

**Research Article**

# Digital Content Marketing Strategy in Increasing Customer Engagement in Covid-19 Situation

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Received: 10.10.20, Revised: 30.11.20, Accepted: 23.12.20

**ABSTRACT**

Today's customer-focused marketing aims to get customer engagement to be a concern for practitioners and academics. This research sees from the perspective of content marketing communication that uses two different theories of content marketing, namely the use and generation theory (UGT) that delivers customers value and the user-generated content (UGC) from the direct customers who deliver it. The quantitative approach was taken by taking a sample of 267 respondents who visit the e-commerce shopping mall in Indonesia. The results of the study stated that the two theories of content marketing have a significant effect on customer engagement and purchase intentions as well as the customer engagement plays a mediating role in the effect of digital content marketing on purchase intention. Companies can focus on content delivered through the website that is useful to attract customers to be involved in the product marketing process both intentionally and unintentionally.

**Keywords:** Used and generations, user-generated content, customer engagement, purchase intention

**INTRODUCTION**

The current digital era has changed the marketing style of many companies from traditional to digital. The importance of website providers serves useful content in forming attitudes and attracting consumers' interest to visit the website provided. Consumers need to be given an online shopping experience that is entertaining, informative, and free of distractions when making the purchase process (Lim & Ting, 2012). However, Wolfenbarger & Gilly (2003) found that electronic consumers tend to be more goal-oriented than experience-oriented when shopping. This online purchasing process needs a Digital Marketing concept, considered as the right step in penetrating the market to digital customers. Digital marketing as an adaptive process made possible by technology companies can collaborate with customers and partners to jointly create, communicate, deliver, and maintain value for all stakeholders (Kannan & Li, 2016) so that the company can get the customer engagement to be long-life customer loyalty. However, customer engagement currently is still an issue in digital communication goals that involve customers in the marketing process (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019; Sheng, 2019).

To have customer engagement, the company must implement the concept of digital content marketing (DCM), introduced by Koiso-kanttila (2004). He said that in the implementation of digital content marketing is an important part of how customers view information as advertising or

as the marketing communication activity. Marketing communication is related to the delivery of information or messages to customers that might influence their behavior. For digital content, marketing and product communication is information. The implementation of DCM is intended to establish long-term customer relationships and can encourage customer involvement or engagement with brands (Taiminen & Ranaweera, 2019). Previous research uses the use and gratification theory (UGT) to explain the measurement of digital content marketing (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). UGT can help to explain how the consumers' motivation and attitudes on social media content from information content, entertainment content, social interaction, and self-expression factors, based on UGT (Bu, Parkinson, & Thaichon, 2020). The use of content marketing is considered different from advertising which is usually directly aimed at sales, but DCM aims in the long term by getting customer engagement (Baumöl, Hollebeek, & Jung, 2016). Then, Prentice et al. (2019) stated that customer engagement has been identified as an important antecedent that influences customer purchases in online shopping

This study is interesting because previous studies only looked at content marketing that was communicated by the company or what is called DCM (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019; Yang, Ren, & Adomavicius, 2019). However, content marketing can also be directly communicated by consumers,

called user-generated content. Consumers will also trust in reviews from people who have bought the product because it looks natural (Sethna, Hazari, & Bergiel, 2017). The utilization of User-generated content in marketing has proven to have a positive impact on the performance of B2B and B2C companies (Liu, 2020).

Previous researchers have discussed a lot about DCM with its implications for purchase intentions. However, there still are inconsistent research results, by several studies. (Sethna et al., 2017) states that the use of DCM has a significant relationship to purchase intentions. However, other research states there is no influence on customer behavior because DCM is only a reminder (Malthouse, Calder, Kim, & Vandenbosch, 2016). Therefore, this research aims to examine whether digital marketing content affects purchase intention, mediated by customer engagement.

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

### Use and Gratification Theory (UGT) and User Generated Content (UGC)

(Hollebeek & Macky, 2019) stated that digital marketing content (DCM) is the process of creating and disseminating relevant and valuable content associated with brands to customers or prospectively on a digital platform to develop brands that benefit them through engagement, trust, and relationships. Good digital marketing content can be measured by using use and gratification theory (UGT) which explains a person's functional, hedonic, and authentic motivation. UGT is the main theoretical method for studying the motivation of individuals to use certain media and to explain their reasons for using certain media channels. Besides, UGT helps explain the motivation to engage in social media content (Plume & Slade, 2018).

UGT is one of the theories of communication on social media introduced by (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974). There are five basic assumptions from the Uses and Gratifications Theory, first is the active audience and the use of the media is goal-oriented. Second, the initiative in connecting the satisfaction needs for certain media choices lies with the audience. Third, the media compete with other sources for the satisfaction of needs. Fourth, a person has enough self-awareness of their use of media, interests, and motives so that they can provide an accurate picture of their use. Fifth, the assessment of media content can only be done by an audience. The theory begins with research on radio communication media that removes content

that is listened to by the listener, and it can influence attitude (Fiske & Lazarsfeld, 1946).

The basic assumption about UGT is that users are actively involved in media use and interact widely with communication media. Given the interactive nature and direction inherent in users from the internet, UGT is very suitable for investigating the use of internet consumers (Azam, 2015). (Lim, 2015b; Lim & Ting, 2012) used UGT indicators in terms of entertainment gratification, and information gratification. Entertainment is defined as an entertainment construct that refers to the extent to which website media can be fun and can entertain users (Eighmey & Mccord, 1998). When websites and media provide higher entertainment value, it will lead to benefits for users and motivate them to use media more often (Lim & Ting, 2012). On the other hand, information gratification is defined as the extent to which a website can provide users with sensible and useful information (Ducoffe, 1995).

Moreover, digital content marketing can also be done by consumers directly called user-generated content (UGC) which can be used in various ways to influence individual online behavior (N. Huang et al., 2018). The form of the UGC is users who make content and ratings on online reviews such as experience in buying products or services, and this is important information for potential customers (Banerjee & Chai, 2019). In measuring how high the value of UGC is, (Hazari, Bergiel, & Sethna, 2016; Sethna et al., 2017) adopt the UGC-forming dimensions such as Hedonic and Utilitarian. Hedonic is defined as pure enjoyment, excitement, captivation, escapism, and spontaneity. Whereas utilitarian is defined as an expression of achievement or disappointment over the ability or inability to complete the process at the time of shopping (Babin, Darden, & Griffin, 1994). Other studies explain that purchase intentions will be more highly influenced by user-generated content than advertisements that are displayed, so companies should also consider using UGC (Mayrhofer, Matthes, Einwiller, & Naderer, 2019). Therefore, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

H1: DCM based on UGT factors significantly affects customer engagement

H2: DCM based on UGC dimensions has a significant effect on customers engagement

H3: DCM based on UGT factors has a significant effect on purchase intention

H4: DCM based on UGC dimensions has a significant effect on purchase intention

Customer Engagement and Purchase Intention

Customer Engagement is defined as the efforts made by companies to motivate, empower, and measure how much customers can contribute to

the company (Harmeling, Moffett, Arnold, & Carlson, 2016). Customer engagement has forming dimensions namely vigor, dedication, and absorption (Molinillo, Anaya-Sánchez, & Liébana-Cabanillas, 2020). Vigor is characterized by mental endurance when working with high energy and can be persistent despite difficulties. Dedication is marked as a sense of pride, inspiration, enthusiasm, and feeling to be a challenge. Absorption is characterized as the feeling of someone who is focused on something until it doesn't feel time passes quickly and that person enjoys it (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-romá, & Bakker, 2002).

Customer engagement can also be used as a mediation effect to improve the performance of the company (Garg, Gupta, Dzever, Sivarajah, & Kumar, 2020). Customer engagement must be recognized by the company as important because customers interact with their products (Hazari et al., 2016). Customer engagement can be influenced by content created by companies or direct customers. Of course, the results of user-generated content will vary according to the customers' experience. These differences will have an impact on customer engagement that varies according to what customers see (Yang et al., 2019). UGC can convince customers to complete a purchase by providing information about attributes such as quality, value, and benefits of a product or service.

Companies must be able to motivate customers to become the opinion leaders of products consumed and direct them into social networks so that they can interact with other customers to influence consumer purchase intentions (Prentice et al., 2019). In measuring customer purchase intentions, many researchers previously used the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991). The theory explains that the higher the intention of someone to do something, the higher the intention also will be done. There are three dimensions in measuring it through cognitive and affective processes. The first is the attitude towards behavior which is interpreted as the attitude of someone in evaluating something that is considered beneficial or not. The second is the subjective norm which means someone does something because there is social pressure. The third is the level of behavior control is defined as behavior that is influenced by the past and the ease or difficulty in doing so (Ajzen, 1991). Therefore, this study also proposes the following hypothesis:

H5: Customer engagement has a significant effect on purchase intention

Customer engagement has a positive mediating role in the effect of DCM based on UGT factors on purchase intention

Customer engagement has a positive mediating role in the effect of DCM based on UGC dimensions on purchase intention

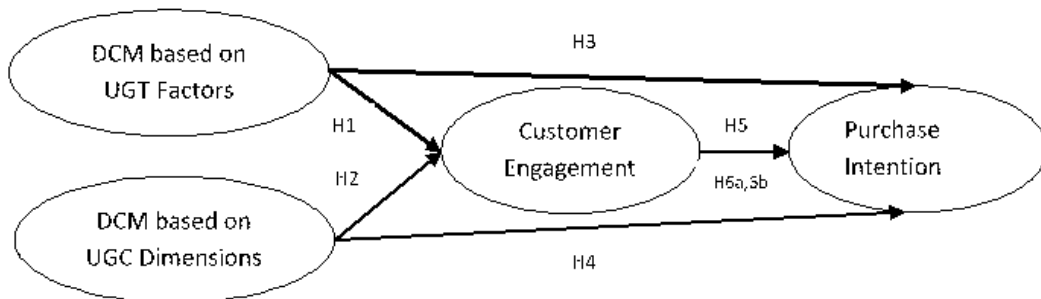


Fig.1: Research model

**METHOD**

The main objective of this research is to examine whether digital content marketing using UGT and UGC affect customer engagement and purchase intention. Considering the rise of online purchases using e-commerce, we focus on customers who have already purchased products online using e-commerce platforms in Indonesia. With a quantitative approach, this study conducted online interviews with 267 respondents. Adopting relevant previous research measurements such as use and gratification measurements (Lim & Ting, 2012), user-generated content (Hazari et al., 2016; Sethna et al., 2017), customer engagement (Molinillo et al.,

2020), and purchase intention (Chiu, Kim, & Won, 2018). Use a Likert scale with 1 = strongly disagree until 5 = strongly agree.

Data processing using SmartPLS 3.0 statistical tools to test reliability and validity with a scale tested from Cronbach's Alpha, Average Variance Extracted, and Composite Reliability. Table 1 shows the assessment of the validity measurements of 40 items having an outer loading value > 0.50 (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt, & Ringle, 2018). Table 2 shows that the Average Variance Extracted value of 0.504 to 0.558 above the required value of > 0.5 (Hair et al., 2018), means that the model is valid. Composite reliability is also important to be seen as the

consistency of internal models with values from 0.938 which shows reliable results > 0.70  
0.874 to 0.945 and Cronbach alpha 0.833 to (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

**Table 1: Measures and Factor Loadings**

| Item   |  | Factor Loading | Findings |
|--|--|----------------|----------|
| <b>Use and Gratifications Factors (UGT)</b>  | (Lim, 2015a; Lim & Ting, 2012)             |                |          |
| <b>Entertainment gratification</b>   |  |                | Valid    |
| I find it entertaining to shop at online retailers   |  | 0,791          |          |
| I find that online shopping sites are fun to use   |  | 0,806          |          |
| I feel excited when I shop online  |  | 0,779          |          |
| Using online shopping sites to purchase products provide me with lots of enjoyment.  |  | 0,744          |          |
| I have fun when interacting with online shopping sites   |  | 0,739          |          |
| <b>Informativeness gratification</b>   |  |                | Valid    |
| It is important that online shopping sites are able to give me information that is of interest to me.                                      |  | 0,763          |          |
| Accurate information on online shopping sites improves my shopping effectiveness.  |  | 0,706          |          |
| Timely information on online shopping sites improves my shopping performance.  |  | 0,694          |          |
| Information in online shopping sites that is useful in aiding my shopping decisions is appreciated.  |  | 0,740          |          |
| Information in online shopping sites that makes it easier for me to compare product choices when shopping at online retailers is desirable |  | 0,702          |          |
| <b>USER GENERATED CONTENT (UGC)</b>  | (Hazari et al., 2016; Sethna et al., 2017) |                |          |
| <b>Hedonic</b>   |  |                | Valid    |
| Information searching on the internet is fun rather than tedious.  |  | 0,690          |          |
| Searching for information on the internet is a good way to spend time.   |  | 0,613          |          |
| I find searching for information on the internet to be enjoyable.  |  | 0,839          |          |
| <b>Utilitarian</b>   |  |                | Valid    |
| It is convenient to gather information from the internet.  |  | 0,796          |          |
| Gathering information by using the internet saves time.  |  | 0,688          |          |
| Reading user comments/reviews is a worthwhile use of my time.  |  | 0,661          |          |
| The internet can be a useful tool to compare information about products from different websites  |  | 0,822          |          |
| When shopping online, the availability of high-quality product reviews provided by users is very important to me                           |  | 0,760          |          |
| <b>CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT</b>   | (Molinillo et al., 2020)                   |                |          |
| <b>Vigor</b>   |  |                | Valid    |
| I can continue using this e-commerce site for very long periods at a time.   |  | 0,697          |          |
| I feel strong and vigorous when I am participating in this e-commerce site.  |  | 0,792          |          |
| I feel very resilient, mentally, as far as this e-commerce site is concerned.  |  | 0,756          |          |
| In this e-commerce site, I always persevere, even when things do not go well.  |  | 0,559          |          |
| <b>Dedication</b>  |  |                | Valid    |

|  |                     |       |       |
|--|---------------------|-------|-------|
| I am enthusiastic about this e-commerce site.<br>This e-commerce site inspires me. |                     | 0,724 |       |
| I found this e-commerce site full of meaning and purpose.                          |                     | 0,723 |       |
| I am excited when using this e-commerce site.                                      |                     | 0,743 |       |
| I am interested in this social e-commerce site.                                    |                     | 0,789 |       |
| I am proud of using this e-commerce site.  |                     | 0,754 |       |
| <b>Absorption:</b>   |                     |       |       |
| Time flies when I am participating in this e-commerce site.                        |                     | 0,716 |       |
| Using this e-commerce site is so absorbing that I forget about everything else.    |                     | 0,666 |       |
| I am rarely distracted when using this e-commerce site.                            |                     | 0,662 |       |
| I am immersed in this e-commerce site.   |                     | 0,683 |       |
| My mind is focused on when using this e-commerce site.                             |                     | 0,741 |       |
| I pay a lot of attention to this e-commerce site                                   |                     | 0,741 |       |
| <b>Purchase Intention</b>  | (Chiu et al., 2018) |       |       |
| <b>Attitude</b>  |                     |       | Valid |
| I think that purchasing goods online is good.                                      |                     | 0,816 |       |
| I think that purchasing goods online is wise                                       |                     | 0,799 |       |
| I think that purchasing goods online is worthwhile.                                |                     | 0,826 |       |
| <b>Subjective norm</b>   |                     |       | Valid |
| Most people who are important to me support that I purchase goods online.          |                     | 0,533 |       |
| Most people who are important to me understand that I purchase goods online.       |                     | 0,577 |       |
| <b>Perceived behavioral control</b>  |                     |       | Valid |
| If I want, I can purchase goods online.  |                     | 0,690 |       |
| I am capable of purchasing goods online.   |                     | 0,670 |       |

**Table 2: Construct Reliability dan Validity**

|                           | Cronbach's Alpha | Composite Reliability | Average Variance Extracted (AVE) | Findings           |
|---------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------|
| Customer Engagement       | 0,938            | 0,945                 | 0,520                            | Reliable and Valid |
| Digital Content Marketing | 0,912            | 0,926                 | 0,558                            | Reliable and Valid |
| Purchased Intention       | 0,833            | 0,874                 | 0,504                            | Reliable and Valid |
| User Generated Content    | 0,878            | 0,904                 | 0,544                            | Reliable and Valid |

## RESULT

Inner model testing is also called structural model testing. This test is based on the goodness of fit (GoF) index. GoF index can be explained by three GoF categories, namely small = 0.1; medium = 0.25; and large = 0.36. The GoF index in this study was 0.574, so it can be concluded that this model is good (Tenenhaus, Amato, & Vinzi, 2004). After the measurement model measured by the GoF index is good, the structural model examination will then be conducted which will focus on the hypothesis testing path coefficient (Sarstedt & Cheah, 2019). Table 3 shows a good R<sup>2</sup> value, obtained for all endogenous variables.

Examination of each hypothesis is performed by bootstrapping which results in all hypotheses H1, H2, H3, H4, H5, H6a, and H6b are supported. Table 4 shows the results of the significant value in hypothesis 1 ( $t = 6,567, p > 0.01$ ) which assumes that there is a significant direct relationship between users and gratification on customer engagement. Hypothesis 2 states that user-generated content has a significant effect on customer engagement with a value ( $t = 6,808, p > 0.01$ ). Hypothesis 3 states that used and generation has a significant effect on purchase intention with a value ( $t = 3.220, p > 0.01$ ). Hypothesis 4 states that user-generated content has a significant effect on purchase intentions

with the result value ( $t = 3.091, p > 0.01$ ). Hypothesis 5 states that customer engagement has a significant effect on purchase intentions with a value ( $t = 10.691, p > 0.01$ ). Testing the effect of mediation shows that customer engagement plays a mediating role in the effect of DCM based UGT on purchase intentions partially with the value ( $t = 4.982, p > 0.01$ ), and customer engagement also plays a mediating role in the effect of DCM based on UGC on purchase intention partially with the value ( $t = 6.504, p >$

$0.01$ ). the mediation effect shows partial mediation because exogenous variables are also able to directly affect endogenous variables without going through mediator variables (Nitzl, Roldan, & Cepeda, 2016).

**Table 3: R Square**

|                     | R Square |
|---------------------|----------|
| Customer Engagement | 0,517    |
| Purchased Intention | 0,692    |

**Table 4: Path Coefficients**

|   | Original Sample (O) | T Statistics ( O/STDEV ) | P Values | Findings  |
|---|---------------------|--------------------------|----------|-----------|
| GCM based on Used and Gratification factors -> Customer Engagement        | 0,394               | 6,567                    | 0,000    | Supported |
| GCM based User Generated Content dimensions -> Customer Engagement        | 0,388               | 6,808                    | 0,000    | Supported |
| GCM based on Used and Gratification factors -> Purchased Intention        | 0,190               | 3,220                    | 0,001    | Supported |
| GCM based on User Generated Content -> Purchased Intention                | 0,181               | 3,091                    | 0,002    | Supported |
| Customer Engagement -> Purchased Intention                                | 0,553               | 10,691                   | 0,000    | Supported |
| DCM based on UGT factors -> Customer Engagement -> Purchased Intention    | 0,218               | 4,982                    | 0,000    | Supported |
| DCM based on UGC dimensions -> Customer Engagement -> Purchased Intention | 0,214               | 6,504                    | 0,000    | Supported |

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study is to look at the effect of digital marketing content conducted by e-commerce companies in Indonesia to be able to influence purchase intentions through customer engagement as a mediating role. The results of the study provide evidence that digital marketing content which this study uses two theories of content marketing namely use and generations (UGT) and user-generated content (UGC) has a positive impact on customer engagement and purchase intentions, These results support the results of previous research (T. Huang, Bao, & Li, 2017; Sethna et al., 2017; Yang et al., 2019). Customer engagement also has an indirect effect seen from the causal relationship between the two exogenous variables. This becomes important because the role of the customer in the marketing process of communication addressed by the customer itself is urgently needed to increase customer purchase intentions for online shopping in e-commerce. For example, when a company can provide useful content for customers, as well as utilize content that is directly delivered by customers who have purchased products that post on social media and websites, it will become a force for customers to visit and make purchases

on e-websites or e-commerce. In general, this implies that there will strengthen customer engagement based on UGT and UGC dimensions that potentially will build strong communication through the worth of mouth communications among existing consumers or toward other potential customers so that the potential consumers are willing to buy the online products or services.

### Theoretical Implications

Our research has several theoretical implications. First, increase knowledge about the types of digital marketing content. Because previous studies mainly focused on one theory of content marketing which was used as an antecedent (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019; Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016). This study looks at two approaches to content marketing that can influence purchase intentions, namely the theory of use and gratification and user-generated content. Things that must be considered in some existing content marketing theories, especially for the two theories in this study, researchers must make the content marketing strategy as a goal to help customers and boost the customer engagement in helping customers' online purchase activity, not the final sales orientation. The concept is by the results of

previous studies applying marketing content not only to B2B businesses but also to B2C (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). This research proves that the content delivered must target what the customer needs are and can solve customer problems rather than the company promoting the products offered. These results support the statement of previous studies (Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016). This research is the first to test content marketing with two perspectives which show that the marketing strategy can be integrated with customer engagement which is considered to have a very important role in building a research model related to digital content marketing.

### Managerial Implications

Looking at it from a practical perspective, digital marketing content theory can be a material consideration for managers in making decisions on marketing communication activities that can be applied to B2C e-commerce companies. First, managers can apply the theory of use and generations by providing useful content for customers. Because customers prefer to be provided with useful education rather than just being targeted for sales, although in the end what is desired is an increase in customer purchase intentions for companies that provide useful content so that customers unconsciously feel comfortable and choose them as the right product service provider. Furthermore, the application of user-generated content theory by involving customers in helping to communicate the value of the product either in a deliberate way that is managing customers or giving contest to public figures on social media and other media to review the benefits of the product as if the customer is using it and get its benefits. Because research results prove that the higher the content provided directly by the customer, the higher the purchase intention. By the results of previous studies stating that customers are more interested in statements given by customers directly than the company because it looks natural in delivering it and not engineered (Sethna et al., 2017). Marketing content can also affect customer engagement. Customers want to be directly involved because they feel usefulness on the website provided by the company and there are implications on the customer's purchase intention. Customization of content designed by companies can also be taken from the utilization of customer interactions with each other that exist on social media and websites (Meire, Hewett, Ballings, Kumar, & Van den Poel, 2019).

### Limitations and directions for future research

This study has several limitations that can be taken into consideration for future researchers. First, the object of research is an e-commerce

company in Indonesia, so it is necessary to examine other kinds of online or digital media, such as social media, used by many millennial generations, hypothesized it will get different results that it might be due to different value behavior. Secondly, the results of the study only measure up to purchase intention, bearing in mind that many previous research results test the relationship of repurchase intentions, it is necessary to have an additional variable influencing customer loyalty due to customer engagement. Third, testing can be done in other countries that have a different culture from Indonesia.

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