

BUILDING CONTENT CONSUMERS: A CONCEPTUAL PAPER AND RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

The growing academic and professional literature on content marketing sets it as the fastest-emerging digital marketing tool. Yet, the reasons why customers follow (or unfollow) brands on social media sites are unknown to marketers. An extensive literature review was conducted to identify factors that improve consumers' attitudes toward marketer-generated content (MGC). The study uses communication theories, resource-based theories, motivation theories, and psychological concepts as method theories to explore the domain of consumer attitude. Results show that consumers' attitude toward MGC is positively affected by Trust, E-entertainment, Brand activism, social orientation, and self-esteem factors. A conceptual model and propositions are developed, drawing upon the identified factors. The model will give good insight to those who want to conduct empirical research in the area and will be a stepping-stone for digital marketers, policymakers, and content writers.

Keywords: *Brand content; Consumer attitude; Content marketing; Marketer-generated content; Content strategy.*

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Digital content marketing

Even if it is simple to recall a period before content marketing, it is difficult to imagine a modern digital world without it. Less marketing and more publishing are what the marketing department will do in the future (Lieb, 2012; Bezbaruah and Trivedi, 2020; Nobar, Kalejahi and Rostamzadeh, 2020). The term content consumer is thus, coined to describe a new customer category. A user who views or engages with content produced by marketers is known as a content consumer. Three well-known examples of content consumers include regular Facebook users, blog readers, and YouTube viewers (Al-Hawary and Obiadat, 2021; Shafiee and Shahin, 2021). According to the Clickz (2020) poll, 89% of consumers who follow a business on social media will purchase from that company, and 75% of the consumers will increase their spending with that same company. Customers are hesitant to purchase from a brand not present on social media platforms and do not produce interesting content for its audience.

In fact, generation Y and Z evaluate any individual or brand based on their social media following (Hirschfelder and Chigada, 2020; Tiwari and Joshi, 2020). In response to this new generational change in their customers, brands have begun to focus on producing high-quality and pertinent content and disseminating it across all digital platforms. For example, personal care brands (e.g., Sugar, Maybelline), food delivery businesses (e.g., Zomato), or FMCG brands (e.g., Vadilal) are creating content to attract and engage target customers.

Marketing professionals can increase their brand following by generating leads, sales and organizational growth by understanding why consumers follow (and unfollow) brands and what kinds of content they are most (and least) interested in (Clickz, 2020). Marketers who know why their

customers use social media, including what platforms they prefer, the type of content they need and want, and the common issues they turn to social platforms to deal with, will be able to provide a more constant and helpful digital experience to their followers (Alwash, Savarimuthu, and Parackal, 2021; Bowden and Mirzaei, 2021).

Researchers (Huotari et al., 2015; Misra and Mukherjee, 2019) found that marketers have the absolute power to influence audience-generated content. B2B companies can directly influence social media content creation by adding or removing content through corporate user accounts, participating in discussions, and managing employees' social media behaviour. B2B companies can also indirectly influence social media content creation by asking employees to create desired content and conducting marketing activities that encourage other users to create content that is advantageous to the company. Content marketing, therefore, exhibits leadership traits rather than people-pleasing traits. Furthermore, marketers sometimes create controversial content.

If we see the trend at the country level, for example, Zomato's social media presented vegetarian food as grass and haystack. The audience found it offensive and the outrage was apparent in the comments section below the post. Besides that, users occasionally start contentious and difficult conversations (Yaghtin, Safarzadeh and Zand, 2020; Safiullah, Pathak, and Singh, 2022; Anuj et al. 2023). High expectations and a dearth of experienced practitioners make it difficult to build a successful content marketing strategy. The lack of content marketing analytics, KPIs, and dashboards is the main issue (Holliman and Rowley, 2014; Content Marketing Institute, 2022). Bennett (2017) highlights the differences between audience and content producers' perceptions. It makes MGC ineffective and does not lead to positive purchase behaviour.

1.2 Research Gap

Despite social media's continuous popularity and widespread use among consumers and marketers, empirical research into the aspects that influence a consumer's choice to follow a business on social media is still underdeveloped (Kashiparekh, 2021; Mehta, Sharma, and Khanna, 2023). The literature that is currently available, however, has not yet looked into how MGC influences a person's choice to follow and interact with brands on social media.

Empirical research takes time to execute, and the possibility for generalization is relatively limited. In contrast, conceptual papers aim to make significant rather than gradual advancements in knowledge of a concept or phenomenon (Jaakkola, 2020; Koob; 2021). Thus, in theory-light literature, a conceptual essay is more likely to be recognized (Razzak, Mustamil, and Bakar, 2020; Hung and Siti-Nabiha, 2024). The study sheds light on how people interact with, consume, and disseminate content. The outcome of the study may apply to emerging professions such as content marketing, digital marketing, social media marketing, viral marketing, and related fields.

The reasons why customers follow or unfollow brands on social media sites are unknown to marketers. Even though content marketing practices have grown, more B2B marketers say their efforts are ineffective, according to the Content Marketing Institute's (2017) report. Marketers do not know which content marketing strategy will engage their target audience the most profitably. Such status of ambiguity in addition to unverified and unauthentic content may churn out customers.

1.3 Research Objectives

It requires action to improve the attitude of consumers toward marketer-generated content. Digital marketers might benefit from changing consumers' attitudes toward MGC. The objectives of the study are:

- To identify the factors affecting consumers' attitude towards MGC.
- To develop propositions on the identified factors.

Thus, we review the literature and seek theories from various related disciplines to identify factors affecting consumers' attitudes toward MGC and develop propositions on the identified factors. Before proceeding with theory building, we present a primary literature review to understand the motivations behind following and engaging with MGC in the below section. After that, the research methodology adopted for this conceptual research paper is presented. The subsequent section presents theory building. The study concludes with implications for research and practice and provides directions for further research in the domain.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

From the primary review of literature, we found that there are two primary reasons for following and engaging with MGC: (i) information gathering and entertainment and (ii) brand's follower base effect. The supporting literature is presented in following sub-sections:

2.1. Consumer attitude and online information gathering & entertainment

Customers were driven online due to physical and social distancing, increasing the percentage of transactions made through digital channels by 36% between 2019 and 2021 (Salesforce research, 2022). Yet, even though physical meetings become available again, these habits are sticking (Torabi and Bélanger, 2022; Anuj et al. 2023). The generation with the greatest affinity for technology are the millennial and Gen-Z, closely followed by Gen-Alpha, a group that has not yet reached adulthood (Hung and Siti-Nabiha, 2024). Researcher Kashiparekh (2021) discovered elements that were significant to young people who followed companies on social media. Some of the crucial elements include the language and tone used by brands on their social media accounts, online brand communities, and online activism by the company (Barretta & Firat, 2022; Mehta, Sharma, and Khanna, 2023).

Social media are types of communication technologies that exhibit Web 2.0 characteristics, such as being collaborative, user-empowered, and having tools for knowledge exchange on the Internet (Kashiparekh, 2021). Instead of only seeking information, users in social media communities also use brand's content to entertain themselves. The level of engagement with brand content varies depending on the type of content, message appeal, social media platform, simplicity of navigation, transparency, creativity, and individual interests of the consumer (Bezbaruah and Trivedi, 2020; Nobar, Kalejahi and Rostamzadeh, 2020).

In addition, when customers are insufficiently informed about the goods or are dubious of other signs, an active online presence of the brand positively influences customer service opinions (Dwivedi et al., 2021). By fostering durable relationships between customers and companies, the ability to engage with brands transparently makes it possible to provide information quickly through direct response and feedback (Waqas, Hamzah, and Salleh, 2020).

2.2. Consumer's attitude and brand's follower base effect

'Everyone is following; I should also follow.' According to Drossos, Coursaris, & Kagiouli (2023), a customer's brand attitude on social media is positively influenced by the content's relevance and popularity among friends and peers. Businesses keep themselves informed about the interests, pursuits, and worldviews of their customers. When brands attempt to interact with customers on social media, their campaigns should be enjoyable, appealing, and distinctive (Misra and Mukherjee, 2019; Al-Hawary and Obiadat, 2021; Shafiee and Shahin, 2021).

Content consumers are sensitive to the follower base of the brand for various reasons. Social issues, psychological values, and quality perception are considered to be the primary variables that affect follower-base sensitivity (Alwash, Savarimuthu, and Parackal, 2021; Bowden and Mirzaei, 2021). Proposed in 1975 by the British anthropologists Edwin and Shirley Ardener, the *muted group theory* explains how dominant groups in society provide the language and vocabulary of mass communication, which the subordinate groups are compelled to learn and adopt if they want to be heard (Meares, 2017). Increased content engagement motivates consumers to raise opinions that were previously suppressed (Antoniadis, Assimakopoulos, and Paltsoglou, 2021).

From the above-mentioned literature review, it is evident that there are various motivations to follow brand's content, but what build positive attitude towards brand's content is still under-researched. Therefore, the present study attempts to build conceptual framework with application of theory synthesis approach, as outlined in below section.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopts "Theory Synthesis" approach (Jaakkola, 2020). A theory synthesis paper aims to integrate concepts from various theories or literature streams. These papers provide a new perspective on a phenomenon by connecting previously unrelated or conflicting pieces in a unique way. By summarizing and integrating existing knowledge of a concept or phenomenon, these papers make a valuable contribution to the field.

The study employs PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines to turn data from multiple studies into information that can be utilized by researchers and managers in the field. The PRISMA 2020 statement comprises a 27-item checklist, reporting guidance, and a flow diagram. PRISMA 2020 method is applied to identify, select, appraise and synthesize literature and present a transparent, complete, and accurate review. PRISMA application and adoption are evident in various disciplines and publications (Yesudian et al., 2014; Ladha and Sharma, 2021; Page et al., 2021).

As digital content marketing is an emerging field in the twenty-first century, hence peer-reviewed scholarly articles published from 2008 to 2024 from numerous databases like the Inderscience, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, Scopus, IEEE, Google Scholar, and Emerald. We examined over 450 research articles published in SCOPUS/SCI/SSCI/Web-of-science-indexed journals. Out of these, 60 articles were finally used to build supportive evidence for the propositions in the present study. The full details of the literature review are presented in Figure 1. These studies were read thoroughly to understand the influential factors for consuming MGC.

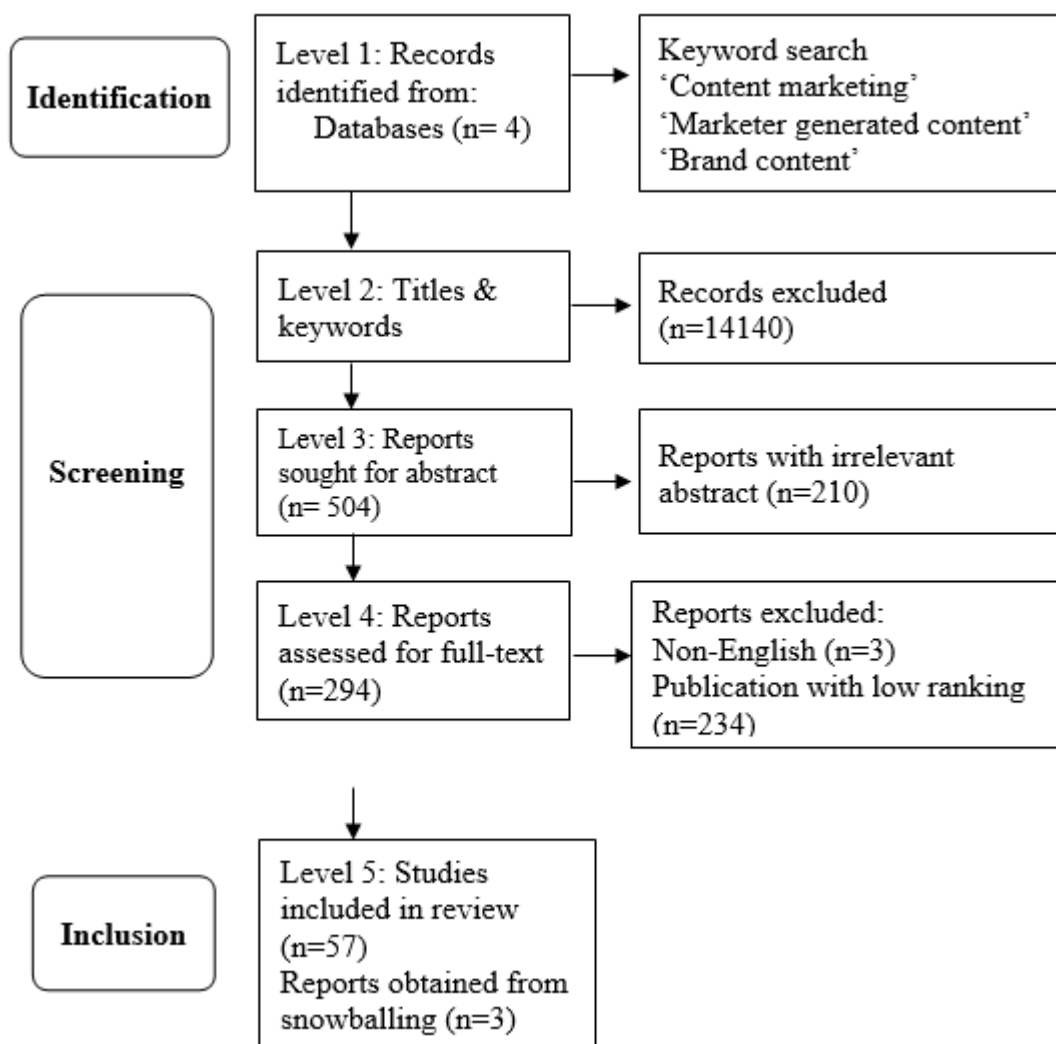


Figure 1 PRISMA flow diagram

4. THEORY BUILDING

A conceptual article written with theory synthesis approach aims to:

- Summarize and integrate current understanding;
- Outline the conceptual domain of a new phenomenon or idea and;
- Structure a fragmented field by analyzing it through theoretical lenses (Cropanzano, 2009; Jaakkola, 2020).

Therefore, we perform theory synthesis by conceptually exploring multiple theoretical perspectives (Figure 2).

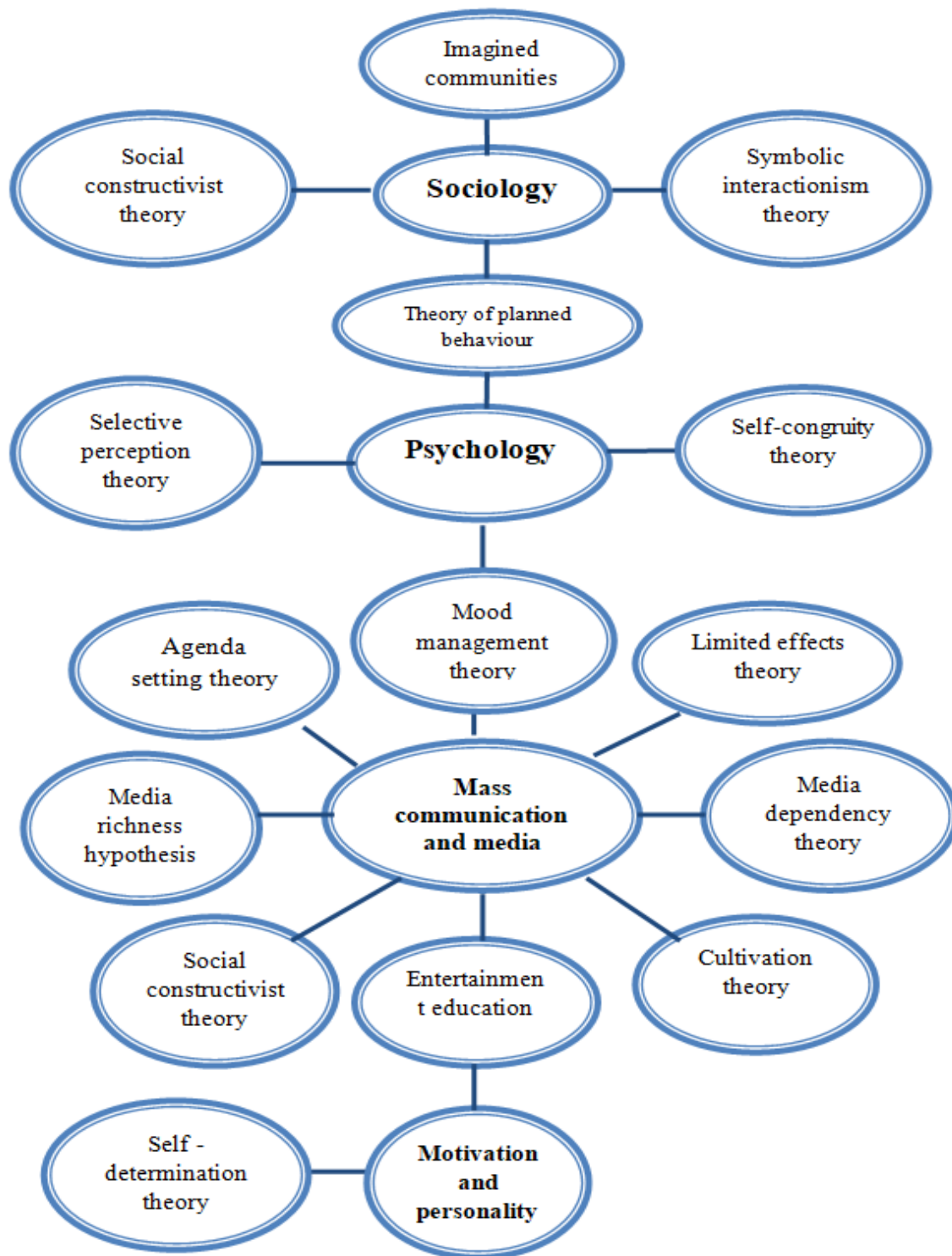


Figure 2 Theories borrowed from various disciplines.

Numerous theories emphasize the speaker, message, media sources, audience, and other pertinent elements of MGC (Table 1).

Table 1 Theories and their relevance with the digital content marketing.

No.	Theory	Concept	Relevance
1.	Agenda-setting theory	Agenda-setting theory posits media influence on public opinion by determining what topics people consider important through coverage prioritization.	According to this theory, a content publisher can affect how much the public cares about an occasion, problem, or product.
2.	Limited effects theory	Limited effects theory posits that media have minimal influence on individuals due to personal predispositions, social interactions, and selective exposure.	Whatever form of effect that MGC has on individuals is limited.
3.	Selective perception theory	Posits people interpret information selectively, filtering based on beliefs, attitudes, experiences, and interests, influencing perceptions and judgments.	According to the selective perception theory, a person is inclined to select content that support the ideas and beliefs they already hold.
4.	Media dependency theory	It explores the relationship between media consumption, societal dependence on media, and its effects on individuals and societies.	According to the theory of media dependency, audiences' needs for understanding, information, or enjoyment contribute to dependence upon content.
5.	Entertainment education approach	Entertainment education combines educational content with engaging entertainment to inform and influence audience behavior positively.	The approach suggests that MGC should enlighten and entertain the audience.
6.	Media richness hypothesis	The Media Richness Hypothesis is a theory that explains how different communication channels vary in their ability to convey information effectively.	According to the theory, valuable content provides equivocality and certainty.
7.	Mood management theory	Mood Management Theory suggests people choose media to enhance their mood.	Content consumers seek content aligning with their emotional state.
8.	Self-determination theory	Self-determination theory emphasizes on intrinsic motivation, which stems from a desire for individual progress and satisfaction.	People consume content for fundamental growth tendencies and innate psychological requirements, such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness
9.	Self-congruity theory	Self-congruity theory posits that consumers prefer brands reflecting their self-image,	Content consumers seek content aligning with their self-image.

		leading to brand loyalty and positive attitudes.	
10.	Symbolic interactionism theory	People create meaning through social interactions, symbols, and interpretations, shaping their identities and understanding of the world.	Content consumers like to portray a version of themselves on social networking sites that may be distinct from the one they have in the real world.
11.	Cultivation theory	Cultivation theory posits that prolonged exposure to media shapes perceptions of reality, influencing attitudes and behaviors.	According to the cultivation idea, the more time people spend consuming content, the more strongly their vision of the outside world will resemble that which is depicted in the content.
12.	Concept of imagined communities	Socially constructed communities are unified by shared myths and symbols, despite geographic boundaries.	Customers look to brand content for versatility and thoughtful human touch
13.	Social constructivist theory	Social constructivist theory posits reality is constructed through social interactions, shaped by cultural norms, beliefs, and shared meanings.	Suggests that the increase in content creation and dissemination has given people a sense that they are all part of the same culture and society
14.	Theory of planned behaviour	The theory posits that intentions predict behavior, influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control.	According to the theory of planned behaviour, when consumers consume marketing messaging, they already know what they want to learn. Customers choose to interact with brands that benefit them.

According to the *agenda-setting theory* (McCombs, Shaw and Weaver, 2018), a content publisher can affect how much the public cares about an occasion, problem, or product. The content marketer can influence the public's perception of the product, preference for a certain brand, and reaction to the company's offerings (Safiullah, Pathak, and Singh, 2022; Anuj et al. 2023).

On the contrary, the *limited effects theory* (Tamim et al., 2011) states that whatever form of effect that media has on individuals is limited. Instead, the limited effects theory focuses the onus on the audience, contending that each person has the power to decide which media they choose to absorb and which they do not. According to the *selective perception theory*, a person is inclined to select media sources that support the ideas and beliefs they already hold. Thus, the content itself has the potential to shift the customers' attitudes (Choi and Lee, 2017).

The *media dependency theory* claims that all three of these participants (i.e. speaker, media, and audience) rely on each other for information to achieve their goals (Arifin, Raharja, and Nugroho, 2023; Drossos, Coursaris, & Kagiouli, 2023). Despite being a theory of mass communication, it fits in well with MGC's objectives of value creation and value exchange. According to the *theory of media*

dependency, audiences' needs for understanding, information, or enjoyment contribute to dependence upon content (Sun and Zhang, 2021).

If someone is happy with the media he consumes, he will likely become more reliant on it for news and amusement. These requirements fall into one of three categories: Surveillance- It entails the necessity to be aware of what is going on in the environment around us. Social Utility- This implies acquiring news and information for a gainful purpose, such as financial products seller sharing knowledge on investing in stocks or other assets. Escape- This is the desire to merely remove oneself from the monotony of life, by indulging in brand-created material on goods, do-it-yourself projects, popular topics etc. (Misra and Mukherjee, 2019).

Entertainment education is a mass communication approach associated with the development and production of specific media. It especially refers to programs made to enlighten and entertain the audience. According to the notion, entertainment education can influence social functions, affect social structures, and inspire change. This is accomplished by modifying the audiences' attitudes and, eventually, their actions (Lou and Xie, 2020).

From a *value-creation perspective*, we need to first understand what customers demand from marketers in terms of content priorities. According to the *media richness hypothesis*, valuable content provides equivocality and certainty. For instance, the media must have a wealth of information, specifics, or data to help eliminate doubt over the nature of an event (Taiminen and Ranaweera, 2019).

According to *mood management theory*, a person may interact with a particular form of content to elevate their mood. The *self-determination* and *self-congruity theories* support that people consume content for fundamental growth tendencies and innate psychological requirements, such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Koob; 2021; Mehta, Sharma and Khanna, 2023). We all portray a version of ourselves on social networking sites that may be distinct from the one we have in the real world. According to the *symbolic interactionism theory*, we construct this identity through our interactions with others on social media, just as those same contacts with individuals in the real world aid in the development of the identity we project to them (Chen, Davison, and Ou, 2020).

Cultivation theory (Morgan, Shanahan and Signorielli, 2015) of psychology questions how active we are when we consume content. As per psychologists, the attention economy is characterized by consumers' difficulty focusing on specific brands because of the noise that social media has created. In 2004, Timothy Wilson wrote in his book that our eyes process 10 million pieces of information each second. However, we can only cognitively process 40 of them at once (Wilson, 2004). According to the cultivation idea, the more time people spend consuming content, the more strongly their vision of the outside world will resemble that which is depicted in the content. Therefore, when used by content marketers, consumer attitudes can be improved toward the brand content (Stein, Krause, and Ohler, 2021).

The *concept of imagined communities* and *social constructivist theory* suggests that the increase in content creation and dissemination has given people a sense that they are all part of the same culture and society (Kavoura and Borges, 2016). Behavioural intent is the central idea in the *theory of planned behaviour*; behavioural intentions are impacted by attitudes toward the likelihood that the conduct will have the desired consequence and by a subjective assessment of the risks and advantages of that outcome. According to the theory of planned behaviour, when consumers consume marketing messaging, they already know what they want to learn (Raval and Makhija, 2023). Customers choose

to interact with brands that benefit them. The theory states that behavioural achievement depends on both motivation (intention) and ability (behavioural control). Customers look to brand content for versatility and thoughtful human touch. Customers feel empowered by choice and increasing control over their data (Pires, Stanton, and Rita, 2006).

5. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

We use communication, resource-based, motivation, and psychological theories as method theories to explore the domain of consumer attitudes toward MGC. According to the *uses and gratification theory*, audiences actively seek out certain media to meet their wants (Logan, 2017). Marketers view the content consumer as a logical, active participant who chooses the content wisely. Content that does not align with their values, attitudes, or views tend to be avoided by consumers (Nobar, Kalejahi and Rostamzadeh, 2020; Al-Hawary and Obiadat, 2021). According to Schramm and Winfield (2017), we choose our media by estimating the level of satisfaction we would experience after consuming it. We use various social media platforms for various purposes. For example, we use Twitter for textual information that is frequently political, Instagram for visually appealing visual content and LinkedIn for professional networking.

Based on arguments using multiple theories and empirical evidence from the literature review, we identified factors that affect consumers' attitudes toward marketer-generated content (MGC). Trust, E-entertainment, Brand activism, social orientation, and Self-esteem are the factors that influence consumers' attitudes toward MGC (Figure 3).

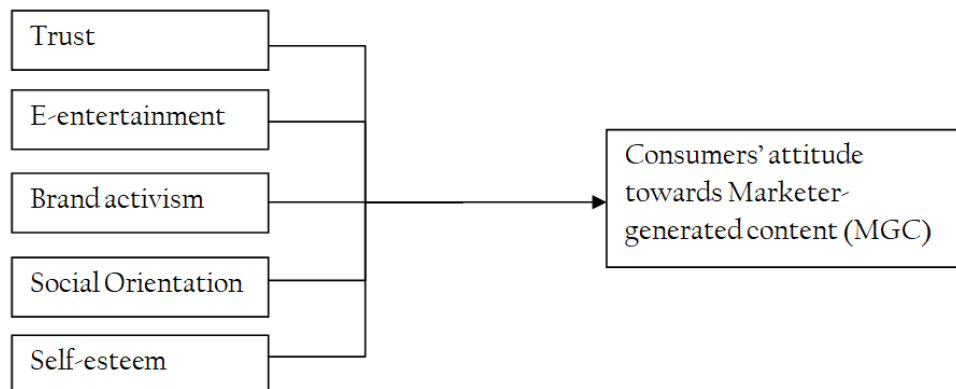


Figure 3 Proposed Conceptual Framework

5.1 Trust

Customers are increasingly experiencing data theft and leakage. In the fastest-growing digital world, data privacy is a myth (Choi and Lee, 2017; Shafiee and Shahin, 2021). In such an intrusive marketing age, content marketers should focus on winning consumers' trust in the content presented to them (Tiwari and Joshi, 2020). Consumers want reliable and accurate content. Studies show that they no longer believe in celebrity-endorsed products. Youngsters dislike the fictional stories created to attract them (Du Plessis, 2015; Hollebeek and Macky, 2019). Consumers want authentic and trusted content that fulfills their socially-expressive needs with organic inspiration and validation. As it turns out, most consumers are not looking for paid celebrity and complexity, but for content that boosts their trust in MGC (Geng et al., 2020).

Empowered by choice and increasing control over their personal data, trust is their source of hope. With long-established norms and a distant memory, customers are searching for firm footing

grounded in trust. Trust/attitude comes from being treated sensitively and not lost in an anonymized system. Setting grounds on cultivation theory, consumers repeated exposure to trust-worthy content results in belief in the brand over time (Stein, Krause, and Ohler, 2021; Raval and Makhija, 2023).

Customers have a strong emotional bond with the brands they use most frequently (Antoniadis, Assimakopoulos, and Paltsoglou, 2021). Customers face the danger of becoming resentful of interactions that seem impersonal, such as waiting on hold or receiving useless offers (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Salesforce Research, 2022). Consumers today value authenticity and are more likely to interact with brands if the content is reliable (Nunes, Ordanini and Giambastiani, 2021).

- ***Proposition One: Trustworthy content leads to a positive attitude towards MGC.***

5.2 E-entertainment

The pandemic-accelerated trend of digital selling is still prevalent today. D2C sales conversations that were formerly held in person or virtually are now occurring over asynchronous channels such as messaging platforms, social media, and collaborative documents. Customers use an average of nine distinct channels to be engaged by businesses, proving that entertainment is as omnichannel as ever (Lou and Xie, 2020). Phone, Email, Online chat, Mobile app, Messenger apps, social media, Video chat, SMS, and Online portals are heavily utilized by marketers as well as consumers to share memes and have fun, and it can be termed as Electronic Entertainment (E-entertainment) (Yang, 2022).

Recently, many firms have used humorous social media content to increase customer interaction. The Uses and gratifications method and peripheral processing under ELM both support the idea that using creative content can help brands generate a buzz on social media (Teng, Khong, and Goh, 2014). Many people looking for entertainment are drawn to the various online marketing initiatives and creative events that firms routinely run on social media (Du Plessis, 2015).

- ***Proposition Two-One: Consumers who find entertainment in the content have a positive attitude toward MGC.***
- ***Proposition Two-Two: Consumers who find higher entertainment in the content have higher trust in MGC.***

5.3 Brand activism

Brand activism is defined as companies taking a public stance on contentious matters (Kotler and Sarkar, 2017). Therefore, brand activism allows customers a chance to assess how much of them a brand represents. Consumers have changed from being quiet individuals to a loud and collective group that wants to bring about change on a global scale (Arifin, Raharja, and Nugroho, 2023; Drossos, Coursaris, & Kagiouli, 2023). Higher self-brand similarity can help the customer relate to or personify the brand, leading them to have overwhelmingly favorable opinions of the brand's content (Mehta, Sharma and Khanna, 2023).

According to *consumer-brand identification theory*, a high degree of self-brand resemblance should ideally lead to a stronger identification of the self-brand and, as a result, to more positive brand attitudes (Büyükdag and Kitapci, 2021). Political scientist Noelle-Neumann's *Spiral of Silence theory* contends that people tend to keep their opinions to themselves out of fear of being shunned or rejected for holding a different viewpoint (Gearhart and Zhang, 2015). Therefore, brand activism may have a beneficial impact on how customers view MGC. Due to the lack of research on brand activism, its impact on customer attitudes, and their intent to follow a brand on social media, we now move on to our third hypothesis.

- ***Proposition Three: Brand activism positively affects customers' attitudes toward MGC.***

5.4 Social orientation

Brand followers are motivated individuals who voluntarily accept content when they follow specific brands on digital platforms, according to De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders (2017). According to the expectation-value model, if the reward (the content's deemed social-expressive value) is alluring, the person will be driven to complete the activity (consume the MGC). Customers prefer social media content to be updated and popular. On social media platforms, users may engage with brands directly and communicate their queries, concerns, and compliments as well as exchange information and engage in conversations with other users (Dwivedi et al. 2021).

Consumers' social interactions in fan communities may strengthen their social presence in the online retail environment, which improves consumers' trust in online vendors and thus raises purchase intention (Hutter et al., 2013; Geng et al., 2020).

- ***Proposition Four: Socially oriented content can positively affect customers' attitudes toward MGC.***

5.5 Self-esteem effect

Consumers consider how many people follow a brand and how frequently they communicate with it. Pentina et al. (2013) suggest that consumers are more fascinated by the number of followers and likes on the content rather than the content itself. These numbers are undoubtedly considered indicators of the brand's reputation in the social media space (Pentina et al., 2013). Consumers associate the quality of products with brand name and social media fame. Consumers try to show their well-off or social status by consuming products from a certain brand, which are perceived as high quality or expensive, or not affordable to other people (Nabi, O'CassandSiahtiri, 2019; Bowden and Mirzaei, 2021; Safiullah, Pathak, and Singh, 2022).

A social media platform does the job right. Social media platforms that let other users know that a customer is following a major brand may have a positive influence on one's self-esteem. When you follow a brand or like an MGC; Facebook informs your peers and social media friends about the same, and serves the quest for identity-fulfilling. Thus, follower count is positively associated with follower engagement and marketers' popularity (De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders, 2017).

Consumer brand identification theory states that consumers tend to perceive oneness with a brand. For example, associating with digitally big brands (e.g. Mameearth, Rolex watches, Giva jewelry) have a status effect because of their huge follower base. On the other hand, brands with a low follower-base may fail to attract and gain trust from potential buyers, which is supported by the *theory of viral marketing* (Quan et al. 2023). Studies (Tiwari and Joshi, 2020; Tafesse and Wood, 2021; Arifin, Raharja, and Nugroho, 2023) indicate that consumers have a negative attitude toward manufactured products from digitally unpopular brands.

- ***Proposition Five-One: The number of brand followers affects customers' attitude toward MGC.***
- ***Proposition Five-Two: Status (self-esteem) consumption tendency affects customers' attitude toward MGC.***
- ***Proposition Five-Three: Consumers who have higher status (self-esteem) consumption tendency have a positive attitude toward MGC.***

6. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

As marketing is a battle of attitudes, not products, thus, marketers are advised to invest in content to build consumers' favourable attitudes toward the brand. Every day competitors —thereby losing attention span— yet only a few studies talk about diminishing the reliability and authenticity of marketer-generated content (MGC) roll out an increasing volume of content. With competition as fierce as ever, media companies and marketers must relentlessly try to improve consumers' attitudes toward brands' content marketing efforts. There exists a dearth of theoretical and empirical evidences on the factors affecting consumers' attitudes toward MGC. The study develops a conceptual framework by integrating literature from various disciplines and provides implications for practices and research:

6.1 Implications for practice

- Based on empirical and theoretical literature reviews, five constructs are identified as factors affecting consumers' attitudes toward MGC. Trust, E-entertainment, Brand activism, social orientation, and Self-esteem are factors that affect consumers' attitudes toward MGC.
- As per findings, to improve the attitude of consumers toward MGC, brands have to build consumer trust in content and entertain consumers through knowledge, expertise, fun elements, and gamification.
- Study found that brand activism, follower base, digital popularity, and socially oriented content positively affect consumers' attitudes toward MGC.
- Furthermore, it will provide a good understanding to content marketers and writers to deal with the fastest-growing consumer expectations.
- *6.2 Implications for research*
- This study adds to the literature on digital content marketing by establishing conceptual linkages with other disciplines including mass communication, sociology, resource-based, motivation, personality and psychology theories.
- This study is a good beginning point for researchers interested in empirically investigating customers' attitudes toward brand content in the context of consumer behaviour and digital marketing.
- After being put to the test, the model will offer academics, consumer behaviour analysts, and digital marketers a wealth of new information.

6.3 Scope for further research

The proposed conceptual framework and the five constructs it comprises provide a basis for further research aimed at exploring the relationships between the relevant variables that affect attitudes towards digital content marketing. The analysis presented in the results section yields a set of research questions that are both complex and thought provoking. These questions merit further empirical investigation to fully explore, refine and validate the conceptual framework, as evidenced by the propositions outlined throughout the theory building section.

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