



Improving content marketing strategy. A case study of a digital marketing agency.

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Year of publication **Laurea**



Laurea University of Applied Sciences

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Bachelor of Business Administration

Thesis

April, 2024

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Year	2024	Number of pages	40
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This thesis explores the impact of content marketing strategies on customer engagement and retention within a B2B digital marketing agency. The main aim is to help provide 'Company X' a B2B digital marketing agency, with detailed insights to improve their client relationships by data-driven marketing. The research is carried out by investigating the type of content, distribution channels, and personalization strategies practiced by B2B digital marketing agencies to attain successful client relationships. Beginning the research with the existing literature on the influence of content marketing on B2B customer engagement and retention, followed by a qualitative research analysis which was carried out via semi-structured interviews with representatives of four B2B digital marketing agencies, one of them being the founder of Company X. The interviews provided deep insight into the content marketing strategies practiced by these agencies.

Having analyzed the findings it was evident that the agencies followed three main strategies to build strong bonds with their clients. Firstly, they focused on creating informative content as a solution to the exact problem faced by their clients, by ensuring the target audience finds the content relevant. Secondly, they support thought leadership content to demonstrate their expertise concerning each industry, thereby building trust among potential clients. Finally, they distribute content across multiple platforms to a diverse range of audiences, hence creating a bigger impact.

Content personalization is a similar practice across all agencies, however, the extent to its implementation varies. The findings also demonstrate a positive influence of informative and thought leadership content on developing deeper client relationships. The findings also highlight the importance of interactive content formats to achieve strong client relationships. However, as data collection was limited to only four agencies, it prevents a conclusive assessment of the relationship between content marketing strategy and client engagement/retention in complex versus simpler agencies. The findings also partially support the hypothesis that personalized content marketing strategies lead to higher engagement and retention rates.

The thesis concludes that even though Company X adheres to industry best practices in terms of content marketing there are still areas of improvement, particularly in measuring the content marketing effectiveness and implementation of more sophisticated personalization techniques. Therefore, Company X can develop a data-driven content marketing strategy by implementing the recommendations outlined in this thesis, to achieve stronger client engagement and lasting client retention.

Keywords: B2B content marketing, customer engagement and retention, data-driven marketing, content personalization, digital marketing agencies

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1 Introduction

The present era of digital marketing demands constant innovation from agencies to retain clients (Smith et al.,2020). Emerging as a powerful tool, content marketing helps create brand awareness, establish expertise, and nurture valuable client relationships (Pantoja et al., 2023). However, it remains a challenge for many agencies to translate content marketing strategy into measurable client engagement and retention rates (Waheed & Shahzaib, 2022).

This thesis investigates the role of content marketing strategies in enhancing client engagement and retention in the context of a B2B digital marketing agency. As the thesis follows a case study approach, the research will analyze the agency's current content marketing practices, identify areas of improvement, and use the findings to create a data-driven content strategy tailored to strengthen client relationships.

The central research question of this thesis revolves around **how improving content marketing strategy can help a digital marketing agency improve client engagement and retention**. The investigation aims to not only benefit the chosen case study agency but also the broader B2B digital marketing industry, by providing valuable insights. Existing literature on the topic suggests a strong correlation between effective content marketing and improved client engagement metrics (Pantoja et al.,2023). However, a gap persists in the understanding of which specific strategies and implementation methods can lead to optimal client retention within the context of a B2B digital marketing agency (Waheed & Shahzaib, 2022). Furthermore, Cozma (2019) demonstrates the importance of a data-driven approach in content marketing, to ensure the content resonates with the target audience and measurable outcomes are achieved.

The following chapters will provide a detailed discussion of the existing literature concerning content marketing strategies, client engagement, and how they correlate. The research methodology chosen for this thesis will be outlined, followed by an in-depth analysis of the case study and its findings. The thesis will then conclude with a summary of the key findings, recommendations for Company X, and suggestions for further research, within the field of content marketing and client management.

1.1 Background and Context

To maintain confidentiality as requested by the case agency, the B2B digital marketing agency is referred to as 'Company X', a mid-sized agency offering services in digital marketing for a diverse range of industries. The services offered include search engine optimization (SEO), social media marketing, pay-per-click (PPC) advertising, content marketing, and website design. Among these services SEO helps place client industries higher up in the search results,

PPC advertising enables publishing targeted ads across potential clients, content marketing creates valuable content to attract clients and website design is crucial for building an online presence for clients.

In this thesis, the objective is to investigate how Company X uses their content marketing strategy to develop relationships with clients. A thorough analysis of website traffic, content interactions on social media, lead generation, and the number of existing clients will demonstrate areas for improvement and ultimately help provide recommendations for a data-driven content marketing strategy that will promote client engagement and retention.

1.2 Research problem and questions

To address the central question of this research on the B2B digital marketing agency 'Company X' we must find answers to the following research questions:

RQ1: What content marketing strategy is practiced by Company X (e.g. content type, distribution channels, distribution frequency)?

RQ2: What client engagement and retention metrics does Company X use (if any) to achieve measurable client relationships? What is the current state of client engagement and retention associated with the agency's content marketing efforts?

RQ3: What is the extent of Company X's current content marketing strategy's contribution to achieving positive client relationships?

RQ4: What are the potential areas of improvement within the agency to enhance client engagement and retention?

RQ5: How can a data-driven content marketing strategy be developed and implemented within the agency to improve client engagement and retention?

By addressing these research questions, this thesis aims to establish a clear understanding of the relationship between content marketing strategies and client engagement/retention within the B2B digital marketing agency. These findings will not only prove beneficial for Company X but also for the B2B digital marketing industry by contributing valuable insights on developing and implementing data-driven solutions for content marketing strategies to establish stronger client relationships.

1.3 Research aims and objectives

The research aims to determine the key elements and the best practices of content marketing strategies that can improve client satisfaction and loyalty. The objective, however, is to find reliable solutions to the above-mentioned research questions. The objectives include understanding the current state of Company X- by focusing on analyzing the agency's current content marketing practices.

This initial phase involves identifying the types of content produced (blog posts, infographics, etc.), the distribution channels (websites, social media, etc.), and the frequency of publishing content. The next step is to evaluate the client engagement and retention metrics, by determining the specific metrics used by the agency to measure engagement (website traffic, social media interactions, etc.) and assessing their current client engagement and retention levels via client surveys or data analysis. Following this, it is important to assess the impact of content marketing on client relationships. This is done by analyzing the current themes and messaging used by the agency to see if they establish positive client relationships. Additionally, client feedback analysis will help evaluate the client's perception of the content and its impact on their relationship with the agency.

Moving forward, the objectives include identifying areas of improvement in the agency's content marketing strategy and considering industry best practices along with relevant research to highlight potential strategies for strengthening their content approach. The final objective is to formulate a data-driven content strategy, building upon the insights gained from the previous steps. This will involve a comprehensive review of the research findings, identifying key performance indicators (KPIs) that directly correlate with established client engagement and retention goals. These KPIs will allow subsequent measurement and evaluation of the proposed content marketing strategy.

1.4 Scope and limitations

The scope of this thesis is to achieve the objectives by determining the type of client industries, analyzing the distribution channels and distribution frequency, identifying measurable client engagement and retention metrics, and recommending appropriate data-driven strategies. This focused scope will ensure a critical analysis of Company X's content marketing strategy and its influence on client relationships while remaining achievable within the constraints of available data.

Although the research scope is achievable, the thesis faces a few limitations. As we know, this research focuses on Company X and qualitative research involving three other similar agencies, this limits the generalizability of the findings to the broader B2B digital marketing industry. The research relies on data provided by the representatives of these agencies, which may be

subjected to some bias and limited access to internal data or client feedback may restrict the in-depth analysis.

Despite these limitations, this thesis offers a valuable case study analysis that contributes to understanding the role of content marketing in developing client relationships within Company X. The proposed data-driven content marketing strategy, aimed specifically at Company X, can provide a reliable framework for other B2B digital marketing agencies seeking to improve their client engagement and retention via content management.

1.5 Research significance and contribution

As mentioned above the research is significantly valuable for not only Company X but also the broader B2B digital marketing industry. Let us first consider the significance in terms of Company X. By analyzing the current content marketing practices and their impact on client relationships, the research offers actionable recommendations for improvement, suggesting a more effective strategy that ensures stronger client engagement and retention rates (Pantoja et al., 2023). Moreover, the research highlights the importance of data-driven decision-making in content marketing. The proposed data-driven approach will guide Company X in developing and promoting content that best caters to the needs of the target audience and achieves sustainable engagement goals (Cozma, 2019). A strong content marketing strategy can differentiate Company X from its competitors within the industry, as the findings will equip the agency with the ability to develop unique content that positions Company X as a thought leader and thereby attract new clients while retaining existing client loyalty (Smith et al., 2020).

The B2B digital marketing industry can benefit from this research as this research contributes to a deep understanding of how content marketing strategies influence client engagement and retention within B2B digital marketing agencies, this can inform the best practices and guide other agencies in developing effective content marketing strategies. The B2B digital marketing industry can use the data-driven content marketing framework to optimize their content marketing efforts. This framework can be adapted to different agency sizes and target audiences (Singh & Fischer, 2022). However, the limitations of this research highlights the need for further research on content marketing's impact within the B2B digital marketing industry, this research paves the way for future studies exploring content marketing strategies across multiple agencies and client industries.

1.6 Thesis outline

This chapter discusses the structure of the thesis, as outlined in Figure 1. The introductory chapter (Chapter 1) introduces the importance of content marketing in the digital marketing landscape and provides a brief introduction of the case company 'Company X' while maintaining its confidentiality. It then describes the research gap and the lack of information regarding

content marketing's influence on client engagement and retention within B2B digital marketing agencies. The research question is then highlighted to guide the investigation, focusing on various elements such as content marketing practices, engagement metrics, and the impact on client relationships. The chapter further outlines the research aim and breaks it down into specific achievable objectives, to address the research question. The scope is clearly defined, and the limitations are acknowledged further in the chapter, concluding by highlighting the significance of research for Company X as well as the overall B2B digital marketing industry. Finally, it provided a brief overview of the thesis structure by outlining the content of each chapter.

Chapter 2 deals with the existing literature review on content marketing, client engagement, and retention within the B2B digital marketing industry. Along with the various definitions of content marketing, this chapter explores the different content types specific to digital marketing. It also discusses the important elements of successful content marketing strategies, identifying the target audience, the content creation process, distribution channels, and frequency along with promotional strategies. The chapter further explores the benefits of effective content marketing for B2B digital marketing agencies, by discussing brand awareness, lead generation, and client relationships. It also analyzes the potential challenges associated with implementing content marketing strategies. Furthermore, client engagement and retention are defined concerning B2B digital marketing, the factors affecting these metrics are also discussed alongside methods of their measurement. The benefits of strong client engagement and retention are explained parallel to the challenges associated with these aspects of client relationships. Correlations of these aspects are discussed in light of existing literature concerning the B2B digital marketing industry. The chapter concludes by identifying the specific research gap in existing knowledge that this research addresses and formulation of hypotheses based on the research question.

Research methodology is discussed in detail in Chapter 3, it describes the chosen research approach while justifying the use of a case study approach for this investigation. The specific case study design is detailed along with the rationale behind the chosen design. In addition to this, the chapter describes the data collection methods, sources, and techniques for gathering and analyzing data. The chapter also discusses the ethical considerations related to data collection and analysis (e.g. informed consent, confidentiality). Lastly, it explains the strategies used to ensure the reliability and validity of the research.

Chapter 4 presents the data analysis and findings, along with the process of analyzing qualitative data, and demonstrates the key findings in relation to the research question. Results are presented with an overall discussion and interpretation of the findings from all the data sources.

The concluding chapter (chapter 5) summarizes the key research findings and their implications for Company X, along with the recommendations for improvement of their content marketing strategy for enhanced client engagement and retention. Finally, suggestions for future studies are offered.

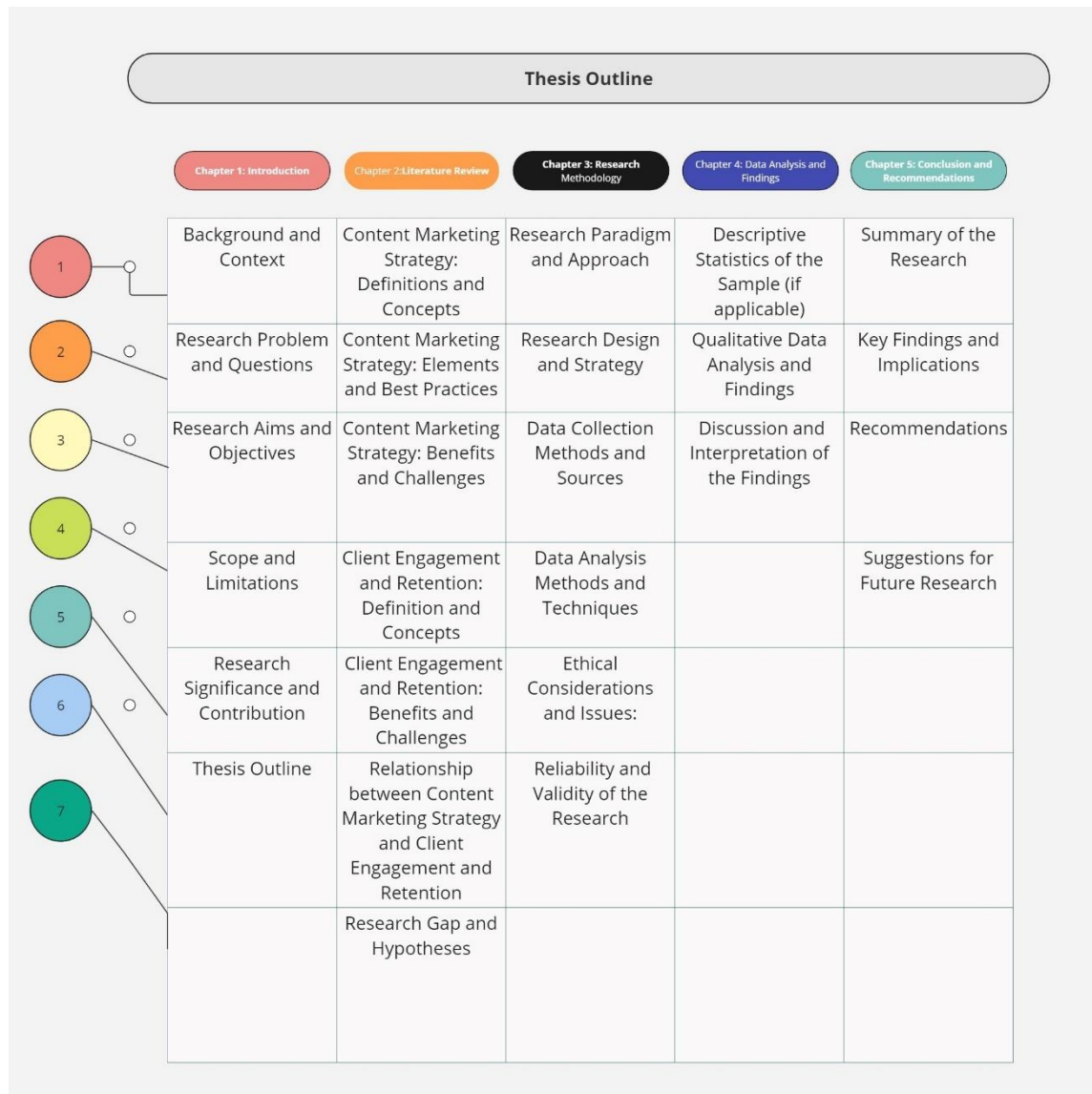


Figure 1: Thesis outline

2 Literature review

2.1 Content marketing strategy: definitions and concepts

Content marketing has emerged as a strategic pillar in today's digital marketing landscape, in contrast to the traditional marketing tactics that focused mainly on direct product promotion. Present-day marketing prioritizes developing relationships and building trust with potential clients, this is achieved by delivering content that is not only valuable but also informative and engaging for the target audience. This section deals with the core concepts of content marketing, exploring the definitions and the fundamental elements that contribute to its success.

Content marketing can be broadly understood as the art of communicating with customers without directly selling. It focuses on educating and entertaining the target audiences, by establishing an image of a thought leader in a specific industry, and ultimately cultivating a sense of loyalty (I. Heimbach, O. Hinz (2018)). The content created for the purpose of distribution can be informative, educational, or entertaining, but it must resonate with the interests and needs of the target audience (J. Muller, F. Christandl (2019)). Building a successful content marketing strategy requires time and effort, and the results may not be immediate. However, consistent creation and promotion are crucial for long-term success (L. M. Baker, C. R. Boyer, H. H. Peterson, A. E. H. King (2018)).

The term Digital content marketing is a new term in the marketing domain. It is recognized by both practitioners and the academic community as a powerful approach to building brand awareness and customer loyalty (Holliman & Rowley, 2014; Pulizzi, 2014; Świeczak, 2012; Forouzandeh, et al., 2014; Lou et. al. (2019), Rancati & Gordini, 2014). Digital content marketing is the creation of content that is valuable, relevant, reliable, consistent, interactive, and entertaining by brand marketers and its dissemination through digital platforms to their target audience which includes both existing and potential customers (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019).

Figure 2 shows the different definitions of Digital content marketing, demonstrating its unique features. Unlike traditional forms of advertising that consumers choose to avoid, digital content marketing communication is often sought out by consumers (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). For example, the beauty brand Lakme through its BeBeautiful YouTube channel provides information regarding various beauty and fashion topics. There is a very high likelihood that an individual who searches keywords such as 'make-up tutorial' or 'simple party hairstyle' will end up watching these branded videos. Digital content marketing is thus a revolutionary shift from the selling approach of marketing to a helping approach (Holliman & Rowley, 2014).

Table 1: Definitions of DCM

Author(s)	Definition
Koiso-Kanttila (2004, p. 46)	“Marketing of bit-based objects distributed through electronic channels”.
Rowley (2008, p. 522)	“DCM is the management process responsible for identifying, anticipating, and satisfying customer requirements profitably in the context of digital content, or bit-based objects distributed through electronic channels”.
Rose and Pulizzi (2011, p. 12)	“A strategy focussed on the creation of a valuable experience”.
Gunelius (2010, p. 14)	“The process of indirectly and directly promoting a business or brand through value-added text, video, or audio content both online and offline. It can come in long-form (such as blogs, articles, e-books, and so on), short-form (such as Twitter updates, Facebook updates, images, and so on), or conversational-form (for example, sharing great content via Twitter or participating in an active discussion via blog comments or through an online forum)”.
Bloomstein (2012, p. 101)	“DCM is the practice of planning for the creation, delivery and governance of useful, usable content”
Pulizzi (2014, p. 5)	“DCM is the creation of valuable, relevant and compelling content by the brand itself on a consistent basis, used to generate a positive behaviour from a customer or prospect of the brand”.
Holliman and Rowley (2014, p. 269)	“An inbound marketing technique effected through web page, social media and value-add content, and is perceived to be a useful tool for achieving and sustaining trusted brand status”.
Holliman and Rowley (2014, p. 285)	“DCM involves creating, distributing and sharing relevant, compelling and timely digital content to engage customers at the appropriate point in their buying consideration processes, such that it encourages them to convert to a business building outcome”.
Rancati and Gordini (2014, p. 96)	“A tool to share content, that creates value and high returns along with the financial means of customer distribution, attraction, involvement, acquisition and retention”.
Wu and Liu (2018, p. 750)	“It mainly refers to the production of a variety of products or brand content, and the dissemination of the valuable and entertaining content information on the related media platform, in order to attract customers to participate in interactive communication to establish and perfect brand marketing strategy”.
Hollebeek and Macky (2019, p. 26)	“DCM is the creation and dissemination of relevant, valuable brand-related content to current or prospective customers on digital platforms to develop their favourable brand engagement, trust, and relationships (vs. directly persuading consumers to purchase)”.

Table 1: Definition of DCM (Jacob, M. E., & Johnson, J. (2021).

Understanding the evolving marketing landscape

As Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) point out, effectively navigating the marketing environment hinges on visualizing audience interaction and management. Audiences extend beyond websites, necessitating a multi-dimensional approach.

The 5D's of digital marketing

To grasp the complexity, Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick (2019) proposed the '5Ds' of managing digital marketing interactions. This framework highlights the various aspects a digital marketing agency needs to consider. These five aspects include device, data, digital assets, digital channels, and digital customer experience (5Ds). Elaborating on these aspects, it is important to understand how audiences interact with content across various devices such as desktops, mobile phones, tablets, etc.). Customer insights for optimizing content can be acquired by data analytics. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn are some of the digital channels that can be used for B2B communication and client engagement (Brennan & Croft, 2012). It is also crucial to provide a seamless digital customer experience across all digital touchpoints to create a positive impact.

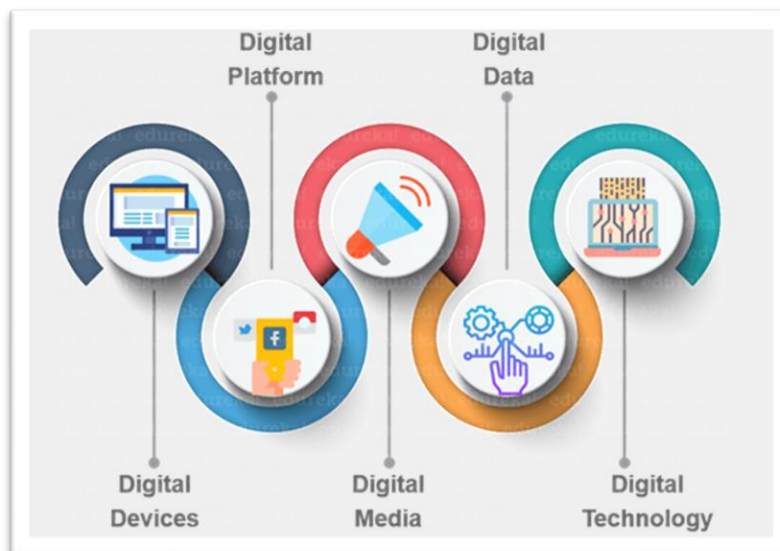


Figure 2: 5D's of Digital Marketing Agency (Disha.,2024, January 10). What is Digital Marketing? The Ultimate Guide for Beginners).

Applying marketing strategy models to digital marketing agencies

This section highlights how several marketing strategy models (Kingsnorth, 2016; Ryan, 2014) can be applied to optimize the operations of digital marketing agencies like Company X.

The marketing mix: A digital lens

The traditional marketing mix (4Ps) of Product, Price, Place, and Promotion (Ryan,2014) offers a valuable framework when adapted to the digital marketing environment. For B2B digital marketing agencies the product translates to specific digital marketing services offered e.g. SEO, social media marketing, or content marketing, etc. Hence, in the competitive digital space, it is crucial to understand the specific needs of the clients and tailor services accordingly (Kingsnorth, 2016). Various pricing models (retainer fees, project-based pricing) can be used to cater to the different clients and their budgets while maintaining transparency in pricing as it is an essential aspect in the online world (Ryan,2014). With respect to the digital world, the term place refers to online channels used by B2B digital marketing agencies to reach clients, by developing a strong agency website optimized for SEO and a presence on relevant social media platforms (Kingsnorth,2016). The final aspect of the marketing mix is the use of promotional tactics to generate leads and attract clients for B2B digital marketing agencies. These include content marketing, social media engagement, and participation in industry events.

Beyond the 4Ps: Additional strategic considerations

Several other marketing strategy models offer valuable insight for digital marketing agencies:

Porter's five forces: analyzing the competitive landscape using Porter's five forces framework (Kingsnorth,2016) helps the agencies identify their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats within the digital marketing industry. This knowledge empowers them to develop a competitive advantage.

Brand position mapping: by creating a brand position map (Kingsnorth,2016) from the client's perspective, agencies can visualize their unique value proposition compared to competitors. This can inform their marketing message and client targeting strategies.

Boston Consulting Group (BCG) Matrix: the BCG Matrix (Kingsnorth, 2016) can be a helpful tool for B2B digital marketing agencies to assess their service portfolio. By analyzing the market share and growth potential of various digital marketing services, agencies can prioritize which services to invest in and potentially identify new service offerings.

By applying these marketing strategy models and adapting them B2B digital marketing agencies like Company X can develop effective strategies to achieve sustainable growth, client engagement, and retention.

2.2 Content marketing strategy: elements and best practices

The effectiveness of content marketing depends upon various key elements. Identifying the target audience by understanding the ideal client profile for creating content that best resonates with their specific needs and interests remains the most crucial element. Another element involved in content creation is developing high-quality content that is not only informative but also promotes client engagement and aligns well with the target audience's needs. This content can be in various formats such as blog posts, infographics, explainer videos, podcasts, whitepapers, and more. Furthermore, choosing the right channel to distribute the content with a well-defined distribution schedule plays a vital role in effective content marketing. Similarly, practicing various promotional tactics to increase content visibility is also important to maximize the impact of the content. This might involve social marketing, search engine optimization (SEO) strategies, or influencer marketing (L. Gajanova (2018).

The emphasis on a well-defined content marketing strategy is crucial in both content marketing and digital content marketing. Koob (2021) highlights the need for clarity and commitment regarding the overall strategy and content production that aligns with the target audience's needs and journalist quality standards. This reinforces the concept that effective content marketing goes beyond simply creating content; it requires a strategic approach that considers the target audience and adheres to best practices.

Effective content marketing provides its target audience with content that is valuable, relevant, reliable, consistent, interactive, and entertaining. To elaborate further, informative, or educational content that addresses a particular need or solves a specific problem for the customer holds true value. Creating content with the audience's present and future needs in mind, in a timely manner demonstrates content relevance (Naseri & Noruzi, 2018). Customers tend to place their trust in a brand if its content proves relatable and relevant (Li et al., 2019). In addition to relevance, customers need to be assured they are getting information from a credible and trustworthy source, therefore, the content should be reliable and unbiased (Naseri & Noruzi, 2018). Authentic and coherent content, coordinating with previously published content shows its consistency with the brand's image (Naseri & Noruzi, 2018).

Moreover, allowing two-way communication, the content should be interactive, such that it is responsive and can be easily shared across multiple platforms (Kang et. al, 2021; Rowley, 2008). If content is entertaining it provides a high value through creativity and storytelling (Hollebeek

& Macky, 2019; Świeczak, 2012; Pulizzi, 2014). While informative, the content should be engaging and memorable. By incorporating these characteristics, B2B digital marketing agencies and brands can develop content that helps them achieve their long-term marketing goals and fosters loyal customer relationships.

As we have now established, effective content marketing requires a multidimensional approach. B2B digital marketing agencies can adopt various industry best practices for employing a powerful content marketing strategy. The proven industry best practices include understanding gratification needs and crafting engaging content. To begin with, in-depth market analysis to identify target audiences according to their demographics, infographics, and psychographics, is pivotal (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). This lays the ground for tailoring engagement strategies that cater to the audience's preferred modes of cognitive, affective, and behavioral content interactions (Patterson et al., 2006; Hollebeek et al., 2014).

As mentioned above, content must provide genuine value through industry reports or informative videos (Naseri & Noruzi, 2018). Brand recognition is strongly encouraged if consistency across diverse content formats is observed, together with the content being interactive, it further increases customer engagement (Kang et al., 2021; Rowley, 2008). To capture the audience, content leveraging storytelling and entertainment value can be impactful (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019; Swieczak, 2012; Pulizzi, 2014).

It is imperative that content marketing should embrace variety and strategic distribution to achieve optimal audience engagement. Diverse formats such as blog posts, infographics, social media posts, and podcasts, etc., should be experimented on to cater to varied preferences within the target audience (Beard et al., 2021). Diverse formats also require diverse publishing channels, therefore, utilizing social media channels, brand websites, and email newsletters, boosts content reach over a wider range of audiences and improves engagement (Shin & Back, 2019; Taiminen & Ranaweera, 2019).

Sustained improvement in content marketing can be achieved by measuring and analyzing performance via a feedback system fueled by data-driven optimization. Website traffic, conversions, lead generation, and engagement rates are the key metrics being monitored. The data is then analyzed, and valuable insight is obtained on content performance. These insights are then used to adjust and refine content for relatively stronger outcomes over time (Content Marketing Institute, 2020), ensuring content marketing efforts remain aligned with the audience's preferences and business goals.

Staying informed of industry trends is paramount to ensure that content marketing remains impactful and relevant (Bloomstein, 2012). Continuously adapting to new strategies allows capitalization on emerging opportunities and addressing the forever evolving audience preferences. Furthermore, collaborating with established industry influencers can significantly

improve brand reach and boost credibility amongst their target audience (Colombo Business Journal, 2021). It is important to prioritize quality over quantity in content creation. Focusing on thorough research, insightful analysis, and engaging visuals ensures content resonates deeply with the target audience and achieves the desired outcomes.

2.3 Content marketing strategy: benefits and challenges

Benefits of content marketing for B2B digital marketing agencies

B2B digital marketing agencies emerge as thought leaders in the industry and build brand recognition among potential clients by fostering effective content marketing. This demonstrates the fact that effective content marketing creates brand awareness. If the content is valuable it results in attracting potential clients in search of solutions to their marketing challenges, therefore generating qualified leads for the agencies. Content marketing also ensures the development of stronger bonds with existing clients by providing valuable and consistent content, while keeping them informed about the emerging industry trends (L. Gajanova (2018).

Challenges of content marketing for B2B digital marketing agencies

Benefits are often accompanied by challenges. B2B digital marketing agencies face many challenges with respect to content marketing, one of them being resource constraints. Creating high-quality content requires time, effort, and financial support, which can be challenging for smaller B2B digital marketing agencies. In addition to this, developing a clear and effective content marketing strategy that aligns with the agency's overall goal and resonates with its target audience requires thorough planning and great expertise. Lastly, tracking the effectiveness of the implemented content marketing strategy and measuring the ROI can be exceptionally challenging (L. Gajanova (2018).

2.4 Customer engagement and retention: definitions and concepts

Customer engagement can be understood through various definitions. It can be viewed as an ongoing, intelligent, and cooperative interaction built on trust (imc², 2008). This trust benefits both the brand and the customer, cultivating a mutually beneficial relationship. Alternatively, customer engagement can be defined as the extent of a consumer's connection with a brand over time (Haven, 2007). This connection is built through a series of interactions, ranging from basic investment to deeper levels of influence.

Yet another perspective sees customer engagement as the process of igniting a potential customer's interest in a brand (Advertising Research Foundation, 2006). This is achieved by effectively communicating the brand's value proposition within the relevant context. Finally, customer engagement can be described as a series of interactions that cultivate a stronger emotional, psychological, or even physical attachment between a customer and a brand (Shevlin, 2006). All these definitions highlight the multifaceted nature of customer engagement, focusing on the importance of building trust, building connections, and creating a positive brand experience.

On the other hand, customer retention is defined as an act of retaining existing customers. Customer retention is often an area of focus among businesses as retaining customers is less expensive than acquiring new ones. Existing literature reveals several ways of improving customer engagement, these include providing exceptional customer service, offering loyalty programs, and personalizing customer experience (People-Metrics, 2008).

Customer engagement model: A five-step web 2.0 powered approach (Fabel et al., 2008)

This part of the thesis describes a customer engagement model that leverages the interactive capabilities of Web 2.0 technologies to cultivate deeper customer relationships. This five-step model provides a framework (figure 4) for companies to guide through a progressive engagement journey.

Step 1: Converting customer activities into digital data

Digital data is the driving force of this model. The initial step involves identifying and converting customer activities into measurable formats suitable for analysis (Fabel et al., 2008). Examples of customer activities that can be used to provide data include website visits, product/service purchases, and interactions on social media platforms. By converting these actions into measurable data points, companies can attain valuable insight into customer behavior and preferences. This data can then be used to customize future engagement strategies and create content to resonate more effectively with the specific target audience.

Step 2: Taking customers to a website for engagement:

Once the customers have been digitized, companies need to create a platform to ensure engagement. This model emphasizes the importance of attracting customers to the company's website (Fabel et al., 2008). Various marketing channels, such as traditional advertising and social media promotion, can be used to drive traffic to the website. Here, the website serves as the central hub where customer engagement activities can be recorded.

Step 3: Customer engagement activities: A four-level framework

This step of the model consists of a four-level framework, aiming to classify the customer engagement activities on a company's website (Fabel et al., 2008). The levels represent the extent of customer involvement with the brand. Level 1 (Involvement) is the initial stage of interaction, where the customer engages in activities such as website browsing, gathering product/service information, or simply making inquiries. Level 2 (Interactions) demonstrates two-way communication as the customer may leave a review, participate in an online discussion, or communicate with customer service representatives. Level 3 (Intimacy) signifies the development of an emotional connection with the brand. At this stage, customers share positive experiences with the brand, act as brand advocates, and recommend the brand to others. They may also write blog posts or participate in online communities dedicated to the brand. Level 4 (Influence) is the final and highest level of customer engagement, the customer actively promotes the brand, influencing others purchasing decisions. This influence can be exerted through word-of-mouth advertising and recommendations, social media endorsements, or by simply persuading others to consider the brand.

Step 4: Neuro-marketing: Unveiling the natural basis of engagement

This model involves the emerging field of neuro-marketing, which explores the brain's response to marketing stimuli (Fleming, 2007). Although optional, this step is a potentially valuable addition to the main model. By measuring brain activity in response to marketing messages, companies can gain valuable insights into customer engagement at a neurological level. Understanding the emotional and cognitive processes underlying customer interactions can inform the development of more targeted and impactful engagement strategies.

Step 5: Customer energy hotspots-segmenting customers based on engagement.

Building on the concept of customer activity levels, the model introduces the idea of 'customer energy hotspots' (Fabel et al., 2008). This approach categorizes customers based on their online behavior and level of engagement. Three main types of customer energy levels are identified first of them being creators, at this level customer are highly active and deem influential, by contributing to content via blogposts or reviews and actively engaging in online discussions, ultimately influencing others' decisions. The second level is contributors, these are moderately engaged customers who share their experiences and opinions online but do not create original content. Lastly, are the viewers, at this level the customers only read product descriptions or watch tutorials. They may not be actively participating in discussions or contributing to content.

By analyzing these models, B2B digital marketing agencies can understand various customer profiles and tailor engagement strategies to cater to the specific need and motivations of each customer segment.

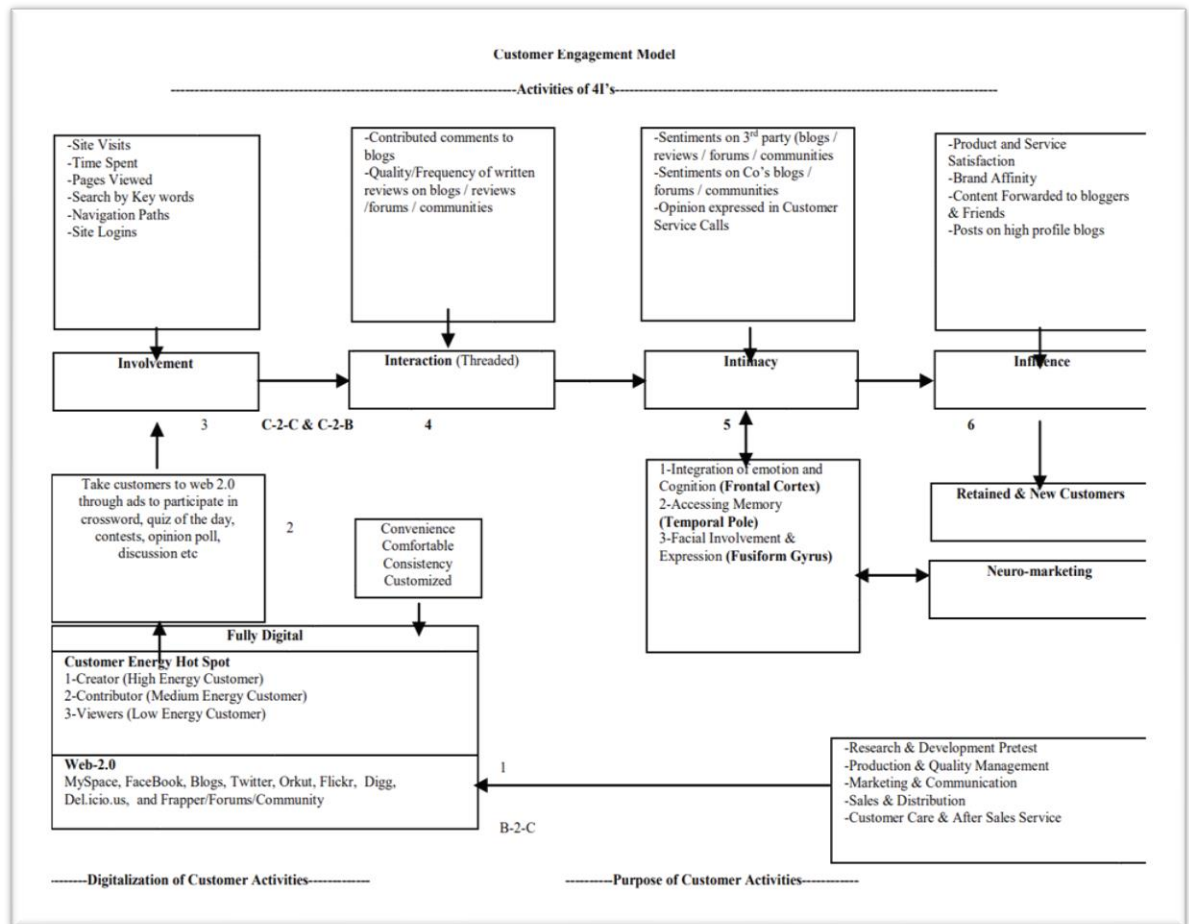


Figure 3:Customer engagement cycle (Singh, A., Kumar, B., & Singh, V. K. (2010). Customer engagement: New key metric of marketing).

2.5 Customer engagement and retention: factors and measures

In today's digital marketing era, boosting interactions and building deep client relationships plays a vital role. The focus is now much more on building a sense of community and cultivating brand loyalty, than just financial transactions. This part of the thesis will elaborate on the customer engagement models, the influencing factors, method of investigation and the pivotal role of social media platforms on influencing customer retention.

Customer engagement models and influencing factors

This discussion involves two key models: Content marketing pillars of engagement (Yaghtin et al., 2020) and Customer engagement and behavioral manifestation (So et al., 2014).

Content marketing pillars of engagement (Yaghtin et al., 2020)

This model relies on three fundamental pillars essential for ensuring customer engagement through content marketing. These pillars include compelling content, interactive content and long-term focus on value. To captivate and sustain clients, creating content that is informative and entertaining, while being specific to the target demographics is paramount (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). It is also important to transition beyond static content, therefore, facilitating two-way communication through comments, polls, quizzes, or other interactive elements creates strong bonds with customers. The long-term objective should be to instill trust and forge lasting connection with customers.

Customer engagement and behavioral manifestation (So et al., 2014):

This model highlights that customer engagement rises beyond mere transactions, by demonstrating customer actions that indicate loyalty and advocacy towards brands. Positive word-of-mouth promotions amplify brand credibility, hence, contented customers can be encouraged to endorse products or services to others. The online reviews and ratings also exert a considerable influence over purchasing decisions, actively engaging with the brand on social media platforms through likes, comments, shares, or participation in online discussions, creates a sense of belonging within the community. For B2B agencies such as Company X, as described by Youssef et al. (2018), customer engagement relies on cultivation of trust and fostering lasting commitments.

Measuring customer engagement

Customer engagement matrix (CEM) is an analytical framework devised by Pansari and Kumar (2017) which facilitates the evaluation of customer engagement by scrutinizing two important factors: satisfaction levels and emotional resonance. It involves different stages of customer engagement predicted by four metrics. Beginning with indifference, this includes indicating customers with specific needs met by the product/service without any emotional attachment. Next is passion, it reflects enthusiastic customers displaying enthusiasm for specific features albeit experiencing overall dissatisfaction. Following passion is attraction, this categorises contented customers of profound emotional connection. The final stage is true love, this stage exhibits customers with both heightened levels of satisfaction along with strong emotional bonding with the brand.

Social media engagement analysis

Measuring customer engagement across social media channels, by monitoring likes, comments, shares, etc., agencies can gain valuable insights demonstrating audience sentiments and brand perceptions (Guesalaga, 2016). This analysis promotes comprehensive understanding of customer priorities, thereby providing insights which can be utilized to strategically adapt the content to meet the evolving customer expectations (Agnihotri, 2020).

Customer Retention: A Cornerstone of Business Success

This passage dives into the concept of customer retention, a critical factor influencing a company's long-term prosperity. By understanding customer retention and the various strategies that promote it, businesses can cultivate loyal customer bases, ensuring repetitive purchases and positive word-of-mouth promotion. Customer retention can be conceptualized by two methods, evaluating of product/service quality and building long-lasting relationships. The evaluation of product/service quality gauges the effectiveness of a company's offerings in meeting the customers expectations, ultimately influencing customer satisfaction and loyalty (Chen & Liu, 2019). Customer retention also depends on the practices and activities carried out by a firm to cultivate customer relationships characterized by satisfaction and loyalty (Chen & Liu, 2019).

The Significance of Customer Lifetime Value (CLTV)

Customer retention goes beyond simply ensuring customer satisfaction. It acknowledges the importance of Customer Lifetime Value (CLTV) - the total net profit a customer generates over their relationship with the company (Leventhal & Leventhal, 2006). Loyal customers contribute to a company's CLTV through repeated purchases, referrals, and positive word-of-mouth promotion.

Drivers of Customer Retention

Research by Gustafsson, Johnson, and Ross (2005) identifies three key drivers that influence customer retention- customer satisfaction, affective commitment and calculative commitment. The research describes customer satisfaction as a customer's overall assessment of a product/service or performance of the offering (Gustafsson et al., 2005). It demonstrated a positive correlation between high customer satisfaction and customer retention (Chen & Liu, 2019). The research also demonstrates the emotional attachment a customer feels towards a company, such that they maintain loyalty even though the satisfaction levels decrease (Chen & Liu, 2019). Lastly, this research also sheds light on another perspective that customer retention also arises when a customer feels inconvenience when they think of switching to a

competitor, as they may also be considering additional costs such as switching fee or simply lack of suitable alternatives (Chen & Liu, 2019).

Strategies to Enhance Customer Retention

Leventhal & Leventhal (2006) propose several strategies companies can employ to improve customer retention. These strategies emphasize understanding customer churn, focusing on high-value customers, prioritizing employee training to deliver excellent service, and continuously measuring retention rates across different business segments.

By prioritizing customer retention and implementing effective strategies, companies can cultivate a loyal customer base. This translates to increased profitability through repeated business, reduced customer acquisition costs, and positive brand advocacy. Therefore, customer retention is not merely a marketing tactic but a core business philosophy that ensures long-term success and sustainability.

2.6 Customer engagement and retention: benefits and challenges

Benefit of customer engagement:

Customers that are exceptionally engaged are more likely to remain loyal to the brand/company and are keen to repurchase the offered products/services, increasing customer retention. According to existing knowledge, engaged customers also act as advocates and promote the brand through positive word-of-mouth and online reviews. This increase in customer retention and enhanced brand advocacy can lead to higher CLTV. The customer engagement activities also provide valuable insights into customer preferences and needs, making it easier to meet the expectations of the target audience through tailored content. While affective and calculative commitment can create a "stickiness" that keeps customers from switching (Chen & Liu, 2019), customer satisfaction remains the cornerstone of customer retention (Chen & Liu, 2019). Loyal customers are not only satisfied but also emotionally invested in the brand.

Challenges of customer engagement and retention

Within the digital marketing landscape, achieving and sustaining customer engagement presents a complex challenge. While efforts to measure the effectiveness of the customer engagement initiatives can be difficult, maintaining a long-term customer engagement relationship requires a commitment to continuous innovation and development. At the same

time challenge lies in the creation and ongoing maintenance of content that resonates with target audiences. This content must not only be informative but also captivating enough to hold the client's attention.

2.7 Research gap and Hypotheses

Research Gap

Under the light of existing research there is a well-established understanding that content marketing can significantly benefit B2B digital marketing agencies by ensuring client engagement and retention. However, a critical gap remains with respect to the specific content types that resonate most effectively with the B2B clients. While research demonstrates a positive influence of content marketing, we must dive deeper to investigate what is necessary (e.g. format, topic, style). Additionally, there are limited studies that investigate how a client's industry might influence the content marketing strategy and client relationships (Youssef et al., 2018). Fundamentally, different industries may respond better to specific content formats or topics, for example, the financial services industry might prefer white papers on complex investment strategies, while the retail industry might prefer engaging with visually appealing infographics on consumer trends.

A gap can also be noticed in the investigation of the impact of personalizing content marketing strategies for B2B clients. Although personalization is an emerging trend across marketing disciplines, its effectiveness in improving client engagement within B2B digital marketing agencies requires further investigation. By addressing these knowledge gaps, this thesis aims to provide a more refined understanding of how B2B digital marketing agencies can leverage content marketing to build stronger client relationships and achieve long-term success.

Hypotheses

H1a: Informative content that addresses client challenges will have a stronger positive impact on client engagement compared to promotional content.

H1b: Thought leadership content showcasing industry expertise will lead to higher client engagement and retention than generic content.

H1c: Interactive content formats (e.g., webinars, infographics) will generate greater client engagement compared to purely text-based formats.

H2: The positive relationship between content marketing strategy and client engagement will be stronger for clients in complex industries (e.g., finance, healthcare) compared to simpler industries (e.g., retail).

H3: Personalized content marketing strategies tailored to individual client needs and interests will lead to significantly higher client engagement and retention compared to generic, non-personalized content.

3 Research methodology

This section outlines the research design and methods employed to investigate the content marketing strategies within digital marketing agencies.

3.1 Research paradigm and approach

This research adopts a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of B2B digital marketing agencies' content marketing practices. Qualitative research methods are valuable for exploring subjective experiences, perceptions, and meanings (Flick,2014). By conducting semi-structured interviews, the study aims to capture the experiences and perspectives of the interviewees from agencies regarding their content marketing strategies.

3.2 Research design and strategy

This research adopts a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of B2B digital marketing agencies' content marketing practices. Qualitative research methods are valuable for exploring subjective experiences, perceptions, and meanings (Flick,2014). By conducting semi-structured interviews, the study aims to capture the experiences and perspectives of the interviewees from agencies regarding their content marketing strategies.

3.3 Data collection methods and sources

This study involves semi-structured interviews as the core data collection method, within the qualitative data collection methodology. A purposive sampling approach was used to choose participants that possess profound knowledge and experience in relation to the research inquiry. The interview questionnaire ideally draws upon initial discussion with the founder of

Company X and representatives (founder, CEO, and marketing manager) of three similar B2B digital marketing agencies. This approach allows comparative data analysis of the content marketing strategies practiced by Company X and other similar B2B digital marketing agencies. The questionnaire includes one-ended questions specifically crafted to ensure and encourage comprehensive responses, explore recurring themes related to the content marketing strategies practiced by the agencies, their target audience considerations, and the methods of quantifying content performance.

3.4 Data analysis methods and techniques

The interview data was analyzed primarily by thematic analysis method. This method involves identifying the recurring themes, patterns, and key insights within the transcribed interview (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding techniques were then used to categorize and analyze data effectively.

3.5 Ethical considerations and issues

This research has been conducted with commitment to the highest ethical standards through all the investigation stages. Informed consent was obtained from all participants in the study, to ensure transparency and to practice autonomy. The consent involved providing the participants with a comprehensive understanding of the research objective, their rights to confidentiality and protection as participants, while reassuring specific measures to safeguard the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses.

3.6 Reliability and validity of the research

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings, member checking was conducted. This involved sharing key findings and interpretation with interviewees to verify their accuracy and resonate with their perspectives. Additionally, triangulation was considered by incorporating data from other sources, such as the agencies' content marketing documentation and website analysis, to provide a more comprehensive picture. Thick description was employed throughout the research, providing rich and detailed descriptions of the research context, interview process and analytical decisions to enhance transparency.

Even though the number of interviews is limited, the chosen research design and meticulous data analysis techniques have contributed to the reliability and credibility of the research

finding. This study aims to provide valuable insights into the diverse content marketing strategies employed within the B2B digital marketing industry.

4 Qualitative data analysis and findings

One of the primary objectives of the questionnaire was to collect data intended to analyze the factors shaping the content marketing strategies and subsequently evaluate their influence on customer engagement and retention in B2B digital marketing agencies. To identify these predictors and understand their impact on various outcomes, interviews from the respondents have been summarized in this section. The questionnaire has been structured into three main sections: Agency demographics, Content marketing strategies and client engagement and retention.

4.1 Insights from the interviews

Beginning with the section of agency demographics, we gathered data from participants' designations in the agency, the duration their agencies have been operating within the B2B digital marketing industry, the client industries represented, and the average number of clients managed annually. According to the interviewees a common designation was shared among the leadership of the four digital marketing agencies, they held positions of founder, CEO, and marketing manager, this highlights their direct contributions in shaping the agency's marketing strategy and client relations. The agencies averaged seven clients annually with a variety in clientele such as e-commerce, finance, healthcare, and technology. However, a focus on providing personalized attention to each client, regardless of the number of clients served annually, was a consistent theme across the interviews. This suggests that they are committed to building strong relationships by tailoring services to specific industry needs.

The content marketing strategy section contained questions regarding the significance of various strategy components, the types of content format used (e.g. images, texts), the frequency of content publication per week and the methods of content distribution. This section also examined the effectiveness of content marketing plans in establishing positive relationships with customers, providing detailed insights into agencies' approaches and practices that contributed to their success. According to the interviews a shared vision has emerged from analyzing the content marketing strategies of these B2B digital marketing agencies. All these agencies prioritize establishing thought leadership, educating clients, building trust, and lead generation. Among these thought leadership and lead generation receive the most emphasis, as evidenced by interviewee 1's detailed explanation of the advantages of these methods.

To cater to the diverse audience preferences, the agencies utilize a rich matrix of content formats. Blog posts serve as the foundation for sharing industry trends and practical advice. In-depth analysis of specific topics is provided by eBooks and whitepapers. Complex data is transformed into engaging visuals with infographics. The videos encompass a variety of formats, including explainer videos, thought leadership interviews and client success stories, emphasized by interviewee 2 and 4.

Consistency remains supreme when it comes to content publishing schedule. All agencies adhere to a regular publishing schedule ranging from weekly (interviewee 2,3&4) to monthly (interviewee 1). Understanding the specific frequencies adopted by each agency offers valuable insight into their content production process and audience engagement strategies. Finally, a multi-channel distribution strategy is employed across the board. Social media promotion expands reach and ignites conversations, while targeted email marketing keeps existing clients and nurtured leads informed. Strategic website placement ensures content visibility on the agencies' websites, with the keywords often highlighted on relevant landing pages.

The emphasis on thought leadership appears to vary slightly across the agencies. While all acknowledge its importance, interviewee 1 provides a more detailed elaboration on its benefits, suggesting a stronger prioritization of this aspect. Furthermore, there is subtle variation in the specific video content formats utilized by each agency. Interviewees 2 and 4 explicitly mention explainer videos and client success stories, which are not directly mentioned by other interviewees. This hints towards different approaches within the broader video content category.

Content marketing has become a strategic aspect for success in the B2B digital marketing agency. The shared approach mentioned above relies upon the creation of high-value content in various formats, together with the multi-channel distribution strategy. Strategic crafting and distribution of informative content, fulfill a range of objectives of the B2B agencies. These agencies aim to establish themselves as a thought leader within the B2B digital marketing environment, anchoring their position as trusted advisors. Clients are educated through content, empowering them with knowledge to make informed decisions and developing collaborative partnerships. By consistently producing high quality content, agencies tend to establish themselves as authorities within the B2B digital marketing field. This position builds trust and credibility with both existing and potential new clients, who view the agency as a reliable source through their expertise. Lastly, this content marketing strategy attracts organic leads by showcasing the agencies capabilities as a solution provider for B2B digital marketing challenges. This analysis therefore highlights the role of content marketing for B2B digital marketing agencies.

The last part of the questionnaire which is the client engagement and retention section focused on how agencies measured client engagement, the marketing initiatives that achieved the highest levels of engagement, and the extent to which agencies personalized their marketing strategies for individual B2B clients. This section also included detailed metrics on client engagement and retention, highlighting areas of improvement. These questions revealed the different strategies employed by agencies and the challenges encountered during the process. All four agencies reveal a strong alignment in their approaches to measuring client engagement and retention, while also highlighting some differences in content personalization strategies.

Emphasis on multi-faceted approach to measure client engagement and retention is observed, the key metrics consistently mentioned during the interviews include website traffic and content download, social media engagement, client feedback and surveys, lead generation and conversion rates, and client retention rates. This suggests that increased traffic and download rates towards content serves as an indicator of audience interest and engagement. The number of likes, comments, and shares on social media platforms where content is promoted gauges the content resonance and audience conversation. Direct feedback that is obtained through surveys or one-on-one conversations offers a valuable insight into client perception of the content marketing efforts.

Moreover, tracking the number of leads generated through content marketing and their conversion rate into paying clients helps to assess content effectiveness in attracting high-quality leads. Lastly, high client retention rates demonstrate that content marketing contributed to building trust, satisfaction, and long-term client relationships. All interviewees reported positive trends in these metrics confirming the effectiveness of their content marketing efforts in fostering client engagement and retention.

Focusing on the marketing initiative for high engagement, all four agencies thought leadership articles and case studies emerged as the most successful content formats driving client engagement. Content personalization is also acknowledged by agencies of which the most common approaches involve segmenting client bases by industry or marketing goals and tailoring content recommendations accordingly. Interviewee 1, however, presented a more sophisticated approach, going beyond segmentation by mentioning the use of dynamic content on websites and personalized content recommendations based on user behavior.

While all agencies acknowledge the value of personalization, the extent to which it is implemented varies, the overall findings suggest that B2B digital marketing agencies are actively updating their content marketing strategies to foster deeper client relationships and to achieve long term client retention.

4.2 Discussions and interpretations of the findings

In-depth analysis of the data provided by the interviews can now be used to assess the validity of the proposed hypothesis.

H1a: Informative content that addresses client challenges will have a stronger positive impact on client engagement compared to promotional content.

As per results, the interview findings strongly support the hypothesis H1a, as the generation of informative content has been observed as a common practice among all four agencies, leading to client education. This focus can be witnessed in the various content formats utilized by the agencies, such as blog posts, eBooks, and whitepapers. These content formats aim to provide in-depth analysis, practical advice, industry trends, client empowerment in terms of knowledge and establishing reputations as trust advisors. Aligning with the core concepts of H1a, advocating that informative content builds stronger client engagement by addressing their specific needs and challenges.

H1b: Thought leadership content showcasing industry expertise will lead to higher client engagement and retention than generic content.

The interview finding strongly supports H1b, demonstrating thought leadership as a central theme of content marketing strategies of all agencies. Responses from the interviews highlight the significant role of thought leadership in building trust, credibility and attracting new clients. New content formats such as thought leadership interview, and whitepapers are produced by agencies to position themselves as experts in specific subject matters within B2B digital marketing industry. Hence, we can conclude that this focus aligns with H1b, suggesting that thought leadership content effectively leads to client engagement and retention by demonstrating expertise and gaining trust.

H1c: Interactive content formats (e.g., webinars, infographics) will generate greater client engagement compared to purely text-based formats.

While the interviews acknowledge the use of a variety of content formats, including interactive elements like infographics and videos, they do not provide conclusive evidence to support or refuse H1c. H1c suggests that interactive content format will generate more client engagement as compared to purely text-based formats. The interviews reveal that agencies use a mix of these content formats, but the specific impact of each format on engagement remains to be explored.

H2: The positive relationship between content marketing strategy and client engagement will be stronger for clients in complex industries (e.g., finance, healthcare) compared to simpler industries (e.g., retail).

According to the interviewees, all four agencies serve a diverse range of clientele, mainly e-commerce, technology, healthcare, and finance, but the interview data is insufficient to assess H2 as they do not demonstrate how content strategies are developed for different industries and how these variations might influence client engagement.

H3: Personalized content marketing strategies tailored to individual client needs and interests will lead to significantly higher client engagement and retention compared to generic, non-personalized content.

A partial support to the hypothesis H3 can be established, with respect to the interview responses. Although all four agencies acknowledge the significance of personalization, the extent to which they are implemented in the content marketing strategy of each agency varies. Some industries tend to segment their client base by industry or marketing goals and tailor content suggestions accordingly, only one interviewee has presented a more advanced approach towards personalization by mentioning the use of dynamic content on the websites and personalization of content recommendations based on the behavior of the audience. This suggests that personalization of content has the potential to significantly enhance client engagement. However, further investigation is needed to establish an understanding of the effectiveness of various personalization techniques and their subsequent impact in client engagement and retention.

5 Conclusions and recommendations

The research suggests that Company X is utilizing a strong content marketing strategy that embraces a variety of content formats and distribution channels. This aligns perfectly with established industry best practices known to boost client engagement and retention. Company X is using blogposts, eBooks, and whitepapers to deliver valuable insight, focusing on industry trends, practical advice, and in-depth analyses. This aligns with the established importance of informative content for improved client engagement and retention. Company X also employs white papers and thought leadership interviews to showcase their expertise in the industry. These findings correlate well with RQ1, however, the interviews do not directly confirm the use of interactive content by Company X such as infographics, explainer videos and client success stories- Company X can use the elements for enhancing audience engagement.

Company X uses social media platforms to expand the reach of their content and spark conversations with potential and existing clients-broadening their content visibility and encouraging audiences' engagement. Company X also uses targeted email marketing to keep existing clients informed, supporting client retention. Their official website serves as a central hub for their content, where they practice strategic placement with relevant keywords to

ensure easy access for target audience, therefore, maximizing the impact of their content creation efforts.

The findings from the research with respect to RQ2 state that Company X adheres to a data driven approach for measuring client engagement and retention through content marketing efforts in alignment with industry best practices. The current practices include engagement metrics, retention metrics, and lead generation. While positive trends are reported through these interviews, they lack specific data on Company X's engagement and retention levels, therefore implementing systems that capture and analyze this data is crucial to quantify the success of content marketing efforts. Solely focusing on website traffic and downloads might not be enough, it is imperative to analyze the source of traffic and the type of content to provide insight to audience preferences and content effectiveness in driving desired actions.

While client feedback is beneficial, going beyond basic satisfaction score can be helpful. Open-ended questions and sentiment analysis can reveal deeper insights into client needs and areas of improvement.

Moving forward, while Company X practices a positive client relationship supporting hypothesis H1a and H1b, a gap remains in the measurement of the exact extent to which Company X's marketing strategy contributes to a positive relationship RQ3, this may be due to insufficient information on the extent of personalization provided by the agency. This also resonates with RQ4 which is intended to identify areas of improvement. In addition to more focused personalization, Company X could benefit from investigating the effect of various formats and interactive elements, analysis of audiences' preferences and engagement metrics by A/B testing to determine what resonates best with target audiences. Client data and feedback can be used to personalize content recommendation, offer targeted call to action, or even tailor the content itself to address the specific need of the client.

All the above-mentioned practices and recommendations collectively answer the RQ5, of how data-driven content marketing strategy can be developed and implemented within the agency to improve client engagement and retention. These translate to a positive client relationship for company X. The client feels valued and supported by receiving informative and relevant content that helps them address their challenges and reach the target audience, specific to each industry. Thus, showcasing Company X a valued partner for businesses looking to stay informed, engaged, and competitive.

5.1 Suggestions for future research

After critical evaluation of the conclusions and areas of remaining research, Company X can perform further research to address the different areas of gaps, by performing quantitative analysis of user engagement metrics-by analyzing the metrics like time spent on content, click-through rates on call to action, and content downloads. Company X can then identify the most successful content formats and approaches. This data can be presented as a guideline for future content creation to maximize engagement.

Company X can develop a methodology to investigate ROI (return on investment), considering factors such as website traffic conversion rates, lead generation from content, and potential client lifetime value, these can provide Company X a more comprehensive picture of the financial impact of their content marketing efforts.

Furthermore, Company X can track the impact of improved content marketing strategy by implementing a longitudinal study that tracks client engagement and retention metrics overtime to reveal the effectiveness of Company X's improved content marketing strategy. This can be done by surveys, website analytics, and CRM data analysis to show a cause-and-effect relationship between improved content and positive client outcomes.

Lastly, by carrying out sentiment analysis and A/B testing of personalized content recommendations, within open-ended feedback surveys Company X can establish how personalized content experience correlates with client satisfaction, loyalty, and advocacy. This data can be present as an asset in refining their personalization strategy for further strengthening client relationships.

By establishing a comprehensive understanding of what content best responds to with their client and audiences, analyzing the financial returns on their efforts, and studying the impact on client relationships, Company X can make informed decisions regarding future content creation and personalization efforts.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Questionnaire (Interview)

I am pleased to inform you that I am a student at Laurea University of Applied sciences, pursuing a degree in bachelor's in business administration (BBA). As partial fulfilment for my degree, I am conducting research on the impact of content marketing strategies on customer engagement and retention. Please note that any information you give will be treated with confidentiality. Your assistance will be highly appreciated.

Part 1: Agency Demographics

1. What is your role in your agency?
2. How many years has your agency been operating in the B2B digital marketing space?
3. To which industries do the clients belong? (e.g. Finance, healthcare, technology)
4. On average, how many B2B clients does your agency work with per year?

Part 2: Content marketing strategy

5. Describe the importance of the following:

- establishing thought leadership in the B2B digital marketing industry
- educating clients about digital marketing trends and best practices
- building trust and credibility with potential and existing clients
- generating leads and attracting new B2B clients

6. Which content formats does your agency utilize most frequently in its content marketing strategy?
7. How does your agency typically publish new content for your audience (e.g. weekly, monthly, quarterly)?
8. Briefly describe your content distribution strategy (e.g. social media promotion, email marketing, website placement)

9. To what extent does your agency's current content marketing strategy contribute to fostering positive client relationships?

Part 3: Client engagement and retention

10. How do you measure client engagement with your agency's content marketing effort

-website traffic and content download

-social media engagement (likes, comment, shares)

-client feedback and surveys

-lead generation and conversion rates

-client retention rates

11. In your experience, which kind of marketing initiatives have resulted in the highest levels of client engagement (e.g. thought leadership articles, case studies, showcasing successful client projects)?

12. Do you personalize your content marketing strategy to cater to specific needs and interests of individuals B2B clients? (yes/no)

13. What metrics are currently used by your Company to measure client engagement and retention? What are the current levels of client engagement and retention associated with the agency's content marketing efforts?

14. What are the potential areas of improvement with the agency to enhance client engagement and retention?