in environments where trust in brand communication is low. When consumers encounter branded content online, their subsequent evaluation of that content is often shaped by the

eWOM that surrounds it—whether in the form of online reviews, influencer commentary, or peer discussions. Positive eWOM enhances brand attitudes and increases the perceived value and reliability of the offering, thereby boosting consumers' intent to buy (Hussain et al., 2020).

According to Dewi et al., (2022), electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) actively influences people's decisions in addition to sharing perspectives. Customers frequently read reviews and other people's experiences before deciding on a product or service. It indicates that e-WOM is largely shaped by digital content marketing, demonstrating online content's direct influence on consumer attitudes and decisions. Moreover, e-WOM enables individuals to form relationships with firms, brands, and other customers, which benefits both consumers and companies. It plays a significant role in a firm's performance (Akbari et al., 2022). Hasani et al., (2023) mentioned that most of the studies argued that consumer attitudes are significantly influenced by e-WOM, and this has an apparent effect on purchase intentions also argued that the quantity and quality of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) can have a significant impact on the purchasing intentions of both new and existing customers, so businesses should be aware when communicating online. (Emad, 2023) mentioned that a greater quantity of e-WOM indicates positive social proof, which has a positive impact on purchase

intention. (Hasani et al., 2023) indicates that digital content marketing has a significant impact on e-WOM. In another study conducted by (Alrwashdeh et al., 2019) mentioned that E-WOM has a positive impact on purchase intention. The significant impact of eWOM on purchase intention has been demonstrated by an abundance of studies. Effective eWOM increases consumer perceptions of the quality of the product and the level of service, which subsequently effect increases intention for purchase (Ezzat, 2022). However, not beneficial electronic eWOM might discourage customers from making a purchase, highlighting the significance of promptly monitoring and resolving unfavorable online evaluations (Tobon & García~Madariaga, 2021). A brand may clearly benefit from positive eWOM. Because consumers frequently search for product reviews online and from peers when gathering information about products before making a purchase, product reviews posted by consumers on the Internet are among the most effective forms of electronic communication (Martha et al., 2024). Good electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) influences the brand's reputation and encourages potential buyers to consider the goods. E-wom has a considerable positive impact on purchase intention, according to (Al-Gasawneh & Al-Adamat 2020). Customers' willingness to acquire an item is positively impacted by comments and reviews they read on websites and social media.

Based on the above the following hypotheses were formulated:

H2: DCM has a positive impact on EWOM

H2.1: EWOM mediates the impact of DCM on PI

2.3 Customer Engagement

Customer engagement refers to the emotional connection and interaction between a consumer and a brand. Effective DCM strategies have been shown to significantly enhance customer engagement by delivering content that resonates with the target audience. For instance, personalized and interactive content can lead to higher levels of consumer involvement, encouraging them to participate in brand-related activities and discussions. This increased engagement not only strengthens the customer-brand relationship but also serves as a catalyst for positive word-of-mouth and repeat purchases. Hollebeek and Macky (2019) conceptualize DCM as a means to develop favorable brand engagement, trust, and relationships through relevant and valuable content dissemination.

Effective DCM strategies have been shown to significantly enhance CE by delivering content that resonates with the target audience. For example, personalized and interactive content can lead to higher levels of consumer involvement, encouraging them to participate in brand-related activities and

discussions. This increased engagement not only strengthens the customer-brand relationship but also serves as a tool for positive electronic word of mouth and repeat purchases. A study by Huang et al. (2024) found that interactivity and electronic word-of-mouth in social media marketing have significant positive effects on various dimensions of user engagement, which in turn influence purchase intentions.

The relationship between DCM and purchase intentions is often mediated by CE. When consumers are engaged through compelling content, they are more likely to develop favorable attitudes toward the brand, which in turn increases their intention to purchase. Engaged customers are also more inclined to share their positive experiences with others, further influencing the purchasing decisions of potential customers. For instance, a study by Febrianti et al. (2024) on TikTok followers demonstrated that content marketing significantly influences CE, which mediates the relationship between content marketing and purchase intention.

Recent studies have proven the mediating role of CE in the DCM and purchase intention nexus. For example, Otopah et al. (2024) examined the banking industry and found that consumer engagement partially mediates the association between digital marketing and purchase intentions. Their findings suggest that while digital marketing directly

influences purchase intentions, the effect is significantly enhanced when consumers are actively engaged. Similarly, Hollebeek and Macky (2019) emphasize that DCM fosters consumer engagement, which in turn leads to favorable brand-related outcomes, including increased purchase intentions.

Customer engagement is the procedure by which a company and a customer work together to create a stronger relationship. According to (Lima et al., 2019), it provides a means of measuring the establishment, growth, and enhancement of customer connections. Businesses creating new goods should also consider the interaction that consumers have with their brands. Customers share their opinions and responses to the newest items (Imtiaz & Nasim, 2022). CE is also a crucial indicator of business performance (Zhao et al., 2023). A good DCM interaction may result in consumer brand engagement (Taiminen & Ranaweera, 2019). However, according to different research, Customer engagement formation is more strongly influenced by the functional features of the content namely, its value, relevance, and reliability (Barari et al., 2020; Wang & McCarthy, 2020). In the Web 2.0 era, organizations use content marketing to engage with customers, providing quality content to increase customer brand engagement is the most crucial way to draw attention to the product; this will eventually result in future purchase intentions (Weerasinghe, 2019). Previous studies have demonstrated that customer

engagement has a beneficial impact on purchasing intention (Patel et al., 2024). Several authors have investigated the relationship between digital content and customer engagement with the brand, with varying results. Previous studies have demonstrated a favorable correlation between customer engagement and Purchase intentions (Sun et al., 2019). Moreover, previous research has revealed a positive correlation between customer engagement and purchase intention (Zheng et al., 2022).

Based on the above the following hypotheses are formulated

H3: DCM positively influences customer engagement

H3.1: Customer engagement mediates the impact of DCM on PI

2.4Purchase intention

In the digital marketing era, purchase intention (PI) has evolved to reflect the dynamic and interactive nature of online consumer behavior. Traditional models of consumer decision-making are being reshaped by the increasing influence of digital content, social media, peer recommendations, and targeted digital campaigns. Consumers are now exposed to a vast amount of brand-related information across various digital touch points, enabling them to make more informed and

confidence-driven purchasing decisions. Recent studies underscore that the accessibility of brand content, the perceived personalization of digital ads, and the ability to engage directly with brands online significantly shape consumer PI as stated by Dwivedi et al., (2021). Moreover, the immediacy and convenience of digital platforms allow for seamless transitions from product discovery to purchase, further reinforcing the effectiveness of digital content marketing strategies in shaping PI (Kumar et al., 2023). As such, understanding how digital stimuli such as engaging content, interactive features and peer influence can be translated into buying decisions is crucial for marketers seeking to optimize their digital marketing efforts.

Subasinghe and Weerasisri (2019) mentioned that some studies have defined purchase intention as a behavioral tendency indicating that the consumer will buy the product. They also mentioned in their report that there is disagreement over the definition of purchase intentions. Some have identified purchase intention as a critical indicator to forecast consumption behavior, while others have defined it as an indicator of a consumer's probability of making a purchase or acquiring a specific good. Hasani et al. (2023) demonstrated that the act of creating something and sharing it on any digital platform does not always directly impact purchasing intention. Strategies should concentrate on producing content that deeply

engages consumers and eventually affects their intention to purchase to maximize marketing efforts. The actual behavior of purchases and buy intentions are highly correlated (Zaharia & Schmitz, 2020). Marketers need to ensure that the majority of purchase intentions convert to real purchases in addition to promoting purchase intents (Aziz & Ahmed, 2023). The business must boost consumer purchase intention since there is a high correlation between buying behavior and purchase intention (Sun et al., 2019). Dölek and Aydın (2020) found that blogs had a greater influence on customers' purchasing intentions when comparing their effectiveness to that of online newspapers. Using viral marketing on Facebook to improve brand image and value, which raises customer purchase intention also purchase intention, is positively impacted by social media E-WOM, online communities, and online advertising (Dölek, & Aydın, 2020).

Digital content marketing (DCM) has emerged as a pivotal strategy in influencing consumer behavior, particularly purchase intention (PI). By delivering valuable, relevant, and consistent content, DCM fosters consumer trust and engagement, which are critical precursors to purchasing decisions. Studies have demonstrated that well-executed DCM campaigns can significantly enhance PI by providing consumers with informative and persuasive content that aligns with their needs and preferences. For instance, research by

Hollebeek and Macky (2019) emphasizes that DCM's role in fostering consumer engagement, trust, and value is instrumental in driving purchase intentions.

Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) has become a powerful influencer in shaping consumer PI. The credibility, quality, and quantity of eWOM significantly affect consumers' perceptions and their subsequent purchasing decisions. A research done by Al-Dmour et al., (2021) applied in the Jordanian telecommunication sector revealed that eWOM positively impacts both brand image and PI, with brand image serving as a mediating factor. Recent studies underscore the mediating role of eWOM in the relationship between DCM and PI. For instance, Albayrak and Ceylan (2021) performed a meta-analysis demonstrating a substantial effect of eWOM on PI, highlighting its critical role in consumer decision-making processes.

Customer Engagement (CE) reflects the depth of the relationship between consumers and brands, encompassing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. In the realm of Digital Content Marketing (DCM), fostering CE is paramount, as engaged customers are more likely to develop favorable attitudes toward a brand, leading to increased Purchase Intentions (PI).

The relation between CE and PI is supported through different research. Engaged consumers develop stronger relational bonds with the brand, including trust, commitment, and affective attachment (Pansari & Kumar, 2017). These relational outcomes translate into higher levels of PI, as engaged consumers feel more connected to the brand and perceive greater value in its offerings as stated by van Doorn et al., (2010). Research explicitly testing the mediating role of CE has found that marketing initiatives (including content strategies) influence behavioral intentions like PI largely through the level of engagement they foster (Leckie, Nyadzayo, & Johnson, 2016; Harrigan et al., 2017).

3. Research Methodology:

The purpose of this research paper to study the impact of Digital content marketing on purchase intentions also exploring the mediator effect of both electronic word of mouth (eWOM) and Customer engagement (CE). Author adopts a quantitative research design, by which is suited for understanding trends, relationships, and patterns among variables in a structured and measurable manner (Creswell, & Creswell 2017). This quantitative approach enables the collection of numerical data that can be statistically analyzed to draw generalizable conclusions about the research problem.

3.1 Data Collection method:

For the data collection a structured questionnaire was used as the primary data collection tool. The questionnaire was a likert scale designed ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." The Likert scale is widely recognized as an effective tool for measuring attitudes and opinions quantitatively (Joshi et al., 2015). It ensures that responses are standardized, making them suitable for statistical analysis and comparison across diverse demographic groups.

An online English survey using Microsoft forms was used for six months. The form was posted on students' official social media groups across several platforms, including Facebook and WhatsApp, as well as the students' e-learning portal. The survey consisted of five sections sections:

Section one was related to the descriptive data, related to age, gender, academic level and years using social media, Section two was related to items assessing the importance of digital content marketing, section three was related to items assessing the customer engagement, section four was related to items assessing the eWOM while section five was focusing on items assessing the purchase intentions dimension

The target population for the study included diverse audiences that are exposed to digital content marketing to solidify the

results coming from different demographics. A non-probability sampling technique, specifically convenience sampling, was employed to select participants due to its efficiency in accessing a diverse and adequate number of respondents within the available timeframe (Etikan et al., 2016).

The sample size was determined based on the requirements for achieving statistically significant results, a sample of 283 valid responses were collected, Data collection was carried out over a period of 6 months via an online survey platform specifically using Microsoft Forms, Participants were provided with detailed instructions to ensure clarity and minimize biases arising from misinterpretation of questions. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation, were strictly adhered to throughout the data collection process (Bell, E et al 2022).

3.2 Conceptual framework

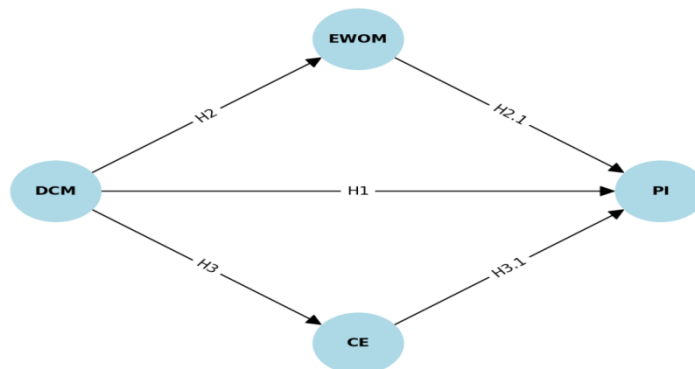


Figure 1: Conceptual research model

The conceptual research model (figure 1) is developed based on literature review on digital content marketing in relation to foodservice sector, Institutes to test the hypotheses that digital content marketing positively affects purchase intentions. The conceptual framework also proposes that electronic word of mouth and customer engagement mediates the relationship between digital content marketing and purchase intentions.

3.3 Research Hypotheses:

H1: DCM has a positive impact on Purchase intention

H2: DCM has a positive impact on EWOM

H2.1: EWOM mediates the impact of DCM on PI

H3: DCM positively influences customer engagement

H3.1: Customer engagement mediates the impact of DCM on PI

4. Research Analysis

This section investigates the research hypotheses. It begins with Testing Validity and Reliability to ensure accurate and consistent measurement tools, forming a strong analytical foundation. Confirmatory Factor Analysis follows, validating the research model's constructs and providing insights into structural relationships among variables. A Descriptive

Analysis then highlights respondent profiles and data patterns, shedding light on demographic characteristics. Normality Testing assesses whether the data follow a normal distribution, a key assumption in statistical methods. Hypotheses are tested using correlation analysis and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), offering a comprehensive understanding of variable interrelationships.

4.1 Testing Validity and Reliability

The research ensures construct validity through Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and factor loadings. An AVE value of 0.5 or higher indicates that the construct explains sufficient variance among its indicators, while factor loadings of 0.4 or higher confirm item validity. Reliability is evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha, where a coefficient of 0.7 or above signifies internal consistency and measurement stability. The study's findings, presented in Table 1, indicate that AVE values (50.198%–60.893%) exceed the 50% threshold, while factor loadings (0.416–0.687) surpass the 0.4 minimum requirements. Furthermore, KMO values (0.728–0.834) confirm sample adequacy, reinforcing the constructs' validity and reliability.

Table 1: Reliability and Validity Table

Variables	KMO	AVE %	Cronbach's α	Items	Factor Loading
Digital Content Marketing	.728	55.105	.723	DCM1	.634
				DCM2	.531
				DCM3	.530
				DCM4	.509
Customer Engagement	.771	60.893	.784	CE1	.670
				CE2	.687
				CE3	.612
				CE4	.466
EWOM	.750	50.198	.747	EWOM1	.538
				EWOM2	.568
				EWOM3	.416
				EWOM4	.499
				EWOM5	.489
Purchase Intention	.834	50.287	.801	PI1	.522
				PI2	.419
				PI3	.519
				PI4	.604
				PI5	.473
				PI6	.481

4.2 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted using AMOS 24 with the Maximum Likelihood (ML) estimation method to validate the measurement model before applying Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The model fit statistics indicate an overall good fit. The Chi-square/degrees of freedom ratio (CMIN/DF) were 1.789 with a p-value of 0.000, suggesting statistical significance and minimal discrepancy between the observed and estimated covariance matrices. The Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) was 0.906, indicating that the model explains the observed covariance well, while the Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) recorded 0.878,

reflecting an acceptable fit despite being slightly below the ideal 0.90 threshold. The Normed Fit Index (NFI) was 0.854, showing an acceptable fit compared to a null model, and the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) reached 0.917, confirming strong model performance. Additionally, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) was 0.929, supporting the model's strong fit. The Root Mean Square Residual (RMR) was 0.047, indicating minimal differences between observed and predicted correlations, while the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was 0.053, suggesting a close fit with minimal estimation error. These results confirm the validity and reliability of the measurement model, as detailed in Table 2, which compares these indices against recommended thresholds.

Table 2: Thresholds and Fit Indices for the Measurement Model

Measure	Results	Threshold
Chi-square/df	1.789	< 2 excellent; < 3 good; < 5 sometimes permissible
P-value	0.000	> 0.05
GFI	0.906	> 0.90
AGFI	0.878	> 0.90
NFI	0.854	> 0.90
TLI	0.917	> 0.95
CFI	0.929	> 0.90
RMR	0.047	< 0.08
RMSEA	0.053	< 0.05

Figure 2 illustrates the execution of confirmatory factor analysis, portraying factor loadings through prominent

arrows. The arrows signify strong factor loadings, with values exceeding the 0.4 threshold. To delve into the specific numerical values of these factor loadings, readers are directed to Table 3 for a detailed examination.

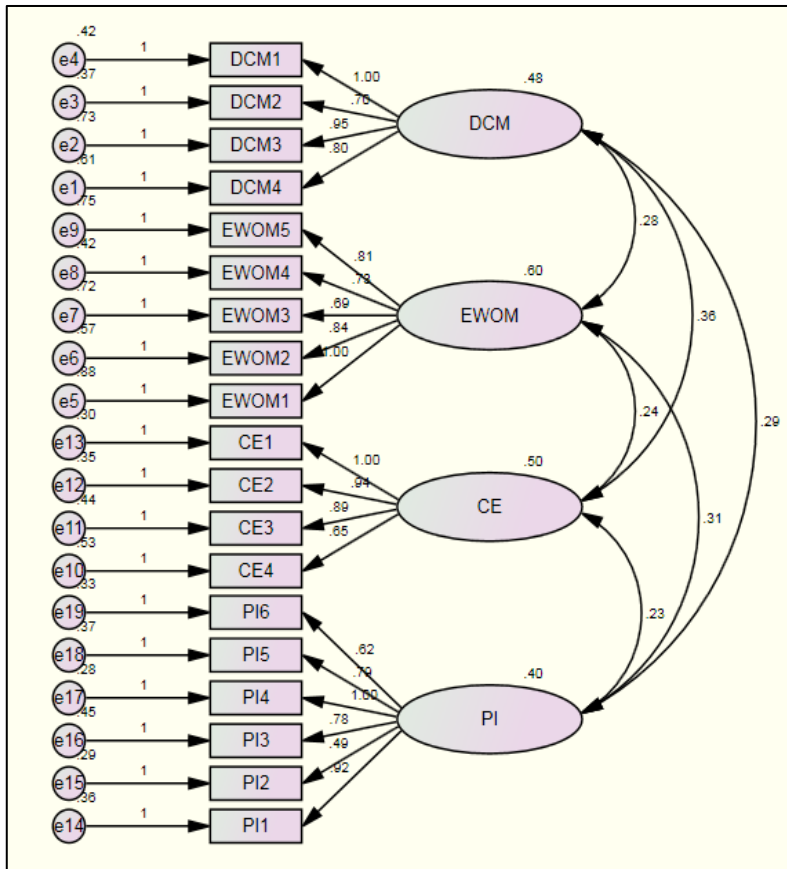


Figure 2: CFA for the Measurement Model

Table 3 offers a thorough display of the factor loadings (FL), indicating the strength of item loadings onto their corresponding variables. Notably, all factor loadings consistently exceed or equal the crucial threshold of 0.40, affirming the robust validity of the examined constructs. Additionally, it is crucial to underscore that the associated p-values uniformly dip below the pre-established threshold of 0.05, underscoring the substantive significance of the statements concerning their connection to the respective constructs.

Table 3: Item Loading after Confirmatory Factor Analysis

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
DCM4	<---	DCM	.803	.095	8.436	***
DCM3	<---	DCM	.950	.108	8.831	***
DCM2	<---	DCM	.705	.078	8.989	***
DCM1	<---	DCM	1.000			
EWOM1	<---	EWOM	1.000			
EWOM2	<---	EWOM	.844	.101	8.332	***
EWOM3	<---	EWOM	.691	.096	7.161	***
EWOM4	<---	EWOM	.727	.087	8.350	***
EWOM5	<---	EWOM	.815	.105	7.738	***
CE4	<---	CE	.648	.078	8.351	***
CE3	<---	CE	.894	.082	10.890	***
CE2	<---	CE	.938	.080	11.673	***
CE1	<---	CE	1.000			
PI1	<---	PI	.916	.083	10.979	***
PI2	<---	PI	.490	.063	7.803	***
PI3	<---	PI	.778	.083	9.363	***
PI4	<---	PI	1.000			
PI5	<---	PI	.786	.079	9.978	***
PI6	<---	PI	.620	.070	8.871	***

4.3 Descriptive Analysis

The respondent profile provides valuable insights into the demographics and characteristics of the study participants in Table 4. The respondent profile reveals a diverse demographic, with 55.1% of respondents being female (156 individuals) and 44.9% male (127 individuals). The majority of participants (66.8%) were aged between 18 and 26 years, followed by 30.4% in the 27 to 42 age range, and 2.8% aged 43 and above. Regarding educational background, 71.7% held a bachelor's degree, 16.3% held a master's degree, 1.1% had a PhD, and 11.0% had completed secondary education. When it comes to social media usage, the majority of respondents (64.3%) have been using social media for over 10 years, 32.2% have been using it for 6 to 10 years, and 3.5% have used it for 1 to 5 years.

Table 4: Respondent profile

Item	Frequency (Total sample = 283)	Percent
Gender		
Female	156	55.1
Male	127	44.9
Age		
18 to 26	89	66.8
27 to 42	86	30.4
43 and above	8	2.8
Education		
Bachelor	203	71.7
Master	46	16.3
PhD	3	1.1
Secondary	31	11.0
Years Using Social Media		
1 to 5 years	10	3.5
6 to 10 years	91	32.2
More than 10 years	182	64.3

The descriptive results for research variable offer valuable insights into the central tendencies and variations within the dataset in Table 5. Digital Content Marketing recorded a mean score of 3.7279. Customer Engagement showed a mean of 3.2615. EWOM recorded a mean of 3.5901. Finally, Purchase Intention had the highest mean score of 3.8269.

Table 5: Descriptive Analysis for the Research Variables

Research Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Frequency				
			1	2	3	4	5
Digital Content Marketing	3.7279	.74389	2	13	76	161	31
Customer Engagement	3.2615	.76411	5	40	114	124	0
EWOM	3.5901	.79102	6	17	83	158	19
Purchase Intention	3.8269	.62602	2	2	66	186	27

4.4 Normality Testing for the Research Variables

Normality is a key assumption in statistical analysis, determining whether parametric or non-parametric tests should be used. If the data is normally distributed, methods like Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) can be applied. To verify normality, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test is commonly used for samples larger than 50 observations. This formal test assumes normality if the P-value exceeds 0.05.

Table 6 presents the results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for the research variables, revealing that the data is not normally distributed, as all P-values are below 0.05. This

indicates the need for a supplementary informal assessment is to gauge the data's approximate normality.

Table 6: Formal Testing of Normality

Research Variables	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Digital Content Marketing	.321	283	.000
Customer Engagement	.271	283	.000
EWOM	.323	283	.000
Purchase Intention	.362	283	.000

As illustrated in Table 7, this informal evaluation reveals that both skewness and kurtosis values within the acceptable range of ± 1 . Consequently, opting for parametric tests is considered apt for elucidating the relationships among the research variables.

Table 7: Informal Testing of Normality

	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Digital Content Marketing	-.607	.145	.872	.289
Customer Engagement	-.722	.145	-.169	.289
EWOM	-.906	.145	1.301	.289
Purchase Intention	-.730	.145	2.443	.289

4.5 Testing Research Hypotheses

In this section, a thorough examination of the research hypotheses is conducted using correlation analysis and path analysis within the structural equation modeling (SEM)

framework. As the data is not normally distributed, Spearman's correlation is the preferred analytical method. Table 8 presents a detailed correlation matrix, illustrating the relationships among all variables in the study.

It could be observed that there is a significant positive relationship between Digital Content Marketing, and Customer Engagement as the P-value is less than 0.05 and the correlation coefficient is 0.430. Moreover, there is a significant positive relationship between Digital Content Marketing, Customer Engagement, EWOM, and Purchase Intention as the P-values are less than 0.05 and the correlation coefficients are 0.353, 0.238, and 0.399 respectively.

Table 8: Correlation Matrix for the Research Variables

			DCM	CE	EWOM	PI
Spearman's rho	Digital Content Marketing	Correlation Coefficient	1.000			
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.			
		N	283			
	Customer Engagement	Correlation Coefficient	.430**	1.000		
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.		
		N	283	283		
	EWOM	Correlation Coefficient	.304**	.281**	1.000	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	
		N	283	283	283	
	Purchase Intention	Correlation Coefficient	.353**	.238**	.399**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.
		N	283	283	283	283

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

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis was utilized to evaluate the influence of the research variables, chosen for its

impartiality and independence from data normality distribution, as evidenced in Table 9. The SEM results, explained below, provide valuable insights into the relationships between the variables:

Hypothesis 1 examines the impact of Digital Content Marketing on Purchase Intention. The results show a significant positive effect of Digital Content Marketing on Purchase Intention, as the P-value is below 0.05 and the Estimate is 0.404.

Hypothesis 2 explores the effect of Digital Content Marketing on EWOM. The findings indicate a significant positive effect, with a P-value below 0.05 and an Estimate of 0.617.

Hypothesis 3 tests whether EWOM mediates the relationship between Digital Content Marketing and Purchase Intention. The results suggest that EWOM has a significant positive effect on Purchase Intention, with a P-value below 0.05 and an Estimate of 0.308, indicating a direct effect of EWOM on Purchase Intention. Additionally, since the effect of Digital Content Marketing on EWOM is significant, it can be concluded that EWOM partially mediates the relationship between Digital Content Marketing and Purchase Intention, as the effect remains significant even with EWOM in the model.

Hypothesis 4 investigates the effect of Digital Content Marketing on Customer Engagement. The results show a

significant positive effect, with a P-value below 0.05 and an Estimate of 0.308.

Lastly, Hypothesis 5 tests whether Customer Engagement mediates the relationship between Digital Content Marketing and Purchase Intention. The results reveal that Customer Engagement has an insignificant effect on Purchase Intention, with a P-value above 0.05, meaning that Customer Engagement does not mediate this relationship as there is no direct effect of Customer Engagement on Purchase Intention.

Table 9: SEM Analysis for the Research Variables

			Estimate	P	R ²
EWOM	<---	Digital Content Marketing	.617	***	.295
Customer Engagement	<---	Digital Content Marketing	.770	***	.547
Purchase Intention	<---	Digital Content Marketing	.404	.002	.534
Purchase Intention	<---	EWOM	.308	***	
Purchase Intention	<---	Customer Engagement	.026	.797	

The model fit indices, including CMIN/DF (1.784), GFI (0.906), CFI (0.929), AGFI (0.878), and RMSEA (0.053), all fall within acceptable ranges. Figure 3 visually represents the SEM model that was employed to analyze the impact of the research model.

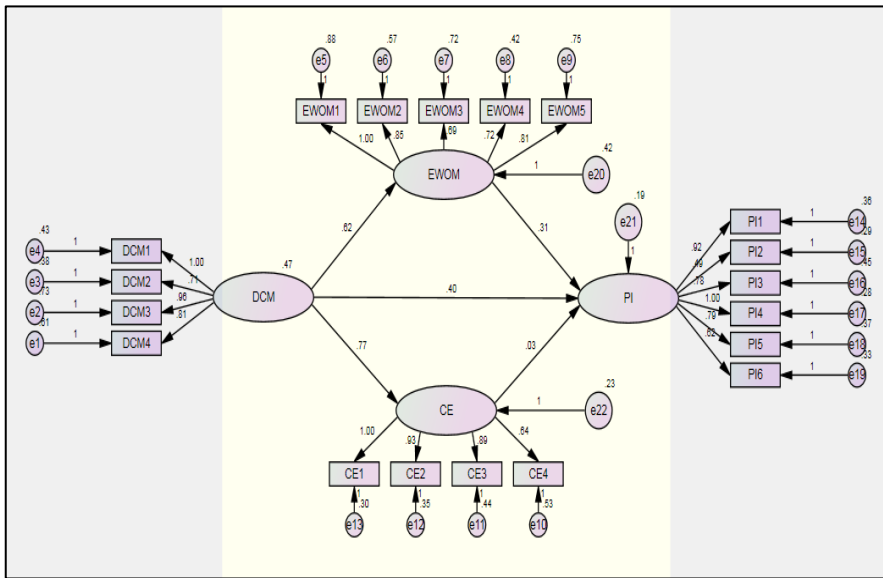


Figure 3: SEM for the Research Variables

4.6 Summary of Testing Research Hypotheses

This paper described an empirical study that measured the variables derived from the literature review using descriptive correlation analyses employing SPSS and SEM using AMOS, to evaluate the research hypotheses. Table 10 summarizes the findings of the hypotheses tested in the study. Hypothesis 1 supports the significant positive impact of Digital Content Marketing on Purchase Intention. Hypothesis 2 demonstrates a significant effect of Digital Content Marketing on EWOM. Hypothesis 3 shows that EWOM partially mediates the relationship between Digital Content Marketing and Purchase

Intention. Hypothesis 4 confirms the positive effect of Digital Content Marketing on Customer Engagement. Finally, Hypothesis 5 reveals that Customer Engagement does not mediate the relationship between Digital Content Marketing and Purchase Intention.

5. Discussion and conclusion:

The findings of this study emphasize the significant role of Digital Content Marketing (DCM) in shaping purchase intentions, particularly through the mediating effects of Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) and Customer Engagement (CE). The research explored how DCM influences customers' intention to purchase products and its impact on eWOM. It highlights that DCM serves as a vital channel for companies to foster closer relationships with their customers. By doing so, this study adds to the existing body of literature on the relationship between digital content marketing and customer purchase behavior.

The results provide valuable insights into how DCM impacts consumer behavior and decision making processes. The study confirms that DCM has a significant positive impact on purchase intention, supporting Hypothesis 1. This is consistent with previous research indicating that DCM enhances brand awareness, trust, and perceived value, which are critical factors in driving purchase decisions (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010;

Kudeshia & Kumar 2017; Kajtazi & Zeqiri, 2020; Pektas & Hassan, 2020; Al-Gasawneh & Al-Adamat, 2020). This is also aligned with the work results of (Martha et al., 2024) showing that digital content marketing has a positive impact on customer purchase intentions, but this result contradict with the work result of (Hasani et al., 2023) stating that digital content marketing not necessarily lead to purchase intention.

This study also mentioned that digital content marketing has a positive impact on electronic word of mouth by which electronic word of mouth partially mediates the relation between digital content marketing and purchase intentions this means that creating digital content marketing might lead to affecting the eWOM which can result in improving the customer purchase decision, the results of those hypotheses also aligned with a study conducted by (Wanigapura et al., 2025; Phuong, et al., 2025) stating that brands should focus more on digital content reviews as it affects the customer purchase decision.

Moreover the results show that DCM has a positive impact on engaging customers, and this is aligned with some of previous studies for example studies by (Paramita et al., 2021; Bazi et al.,2020; Hollebeek and Macky 2019; Rasool et al., 2020).

Results also revealed that customer engagement doesn't mediate the relation between digital content marketing and purchase

intentions, this means that creating good content on digital platforms might engage customer but not necessarily lead to improving the customer's purchase decision for example you might be attracted to a certain digital content on any digital platform but this might not make you have an intention to purchase, this contradict with some previous studies as (Hasani, V. V. et al., 2023; Mathew & Soliman, 2021; Harrigan et al., 2017; Ramzan & Syed, 2018; Yaghtin et al., 2020).

In addition, this study provides several implications for the theory. First of all, it enriches the current literature on digital content marketing and purchasing intention with a sample from a specific growing industry which is the food service sector. Moreover, previous studies have analyzed mainly the direct effect of DCM on PI. This study proves that creating content and posting it on any digital platforms led to a positive impact on eWOM which might result in having a positive impact on purchase intentions in the food service sector most customers on the digital platforms checking online reviews before having their purchase decision. Therefore creating good and related digital content highlighting the good points in a brand honestly led to creating a positive eWOM by which result in improving the purchase intentions. Also creating good digital content for the food service brand has a positive impact on engaging customer. Therefore, marketers need to consider content creation strategies that help consumers and boost

consumer engagement. On contrary results showed that engaging content doesn't have an impact on the purchase intentions, by which audience on digital platforms might engage to certain content for any food service brand but this engagement might not be translated into purchases. Moreover, the results provide some practical implications for managers and companies. The research suggests that brands should concentrate their marketing activities on up-to-date content marketing strategies in order to boost sales and, ultimately, profitability. Instead of huge investments on traditional marketing tactics, such an investment has a more favorable impact on customers' readiness to buy their goods and services, knowing that this research results showed that more than 60% of respondents having different backgrounds and different educational level have more than 10 years' experience in using social media. Basically, the research shows that customers prefer to be educated and informed with content that is in their interest. Therefore, when it comes to digitalization and marketing strategies, brands should operate in accordance with consumer interests and preferences as usually customers respond favorably to the personalized content. They are more likely to make larger purchases from brands that satisfy their interests and remain loyal to those same brands. Thus, from a practical standpoint, when marketers use digital content marketing, they should consider

which marketing communication strategies to use to tailor the content they provide to their targets. Also marketers should keep a high quality content; this will be reflected on a high brand image. This study is among the first studies that studied how content marketing can serve as a means of customer engagement knowing that there is no direct relation between digital content marketing and customer engagement. However good digital content marketing can help in generating a good word of mouth by which resulted in improving the purchase decision in the food service sector. This study has some limitations. First, it was limited to the primary data collected from a quantitative research approach, only from customers' perspectives, and relied on data analysis based on customers' insights. The inclusion of both company and customer perspectives would provide more robust research results. Moreover, the sample size is derived only from a developing country, also this research focus on a specific sector which is the food service sector so that for future research can be addressing different contexts.

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