

## Essential Components and Dimensions of Digital Content Marketing: A Mixed-Method Approach

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** This study aims to develop a conceptual model for digital content marketing (DCM) by identifying its core components and dimensions.

**Method:** A mixed-methods approach was employed. First, in-depth interviews were conducted with 15 experts selected via snowball sampling. The interview transcripts were analyzed using MAXQDA software, yielding 137 initial codes which were synthesized into 26 subcategories. Subsequently, a quantitative survey was designed based on these findings. Using Cochran's formula, a sample of 384 users of Digikala's Instagram page was selected through simple random sampling. Data collected from this questionnaire were analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM) with SmartPLS 3 software to test the study's hypotheses and validate the measurement model's structural validity.

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**Findings:** The analysis of qualitative data resulted in the identification of 26 key subcategories, which were further grouped into several primary dimensions of digital content marketing. These dimensions include: External Environment (Popularity of virtual spaces, competitive landscape, technical limitations, lack of access, and the impact of COVID-19), User Characteristics (Ease of use, individual traits, and social characteristics of customers), Marketing Strategy & Content (Attractiveness of content, methods for increasing audience engagement, providing diverse services, exchanging information, using a customer-friendly style, and enhancing brand building), Organizational Capabilities (Improving technical infrastructure, fostering customer orientation, market expansion, and increasing profitability), Consumer Response (Changing customer behavior, making interactions enjoyable, and increasing participation). The quantitative results from the SEM analysis confirmed that all measured variables (loadings) were statistically significant, providing strong empirical support for the proposed conceptual model.

**Conclusion:** The results demonstrates that all observable variables were significant and they were confirmed. This concequences indicates that the obtained model can be used in digital content marketing.

**Keywords:** Digital Content Marketing, Online Marketing, Brand Awareness, Grounded Theory

## Introduction

Since the inception of commerce, the fundamental principle of marketing has been to communicate the right message to the right audience at the right time and place. However, the starting point for this communication has shifted dramatically with the advent of the digital age. As customer behaviors and habits have evolved from relying on traditional marketing tools to embracing digital platforms, the focal point of marketing is now the internet—where audiences spend a significant portion of their time.

The internet and digital tools have become deeply integrated into daily life. Its rapid growth has created immense opportunities for both companies and consumers. Beyond enabling information search and cross-border communication, social media provides a platform for users to express opinions and emotions. Through various interactive online media, users share and exchange information, often recommending products and services they find satisfactory.

In today's technology-driven economy, customers have profoundly altered their behavior. They actively seek out extensive information about products and services, often becoming aware of them long before engaging with a seller. Modern consumers educate themselves about advertising tactics and operational details, making them increasingly resistant to traditional advertisements, which they often view with skepticism. Furthermore, they exhibit a growing preference for customized products and services and frequently switch shopping channels. These behavioral shifts, compounded by the rising costs of traditional advertising, have fundamentally rewritten the rules of marketing (Nasseri, 2016).

It is due to this transformative landscape—and the current absence of a comprehensive model—that this research is necessary. There is a clear need to identify, predict, and monitor the various dimensions of digital content marketing, including influential factors, contextual conditions, intervening variables, strategic approaches, and consequential outcomes. Based on the research objectives, the research questions are described as follows:

- What is the conceptual model of digital content marketing?
- What are the main components and dimensions of digital content marketing that are needed to design and explain the conceptual model of digital content marketing?

## Literature Review

The rapid emergence of information and communication technologies has profoundly transformed how businesses communicate with customers (Halik et al., 2021). In a saturated market with thousands of brands vying for attention, success hinges on the ability to effectively introduce products and services. Historically, organizations have continuously sought new methods of promotion, with advertising being the most critical activity in this endeavor (Terho et al., 2022). Its role is so pivotal that it is often considered the heart of marketing (Kakkar, 2017).

However, advertising within internet marketing presents significant challenges. The prevalence of low-quality ads has eroded user trust in digital advertisements (Chaniago et al., 2023). Consequently, attracting customers now necessitates building trust and fostering brand satisfaction before a purchase is made—a core objective of digital content marketing (DCM) (Mozaffari et al., 2023). The widespread influence of social networks has created unprecedented opportunities for content creators to engage directly with audiences at a low cost, without the need for dedicated websites. This synergy means content marketing is intrinsically linked to social media marketing (Chaniago et al., 2023).

A fundamental aspect of digital marketing is the creation of valuable content. Digital content, broadly defined, is any information that delivers benefit (value-added) to both the organization and its users (Indriyani, 2023). DCM is defined as "a management process responsible for identifying, anticipating, and satisfying profitable customer needs" through relevant digital content. It serves as a vital tool for relationship marketing, fostering consumer attachments to brands and ultimately contributing to company performance (Carranza, 2017). The importance of DCM growth is well-established (Carmody, 2017; Hollebeek & Macky, 2019).

Despite its potential, DCM's novelty means its capabilities—such as greater audience interaction, ease of measuring effectiveness, and lower cost—and its methods (e.g., email marketing, social media marketing, video marketing, SEO) are not yet fully embraced by many domestic businesses. Furthermore, while significant research potential exists, few studies, particularly in identifying key effective factors of DCM across various industries, have been conducted. Therefore, further research in this

domain is critically needed.

The concept of DCM was introduced by Koiso and Kanttila (2004), referring to marketing where both the companies and the product delivery are digital. Such content is a crucial part of the modern business landscape. Digital inbound marketing focuses on creating content and investing in organic tactics based on mutual interactions to promote search visibility (Eshiett et al., 2022). DCM utilizes digital content as a pull marketing technique to attract customers; it involves providing free, valuable content about products or services to improve communication with other businesses and customers (Nasseri, 2016). It is a relatively new field that emphasizes the importance of valuable and relevant content in the marketing process (Roshandel Arbatani et al., 2015).

The growth of digital media and tools has further amplified the importance of DCM. Producing high-quality content is paramount for attracting audiences and increasing website traffic. Today, creating excellent and engaging content is a top priority for marketers. Engaging content is a primary reason people follow brands on social media; over 90% of customers find personalized content useful, and 78% believe that companies producing it are interested building strong relationships (Labafi, 2017).

Rising advertising costs and shifts in customer behavior have fundamentally changed marketing rules, forcing businesses to adopt the latest trends, including content marketing (Nasseri, 2016). A primary goal of DCM is to increase brand awareness by eliciting audience reaction to valuable content. Companies must understand that more customer contact points and a higher volume of messages do not equate to increased effectiveness. Distinguishing the brand and maintaining a few meaningful contact points is essential; sometimes, a single positive, unexpected brand interaction can cultivate a loyal supporter. Today, 40% of marketers want to learn more about digital marketing, but only 14% know how to do it effectively. Marketing priorities have shifted to data, measurement, brand building, and online conversion rates—concepts that were not central to traditional marketing until recently (Exact Target report). The digitization of information has made measurement possible, elevating its importance alongside digital marketing itself. This research, therefore, seeks to identify and analyze the key factors for designing a conceptual model for DCM.

A review of the most pertinent research reveals a fragmented approach to understanding DCM:

- Torkestani et al. (2022) identified categories like content personalization, emotional resonance, publication timing, and author identity as high priorities. However, they failed to provide a comprehensive model, focusing only on the content and audience.
- Tahmasebpour et al. (2021) identified six components of digital marketing (e.g., technical features, relative advantage) affecting tourist engagement but did not address the full spectrum of DCM dimensions (contextual, intervening, strategic).
- Farshadgohar et al. (2017) merely prioritized affecting factors without proposing an all-encompassing model.
- Nasser (2016) focused solely on content characteristics (inherent elements, form, distribution media, measurement) and neglected other critical dimensions.
- Lou and Xie (2020) emphasized brand experience and loyalty but overlooked other aspects of DCM.
- Taiminen and Ranaweera (2019) addressed support, engagement, and interaction as drivers for DCM but, like their predecessors, did not develop a holistic model.

Based on this investigation, DCM remains a nascent field with limited studies. No research, domestic or foreign, has focused on providing a comprehensive paradigm model for DCM. While existing studies have identified isolated components, none have synthesized these into a clear framework that includes causal conditions, contextual and intervening factors, strategies, and consequences. Therefore, given the importance of DCM in customer acquisition, retention, and behavior modification, this research is conducted to address this significant gap in the literature.

A summary of the research results related to the research topic is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Summary of research on digital content marketing**

Researcher	Research Title	Most Important Findings
Torkestani et al., 2022	Identifying indicators of digital content management to increase the involvement of cyberspace users with a hybrid approach	Among all the identified categories, the possibility of personalizing the content for each audience, the feelings hidden in the content, and the date of publication of the content, the author's membership and his/her identity in the online community were the highest priorities.

Zamani et al., 2022	Designing a Content Marketing Model to increase purchase intention in Digital Marketing	Digital marketing strategies are the underlying factor of the model that affects the content marketing strategy. In addition, the content marketing strategy itself affects consumers' knowledge management on and the quality of service delivery and development, ultimately leading to consumer conflict. Finally, by creating brand value and increasing its competitiveness, consumers' purchase intentions' can be increased.
Rostami et al., 2022	Providing a digital content marketing model to create consumer value	The process of achieving a digital content marketing model is a multifaceted issue. It requires simultaneous attention to the following factors: causal factors (mixed design of content marketing, focus on producing various types of content and online platforms), contextual factors (creativity in the digital market; attention to customers in content production, low production cost) content and digital branding), interventions (preparation and access to the web; crises and natural events, technical knowledge of the company and awareness of market issues), and strategies (planning to update content, distribute related content, create interactive content). Creating value for the customer by increasing information and decision-making power, creating value for the customer through improving relationships with customers, increasing the power of content marketers, and improving the content provided are also identified as the consequences of implementing the digital content marketing model.
Valibeigi et al., 2022	Investigating the effect of content marketing on attracting users to digital libraries	The findings also showed a positive and significant relationship between coordination with previous content, coordination of content with customer needs, appropriate volume of content, suitability of content format, and audience attraction in digital libraries. There is a positive and significant relationship between content marketing and customer loyalty, decision to request and order in digital libraries. The results of the regression analysis showed that 87.7% of the variance related to audience attraction in digital libraries is explained by the variables of appropriate content volume, content format suitability, and customer satisfaction with the content.
Melovic et al., 2020	Impact of digital transformation	The results showed that several determining factors, including the implementation period and

	and digital marketing on brand promotion, positioning and e-business	people's abilities, have a significant impact on the understanding of digital marketing efficiency. However, in this study, social networks were analyzed as the most common form of digital marketing in the market, and Google analysis was the most common method to measure the effects of digital marketing. In addition, the results showed that the more a company relies on the use of digital marketing in its business, the greater its impact on brand promotion and brand positioning.
Mathew, and Soliman 2020	Does digital content marketing affect tourism consumer behavior? Development of the technology acceptance model	Perceived enjoyment and convenience are precursors to customers' attitudes, which in turn influence their intention and behavior to use digital content marketing to purchase or choose a specific tourism product/service. This study also contributes to the knowledge of this field. The digital content marketing literature in the field of tourism in general and in the target area in particular also adds to the studies on digital technologies by expanding two important constructs related to tourism consumer behavior. The practical implications greatly support marketers and tourism officials in developing their tourism strategies and marketing activities.
Lou and Xie, 2020	How Digital Content Marketing Enhances Consumer Experience and brand loyalty	The research findings emphasize the value of brand content marketing in shaping brand experiences and customer loyalty. Brands with high product engagement can invest in creating content that has informative or entertaining value that helps create pleasant consumer experiences. The current findings suggest that social value plays an insignificant role in consumer brand experience, especially for high-involvement products. The two products used in this study often act as beneficial products. This study examined brand videos on YouTube. Online video undoubtedly promises the most growth in ad revenue; however, visual feature-based platforms such as Instagram (mainly images) also offer great potential for branded content marketing. Furthermore, this study conceptualized and examined emotional processing as a central mechanism that explains the impact of brand content marketing on brand loyalty.
Bu et al., 2021	Digital Content Marketing as a	This article examines how digital content marketing can create social influence, and how this



	Catalyst for Electronic Word-of-mouth Marketing in Food Tourism	social influence can lead to electronic word-of-mouth communication. A sample of 707 Chinese tourists completed an online survey. The results indicate that a positive relationship found between content entertainment and informational social influence and between self-expression and normative social influence. Content information and social interaction had a positive relationship with normative and informational social influence. Normative and informational social influence have a positive effect on electronic word-of-mouth communication. Social influence plays a mediating role between digital content marketing and electronic word-of-mouth communication.
Taiminen, and Ranaweera, 2019	Fostering brand engagement and valuable business-to-business communications through digital content marketing - the role of brand contributors	In this research, a series of useful brand actions are presented, which form the basis of the dual roles of a brand in increasing customer value, and strengthening engagement with the brand, and creating connections. This approach helps professionals channel brand perceptions resulting from digital content marketing interactions into building authentic brand relationships. By revealing a potential approach to digital content marketing in customer relationship management, this study contributes to the marketing literature to support engagement and communication. This study demonstrates the potential of brand-initiated digital content marketing as an engagement driver for engaging consumers with brand versus content.
Hollebeek, and Macky, 2019	Role of digital content marketing in fostering consumer engagement, trust, and value: framework, underlying propositions, and implications	This research identifies the important implications of consumer-based digital content marketing, including informed consumption and satisfaction, hedonic performance, and motivation-based validity for digital content marketing interactions. The first-order consequences and internal interaction of digital content marketing include the cognitive, emotional and behavioral involvement of consumers, which, respectively, lead to the strengthening of the sense of belonging to the brand, identification and citizenship behaviors. These, in turn, stimulate and create second-level outcomes and super-interactions of digital content marketing brand trust and brand attitude, which in turn contribute to the development of consumer digital content marketing outcomes and company-based brand equity.

## Method

The research population for the qualitative phase consisted of experts in the field of digital content marketing (DCM), encompassing both academic and industry professionals. This included university professors specializing in DCM, as well as practitioners and experts actively involved in digital content production from digital marketing agencies. Participants were selected using snowball sampling and were required to meet the following criteria: a minimum of five years of combined scientific, research, and executive experience in the field, and possession of at least a master's degree (or a PhD) in marketing management, information technology management, or a closely related discipline.

Data collection was conducted through unstructured in-depth interviews. The interview questions were designed to elicit information corresponding to the core categories of a paradigmatic model:

- What factors affect digital content marketing? (*Causal conditions*)
- What are the underlying factors of digital content marketing? (*Contextual conditions*)
- What factors intervene in the implementation of digital content marketing? (*Intervening conditions*)
- What strategies can be adopted to address or overcome these issues? (*Strategies*)
- What are the consequences of implementing these strategies? (*Outcomes*)

In Quantitative phase, the interviews continued until theoretical saturation was reached. Analysis of the data using MAXQDA software indicated that data repetition began occurring after the 12th interview, suggesting that no new conceptual information was emerging from additional participants.

The statistical population for the quantitative phase comprised all users of Digikala's Instagram page. As this population is effectively infinite, the sample size was determined using Cochran's formula for unknown populations, resulting in a required sample of 384 individuals. Participants were selected via simple random sampling. This population was chosen to enable the implementation and confirmation of the derived model among a diverse user base.

The research instrument was a researcher-made questionnaire, the items of which were developed from the concepts and codes identified in the qualitative analysis phase. The subsequent quantitative analysis

involved defining hypotheses based on the qualitative model and testing them using structural equation modeling (SEM). Furthermore, confirmatory factor analysis was performed to assess the structural validity of the measurement model, utilizing SmartPLS 3 software for these computations.

### **Data Analysis Method: Qualitative Phase**

The data obtained from the interviews were analyzed using the grounded theory technique. This involved a systematic process of coding to develop concepts and categories from the raw data.

**Open Coding:** following the interviews with experts, which were conducted according to a specific protocol and recorded digitally, the audio files were transcribed verbatim. The transcribed texts were then subjected to open coding. In this initial stage, the data were broken down into discrete incidents, ideas, and events, which were then labeled to form initial codes. These codes were subsequently grouped into similar conceptual categories, as illustrated in Table 2.

**Axial Coding:** axial coding, the second stage of analysis, aimed to establish connections between the categories identified during open coding. This phase is termed "axial" because it revolves around the axis of a central category. Here, the researcher selects one core category to serve as the central phenomenon and systematically relates all other categories to it under specific paradigms (such as causal conditions, strategies, and contexts). This process helps in building a dense network of relationships around the core category.

**Selective Coding:** selective coding is the final step, involving the integration and refinement of the categories to form a grounded theory. In this stage, the central category is definitively chosen, and its systematic relationships with all other categories are delineated and validated. Categories that require further refinement are developed until theoretical completeness is achieved. Based on the outcomes of the open and axial coding stages, selective coding was performed according to the paradigm model structure, organizing the categories into causal conditions, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences. The general results for all three coding stages are summarized in Table 2.

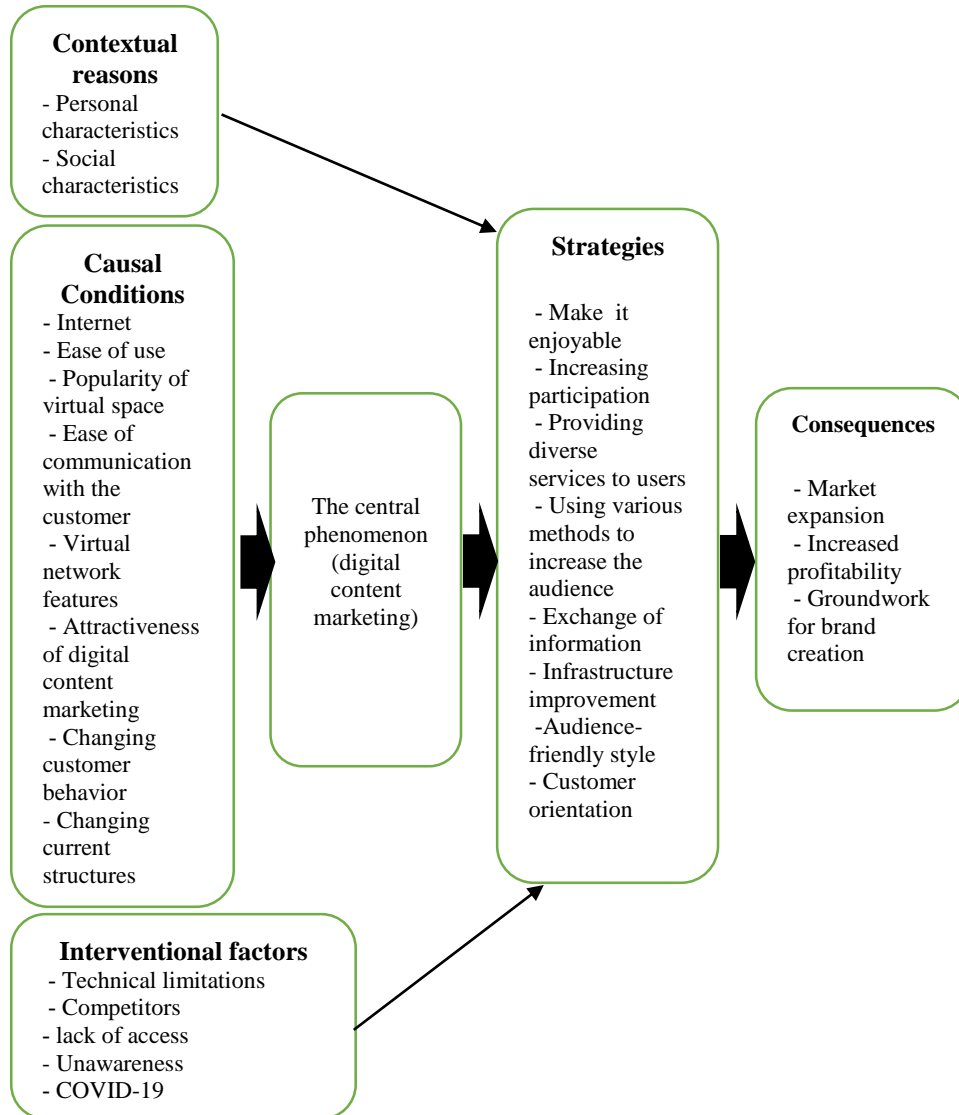
**Table 2- Results of open, axial, and selective coding**

Main Categories	Subcategories	Codes
Causal conditions	Internet	Expansion of communication
		Creating the opportunity to reach millions of people around the world
		The global nature of the Internet
		Internet and virtual space development
		Increasing the development of communication and information technologies
		Development of digital technology
		The birth of the Internet
	Ease of use	Quick and convenient access to goods
		The ease of access to digital content
		Ability to store digital content
		Free sharing feature
		Expanding access to resources
	popularity of cyberspace	The appeal of digital content
		Social network user's interests in content
		Boldness of the Y generation on the Internet
		Visual appeal of digital content
		The increasing presence of users in the virtual space
		People's use of social networks
		Reducing the price of goods
		Absentee shopping
		People's use of online platforms
	Ease of communication with the customer	Online advertising
		Increase in online shopping
		The boldness of brands
		The ease of introducing your expertise and field of work to others
		Ease of expansion and introduction of the brand
		Updated introduction of new products
		Eliminating middlemen and brokers
	Virtual network features	possibility of conducting interviews and surveys with customers
		The possibility of targeted advertising in terms of working conditions, education, age, income, weather, and cultural conditions

		Possibility of high participation
		Saving time
		Spend very little money
		Competition between businesses
		Environmental Protection
		Comprehensive and extensive collections
	The appeal of digital content marketing	Access to the achievements of content marketing
		One of the newest marketing strategies
		Production and distribution of valuable content for marketing
		Creating global income from Digital Content Marketing
		The Full introduction to activities
		Ease of choice
		possibility of using text, sound, and moving images
		Cultivating consumer awareness
	Changing customer behavior	Changing behavior and habits in using traditional tools to digital tools
		Expanding the level of digital and media literacy of users
	Changing current structures	Changing marketing rules
		Cost of traditional advertising platforms
		Pervasiveness of digital media
		Expansion of virtual education
Intervening factors	Technical limitations	Low internet speed
		Restrictions on internet infrastructure
		Internet outage
		Deleting the page
		Dependence on the provider country
	Competitors	Attacks by competitors
		Negative atmosphere of competitors
		Lack of copyright law
	Lack of access	Sanctions
		filtering of some social networks
		Lack of a valuable internal social network
		Lack of access to the Internet for all people
		Lack of access to smartphones for all classes of people
	Unawareness	Ignorance of business managers regarding digital content marketing

		Low user awareness of digital content
	COVID-19	The presence of diseases
		coronavirus
Contextual conditions	Personal characteristics	gender
		Age
		Personality traits of the people
	Social characteristics	Culture
		the customs
		Sociability
Strategies	make it enjoyable	Gamification in social networks
		Content visualization according to people's taste
		Use of Humorous Content
		Use fun content
	Increase participation	Using celebrities
		Participation in online campaigns
		Holding a competition
		Creating trust and commitment among customers
	Providing various services to users	Offer a discount
		Bonus to users
		Free Education
		Support
	Using various methods to increase the audience	Presentation of outstanding and unusual information
		Production of educational content
		Production of therapeutic content
		Production of sports content
		Using new ideas to create content
		Production of original and new content
		Teaching new methods of content production
		Increase quality
		Extensive advertising
		Social network viral marketing
		Generating content based on frequent words
	Exchange of information	Modeling external pages
		Modeling successful pages
		Participation in online campaigns
		Content exchange
	Infrastructure improvement	Increase in internet speed
		Web design
		Producing powerful internal applications
	Audience-friendly style	Make a distinction
		A special and unique style
		up to date

Consequence	Customer Orientation	Use of special effects
		Mastery of body language
		Content production based on society's problems
		Compliance with professional ethics
		Monitor customer needs
		Determine what customers like
		Honesty in content production
	Market expansion	Increase the target market
		Longitudinal and transverse expansion of customers
		Keeping customers
		Entrepreneurship Development
		Being known in the field of work
		Attracting new customers
	Increase profitability	Direct distribution
		Repeat purchase
		Increase profitability
		Reduce marketing costs
		Decrease in investment
		Increase customers
		Profit from advertising
		Increasing the value of pages
	Groundwork for brand creation	Increase user trust
		Brand loyalty
		brand love
		Increase the level of awareness
		Increase the engagement rate
		Brand associations
		Brand success
		Survival and preservation of the brand
		Improving users' attitudes



**Figure 1. The final model of the digital content marketing coding paradigm**



selective process is shown in Table 3.

**Table 3.an example of interview analysis and coding**

Selective coding	Axial coding	Open coding	Phrases from the text of the interviews
Consequences	Groundwork for brand creation	-Increase user trust in the brand -Brand loyalty - brand Love	Its consequences are that it affects our sales, increases the trust of our users in the brand, affects brand loyalty, affects the love for the brand that we receive from the audience, and affects all aspects of the brand.
		-Increase the level of awareness -Increase the engagement rate -increase brand awareness.	The most important result that it can have is that, firstly, it increases the awareness, secondly, and more importantly, it increases the engagement rate for this brand, if this content has the necessary quality. If we want to look at it from a brand's side, it can be a good relationship that this brand can create with its audience. The result can be gaining more customers or brand awareness. If the content is produced, it will make their brand name heard more, their brand name will be used more among different people, and this will have a direct effect on their brand awareness. It also creates a competitive advantage for the business and causes awareness of the brand. The purpose of content is to increase brand awareness.
		-Brand associations -Survival and preservation of the brand -Brand success	One of the things that we can actually do on our site and on our page through content is to create a brand association that will lead to the success of the brand and the survival and preservation of the brand. In content marketing, we actually want to penetrate the heart and mind of our audience and strengthen both our company and our brand, and make our product and service to become

		-Survival and preservation of the brand	loyal customers. Appropriate content can strengthen the brand and branding. The reason for many contents is sales and these issues are not related to sales at all, they come up in order to show the brand so that people can get to know that color, that logo, and those specifications in this way and stay in their minds.
		-Improving users' attitudes  -Shaping the attitude of the audience	We can use digital content marketing to improve user attitudes. When the audience sees the appropriate digital content on the site, their trust in the company increases, improves the attitude and view of the audience toward the company. Correct and convincing content can shape the audience's attitudes.

### Method of Data Analysis: Quantitative Phase

For the analysis of quantitative data, structural equation modeling (SEM) techniques were employed using the SmartPLS 3 software to identify and define the relationships between the variables. The results of the statistical analysis are presented in two main sections: (1) descriptive findings and (2) findings related to testing the research hypotheses.

**Descriptive Findings:** this section reports the descriptive statistics for the research variables, including means, standard deviations, and minimum and maximum scores. The analysis is presented in three parts:

- Analysis of demographic information of the sample.
- Analysis of data pertaining to the research hypotheses.
- Analysis of supplementary data.

**Inferential Statistics and Hypothesis Testing:** inferential analysis involves the process of sampling, whereby a subset (the sample) is selected from the broader population. The purpose of this analysis is to generalize the observations from the sample to the population, which is achieved through hypothesis testing.

To test the research hypotheses, we utilized structural equation modeling (SEM). The measurement model's structural validity was assessed using SmartPLS 3 software. Convergent validity and

reliability were evaluated through the following criteria:

- Factor Loadings: All indicator loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.60.
- Reliability: Both Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR) values for all constructs were above the acceptable level of 0.70.
- Convergent Validity: The average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct was above the required minimum of 0.50.

As shown in the results table, all measured values met these statistical conventions, thereby confirming the reliability and convergent validity of the measurement model.

**Table 4 . Description of fit indices (validity and reliability) (Rosouli et al., 2017)**

	Index type	Index description
Reliability indicators	(Composite Reliability (CR))	Considering that Cronbach's alpha provides a stricter estimate of the internal consistency reliability of the underlying variables (alpha), another version called (composite reliability) is used in PLS path models if the values are greater than 0.7, they are considered suitable.
	Cronbach's alpha	Along with composite reliability, it is considered as a supplementary criterion, values above 0.7 are acceptable
	(Indicator Reliability)	To ensure the reliability of the indicator (Indicator Reliability), all factor loadings of the indicators must be greater than 0.7. Indicators with a factor load of less than 0.4 should be removed from the model. Loads between 0.4 and 0.7 are removed when their removal increases the validity and reliability criteria in the model.
Narrative indicators	Convergent validity (AVE)	Convergent validity expresses the high correlation of the indicators of a structure with the correlation of the indicators of other structures, which should be evaluated in the model. To evaluate the validity of convergence in Smart PLS software, Average variance extracted (AVE) is used. The value of this coefficient varies from 0 to 1, and values higher than 0.5 are accepted.

## Findings

### The hypothesis 1

The causal conditions of the research (Internet, ease of use, popularity of virtual space, ease of communication with customers, virtual

network features, attractiveness of digital content marketing, changing customer behavior, changing current structures) have a significant effect on digital content marketing in Digikala's Instagram users. Considering that; the t.value is outside the range of 2.57 and -2.57, this shows that this hypothesis is confirmed at the confidence level of 99%. The results of this hypothesis agree with those of previous studies.

### **The hypothesis 2**

Digital content marketing has a significant impact on the research strategies of Digikala's Instagram users. Considering that the t.value is outside the range of 2.57 and -2.57; this hypothesis is confirmed at the confidence level of 99%. The results of this hypothesis agree with those of previous studies.

### **The hypothesis 3**

Research intervention factors (technical limitations, competitors, lack of access, ignorance, and COVID-19) significantly impact the research strategies of Digikala's Instagram users. Considering that the t.value is outside the range of 2.57 and -2.57; this hypothesis is confirmed at the confidence level of 99%. The results of this hypothesis agree with those of previous studies.

### **The hypothesis 4**

Research background factors (individual characteristics, social characteristics) have a significant impact on the research strategies of Digikala's Instagram users. Considering that the t.value is outside the range of 2.57 and -2.57; this hypothesis is confirmed at the confidence level of 99%. The results of this hypothesis agree with those of previous studies.

### **The hypothesis 5**

Research strategies (enjoying, increasing participation, providing diverse services to users, using various methods of increasing the audience, exchanging information, improving infrastructure, audience-friendly style, customer orientation) have a significant impact on the results of the research on Digikala's Instagram users. Considering that the t.value is outside the range of 2.57 and -2.57; this hypothesis is confirmed at the confidence level of 99%. The results of this hypothesis agree with those of previous studies.

### **Testing the research hypotheses**

Considering that the current research model measures the relationships between several hidden variables (the main variables of the research)

simultaneously, structural equation modeling was used to analyze the data and test the hypotheses. In this research, to obtain more accurate results and provide the possibility of simultaneously examining the theory and metrics. Fornell and Larker (1981). In this method, two models were examined, (1) the external model, which is used to examine the relationships between indicators (research questions) and the main variables related to them, which is equivalent to the same measurement model in covariance-based methods; (2) the internal model, which measures the structural part of the model and is used to examine the relationships between the hidden variables (main variables) from which the research hypotheses are formed.

#### **External model (measurement) of the research hypotheses:**

In the first stage, data analysis should be performed using the measurement model to determine whether the model has an acceptable level of validity and reliability. By examining this model, the relationship between the variables and the observed indicators is determined. This step is performed using the PLS-algorithm function.

After measuring the reliability and convergent validity, the divergent validity or Fornell-Larker test was performed. Fornell-Larker's criterion claims that a variable should have more dispersion among its own variables compared with the variables of other variables. Therefore, from a statistical point of view, the AVE of each local variable must be greater than the highest square of the correlation of that variable with other local variables.

**Table 5. Fornell-Larcker criterion**

	Digital Content Marketing	Background reasons	Intervening reasons	Strategies	Causal conditions	Consequences
Digital Content Marketing	0.799					
Background reasons	0.762	0.864				
Intervening reasons	0.679	0.571	0.842			
Strategies	0.729	0.775	0.573	0.789		

Causal conditions	0.632	0.522	0.766	0.502	0.913	
Consequences	0.745	0.675	0.774	0.618	0.740	0.948

As shown in table 5, in Fornell's and Larcker's criterion, the values on the main diameter of the matrix (the second root of explained variance values (AVE)) are greater than all the values in the corresponding row and column. This also shows the correlation of indicators with their related structures.

According to the results obtained from the measurement model in the Smart PLS software, which show the validity and reliability of the model, and according to the explanations of the acceptance threshold for the mentioned indicators, all the results obtained in the measurement model are confirmed. Therefore, we can conclude that the model has a good fit. Therefore, the final model could properly express the relationships between the variable descriptive questions. In the next step, the path analysis (or structural model) is examined.

#### **Internal model (fitting the structural model of research)**

In the next step, the structural model and the relationships between the structures should be examined. The bootstrapping function used for this purpose. The number of statistical samples in this research is 384 and 500 are considered bootstrap test samples.

The numerical value in the relationships indicates the t-value, which is actually the main criterion for confirming or rejecting the hypotheses. If this statistics value is greater than 1.64, 1.96, and 2.57, respectively, we conclude that the hypothesis is confirmed at the 90%, 95%, and 99% levels.

#### **Criteria for the coefficient of determination**

The most common criterion for checking the fit of the structural model in a research is the  $R^2$  coefficients related to the endogenous (dependent) hidden variables of the model.  $R^2$  is a measure that indicates the influence of an exogenous variable on an endogenous variable, and three values of 0.19, 0.33, and 0.67 are considered as the criterion values for weak, medium, and strong values of  $R^2$ . According to the following table, the value of  $R^2$  calculated for the endogenous structures of the research, confirms the appropriateness of the fit of the structural model according to the three criterion values.

**Table 6. R Square**

	<b>R Square</b>	<b>Result</b>
Digital Content Marketing	0.853	Strong
Strategies	0.939	Strong
consequences	0.875	Strong

**Stone-Geisser criterion**

The stone-Geisser criterion is another criterion that shows the predictive power of the mode. If the Aston Geisser value for a dependent (endogenous) variable is 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35, respectively, it indicates the weak, medium, and strong predictive power of the variable or independent (exogenous) variables related to that dependent variable. In fact, it measures the quality of the structural model for each endogenous block.

**Table 7. Stone-Geisser criterion (Filling index) (Q2)**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Q<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Result</b>
Digital content marketing	0.393	Strong
Strategies	0.429	Strong
consequences	0.408	Strong

In Table 7, the values related to Q2, which according to the value of the criterion, show the power of the model for prediction, and the fit of the structural model confirmed once again.

**Table 8- Results of rejecting and confirming the research hypotheses**

<b>Hypothesis</b>	<b>T- statistics</b>	<b>Multiply the route</b>	<b>Desired significance level</b>	<b>The significant level of research</b>	<b>Result</b>
Causal Conditions → Digital Content Marketing	4.129	0.624	P<0.05	0.000	Accepted
Strategies Digital Content marketing →	5.014	0.301	P<0.05	0.000	Accepted
Intervening reasons → Strategies	6.190	0.395	P<0.05	0.000	Accepted

Background reasons → Strategies	6.968	0.240	P<0.05	0.000	Accepted
Strategies → consequences	7.686	0.535	P<0.05	0.000	Accepted

### Central phenomenon

The main phenomenon is a category that tells the audience "what is going on?" The main phenomenon in the current research is digital content marketing, in which all factors and influences move toward its description. Choosing this category as the focal category seems logical, and it is a proof of validity and analysis because it is one of the goals of digital content marketing in social networks.

According to Strauss and Corbin, strategies are actions and interactions that are used in normal behavior and how manage situations when facing problems. These are the behaviors that people, companies, and societies do or say. These actions are intentional actions that occur to solve the problem. In this research, the eight categories of basic strategies include: 1. Making it enjoyable 2. Increasing Participation 3. Providing diverse services to users 4. Using various methods to increase the audience 5. Information exchange 6. Improving infrastructure 7. Audience-friendly style and 8. Customer orientation identified.

The use of virtual social networks and the tendency to use the Internet are also because of their pleasure. Many social pages have followers because of their fun and enjoyable content (Bu et al., 2021). Many users refer to the Internet for time and entertainment. Internet entertainment is one of the most popular topics in cyberspace. These tools are mainly provided to users free of charge in virtual networks (Lopes et al., 2022). Making it enjoyable in this research includes gamification in social networks, visualizing content according to people's tastes, using humorous content, and using entertaining content. The results of the quantitative section showed that making it enjoyable with a path coefficient of 0.692 is an effective strategy for digital content marketing.

Influence in social networks is a summary of all the activities that must be performed for the growth and development of the social network so that we can achieve our main goal. The more detailed the planning, the more effective the result will be. With the increasing need for businesses to use social networks and provide content on these platforms, a detailed strategy is very useful to advance goals (Mozaffari et al., 2023). In this research, the following were discovered to increase



participation in digital content: using celebrities, participating in online campaigns, holding contests, and building trust and commitment in customers. The results of the quantitative section also show that increasing participation with a path coefficient of 0.881 is an important strategy in digital content marketing. To attract audiences in social networks and encourage them to view and use digital content, it is necessary to provide them with various services to attract the entire range of people present in these networks. The services that can be paid for in the production of digital content to attract the audience are as follows: providing discounts, awards to users, free training, and support. The results of the quantitative section also show that providing diverse services to users is an influential factor in digital content marketing strategies, with a path coefficient of 0.702.

Considering that marketing means displaying advertising messages and being present where the audience is present, the position of social networks in marketing is determined (Lopes et al., 2022). Many companies refrain from fully embracing social networks in their marketing plans. Perhaps the reason is that by producing content, they consider their business promotion finished and do not enter marketing into the next stage (Purwanto, 2022). Today, nearly 79% of Iranian Internet users are active on Instagram, and they are informed about the news of the society through social networks. Nearly 35% of people use social networks to find a job (Halik et al., 2021). Therefore, it is not surprising if it is necessary to use various methods of increasing the audience in this space. these methods include: providing outstanding and strange information, producing educational content, producing therapeutic content, producing sports content, using new ideas for content production, producing fresh and new content, teaching new methods of content production, increasing quality, extensive advertising, social network viral marketing, and content production based on frequent words. The results of the quantitative section also show that the use of methods to increase the audience with a path coefficient of 0.908 is the most important and effective strategy. In this research, information exchange includes sampling from external pages, sampling from successful pages, participation in online campaigns, and content exchange. The results of the quantitative section also show that information exchange has a significant effect on digital content marketing strategies with a path coefficient of 0.776.

One of the basic actions of Iran in recent years has been to launch

a national information network with the aim of creating and providing the necessary, sufficient, and safe infrastructure for electronic commerce (Rostami et al., 2022). To expand and improve digital content marketing, it is necessary to improve and expand the Internet infrastructure. Improving the infrastructure in the field of digital content includes increasing the speed of the Internet, website design, and the production of powerful internal applications, which few results show is one of the most important strategies with a path coefficient of 0.874. Social networks and ways to become popular and attract audiences are one of the main concerns of these networks (Za et al., 2021). Due to the lack of content in social networks and the Internet, digital content is presented very repetitively and almost all-existing content is shared again. However, someone will be successful in providing updated and new content, and the audience will like this content. This audience-friendly style in the current research includes creating distinction, a special and unique style, being up-to-date, using special effects, and mastering body language. The results of the quantitative section also show that the audience-friendly style of 0.831 is one of the most effective strategies in digital content marketing.

Organizations try to coordinate their performance using the concept of customer orientation. Social networks have had a tremendous impact on marketing since their inception, and their use has now become an integral part of any business' marketing strategy (Sun and Zhang, 2021). In fact, the most common and perhaps the biggest obstacle to customer-oriented performance is the lack of an organizational customer-oriented culture. However, most organizations operate on a product- and sales-focused basis. In this way, customer orientation is prioritized only in certain sectors such as marketing. To implement and fulfill the customer-oriented strategy, the organization must have a culture in harmony with this issue. In addition, to perform such work, it is necessary to employ leaders and managers who promote the necessity of such a way of thinking and its values in their employees (Sawaftah et al., 2021). In this research, customer orientation includes content production based on society's problems, compliance with professional ethics, monitoring customer needs, finding customer's tastes, and honesty in content production. The results of the quantitative section also show that customer orientation with a path coefficient of 0.824 is an important strategy in digital content marketing. In the second part, according to the final model of the research, the codes are

distributed in the form of a questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale among the small statistical population that includes the users of Digikala's Instagram page. The results obtained from the quantitative section show that all the discovered variables have a significant impact in their category, which is ranked according to the impact of each variable. Finally, the relationship of the main categories in the form of hypotheses tested by using Smart PLS software, which is mentioned in the discussion of the results of the hypotheses section.

### **Conclusion**

This study aims to propose a digital content marketing model by identifying its dimensions and components and raising awareness among Iranian stakeholders and users. Using a mixed-method research design and a grounded theory approach, 15 interviews were conducted. Through open, axial, and selective coding, key variables were identified. In the quantitative phase, user opinions were gathered via a questionnaire, and research hypotheses were formulated and tested. The analysis confirmed all hypotheses.

The findings will benefit business practitioners seeking to leverage digital content for business growth and development. By producing optimized and engaging digital content, businesses can increase sales and profitability while enhancing audience engagement and brand awareness.

Regarding customer engagement, Torkestani et al. (2022) emphasize content personalization, while Rostami et al. (2022) highlight customer-centric content production, distribution of relevant content, and the use of online platforms. An audience-friendly approach has been identified as a key strategy for fostering engagement, alongside infrastructure improvement. Zamani et al. (2022) include "brand promotion" as a component of their content marketing model for expanding market share, which aligns with the current study's finding that brand creation is a major outcome of digital content marketing. Farshadgozar et al. (2017) identify customer service, support, and communication as critical factors in digital businesses. Similarly, this study recognizes the provision of diverse user services, increased participation, information exchange, and ease of customer communication as core strategies and causal conditions.

Rostami et al. (2022) describe digital content marketing as a multifaceted process requiring simultaneous attention to diverse

content types, online platforms, digital branding, web accessibility, crises, natural events, and interactive content. The current study's results are consistent with these aspects, particularly in offering diverse user services, facilitating brand creation, utilizing the internet, and addressing crises such as COVID-19. However, this research also introduces previously underexplored dimensions, including technical limitations, competitive dynamics, structural inertia, shifts in customer behavior, the appeal of digital content, features of virtual networks, the popularity of virtual spaces, usability, ease of communication, individual and social characteristics, experiential engagement, customer orientation, market expansion, and profitability.

The results indicate that successful digital content marketing requires simultaneous attention to hardware and software elements. Therefore, recruiting and developing employees and managers proficient in this business model is crucial. Additionally, enhancing IT infrastructure, expanding internet access, and providing necessary tools and facilities—typically under governmental and policy-making purview—are vital enablers.

Practitioners are advised to invest in factors that most significantly contribute to the success of digital content marketing. Based on the final model, efforts should focus on understanding the audience's personal and social characteristics, improving digital literacy, ensuring infrastructural accessibility, producing attractive and audience-oriented content, and delivering substantiated and persuasive information. Collaborating with specialized agencies for professional content production can further enhance effectiveness and success rates.

### **Practical suggestions**

It is suggested to the activists of digital content marketing to invest in the factors that bring the most success for digital content marketing, to increase the probability and success rate of achieving their goals and, by benefiting from the services of companies and teams specializing in the production of professional, attractive and Convincing contents, improve the effectiveness of the content, and increase the success of the content produced.

The results of the research showed that digital content marketing requires simultaneous attention to software and hardware, therefore, carefulness in attracting and nurturing employees and managers who are fully familiar with systematic thinking and working in the digital

business ecosystems will play an important role in the success of digital content marketing.

Business marketing managers are suggested to form a content calendar and content production team for social networks, websites and blogs with the aim of more visibility. A content calendar specifies what content should be published and when. The content calendar facilitates the planning and budgeting of content production and publishing.

In future research, researchers in digital content marketing should conduct comparative studies with other countries, and issues such as determining indicators and evaluating the results of digital content marketing can be important issues in future research.

This research was conducted during the outbreak of Coronavirus, and its results were affected by these conditions, suggesting that this research should be conducted again after the Corona period.

### **Suggestions for future research**

- It is suggested that researchers measure the impact of digital content marketing on other marketing factors such as company performance and customer attitude in future researches.
- The researchers in digital content marketing conduct comparative studies with other countries in future research. Issues such as determining indicators and evaluating the results of digital content marketing can be important issue for future research.
- The researchers fully identify the obstacles to the implementation of digital content marketing in future research and examine the solutions to overcome these obstacles.
- Improving information technology infrastructure, wide; and public access to it, and providing tools, devices, and facilities for using the Internet and information technology infrastructure are among the tasks that are usually the responsibility of governments and, the governance and policy-making system. By developing and improving it, governments provide the possibility of exploitation for the public and eliminate discrimination in the use of these facilities among different strata of society; this issue can be one of the most important research areas for researchers in this field.
- The researchers analyze the data and statistics of visits and the degree of influence and sharing of content in social networks, which can be useful and show practical information about the quality of content in these networks. Optimizing search engines has gained the trust of the

audience, and allocating sufficient funds for research and development in the field of producing up-to-date content is critical and should be given special attention.

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