

## Effectiveness of Content Marketing Strategies on Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) and Brand Engagement

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### ABSTRACT

In today's digital age, content marketing is becoming a key factor in building brand trust and encouraging consumer engagement. The present study investigates the effect of content marketing strategies on Electronic Word-of-Mouth (E-WOM) and its impact on consumer purchase intention using an empirical approach. The study is conducted using primary data gathered from 90 active social media users with regard to their level of awareness, patterns of engagement, preferences for types of content, and sharing habits on the most popular social media channels. The findings were validated using statistical techniques such as percentage analysis, Analysis of Variance (Anova) and Cronbach's alpha reliability testing. The results suggest that video and social media posts are the primary form of content that consumers are engaged with, with Instagram and YouTube the key platforms. Entertaining and informative content proved to be the most powerful enablers of positive E-WOM, and user-generated content was perceived as more credible than brand-generated content. The Anova results show there to be statistically significant differences between the different platforms when it comes to brand-related content exposure and there to be a moderate correlation between review-sharing behaviour and brand trust. The study confirms that positive online reviews have a significant impact on purchase intention and that negative online reviews represent a significant barrier. The measurement instrument has been proven internally consistent with a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.809. The results provide practical suggestions to digital marketers, brand managers, and researchers in the field of consumer behaviour and digital communication strategy.

**Keywords:** *Content Marketing, Electronic Word-of-Mouth, Consumer Behaviour, Digital Marketing, Brand Trust, Purchase Intention, Social Media, User-Generated Content*

A proliferation of digital platforms has completely changed the consumer decision-making process. In the past, people bought based on the mass media advertising, whereas today they have to go through a complicated system of brand generated content, peer recommendations, and algorithmically curated information. In this context, two of the most important drivers of brand perception and buying intent are becoming even more

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important as their influence grows: content marketing and Electronic Word-of-Mouth (E-WOM).

Content marketing is the development and sharing of relevant, valuable, and consistent content that is designed to attract and keep a clear and specific audience. Unlike interruptive advertising, it works on the basis of pull, meaning that it creates engagement with the audience due to its usefulness and resonance, not repetition. E-WOM, on the other hand, refers to the dissemination of opinions, experiences, and recommendations on digital platforms – from micro blog posts, ratings, social media comments, to video reviews. Consumers' perceived trustworthiness of PGM is significantly greater than that of sponsored messages, making PGM an important driver of purchase decisions.

As platforms like Instagram, YouTube and LinkedIn have become more blurred in the line between brand content and consumer conversation, the relationship between these two constructs has become increasingly important. The one great piece of content can generate thousands and thousands of organic mentions, and it does so with no corresponding marketing budget. On the other hand, when content does not connect, it can lead to negative, which can negatively affect brand equity on a large scale. This study aims to locate itself at this nexus, adding empirical insights from a structured consumer survey, to throw light on the link between content marketing attributes and the e-WOM generation and, in turn, purchase intention in the Indian digital marketplace.

### ***Need for Study***

Though there have been all kinds of books and articles published about digital marketing, there's one big gap – the exact process by which brand-generated content is converted into organic consumer advocacy. Organisations regularly invest in content strategies without having a way to anticipate which of the content characteristics (informativeness, entertainment value, emotional resonance or credibility) have greater impact on e-WOM. Yet this dynamic is complicated by the credibility gap between branded content and peer reviews: consumers can prove they trust the latter more, but brands are the ones that are still the main producers of the stories the consumers subsequently spread.

There's also a virality challenge based on the platform algorithm design. Social media algorithms place increased value on content that inspires real-world interactions, which makes content that doesn't elicit e-WOM invisible to target consumers. This is a strategic threat and an opportunity for Indian organisations working in a consumer economy that is fast becoming digital. The identification of the specific content features that are commonly associated with sharing, commenting and recommending behaviour is thus not just an academic task, but a business necessity.

Moreover, most of the available research considers content marketing and e-WOM as independent entities without considering the directionality between them. This study, by empirical examination, contributes to both theory and practice, by exploring the relationship of consumer engagement with digital content and the extent to which this translates into consumer involvement in online brand discourse.

### ***Scope of Study***

This study is bounded to understand the influence of content marketing on e-WOM generation in Indian digital consumer market. In particular, the study includes the following

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dimensions: Analysis of how consumers respond to a range of content types – video, blog posts, social media, podcasts and email. Insights into platform-specific behaviour on Instagram, YouTube, Facebook and LinkedIn.

Evaluation of sources regarding trustworthiness, authority and sharing of UGC vs Branded content. Evaluation of the effect of e-WOM on brand perception, brand trust building process, and purchase intention. Inception of emotional content as motivators of sharing behaviour.

The study is limited to a purposive sample of active digital consumers in a targeted geographic and temporal scope. Offline word-of-mouth, traditional marketing channels, and macro-level industry analysis are not included in the scope of the study. The results are mainly applicable to customer-facing digital marketing scenarios.

### ***Objectives of Study***

#### **1. Primary Objective**

- To examine the impact of Electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM) on content marketing.

#### **2. Secondary Objectives**

- To study the dimension of e- WOM in digital platform.
- To examine the impact of e- WOM on audience engagement (with content marketing)
- To evaluate the role of e- WOM in shaping consumer perception towards brand content.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

A review of existing scholarship indicates the development of a growing understanding of the way digital content relates to consumer communication behaviour. The synthesis builds on key and recent work in content-marketing, e-WOM and digital consumer behaviour.

**Sudarsono (2020)** conceptualises content marketing as an art of engaging potential customers without overt selling. The study operationalises content quality across six dimensions: relevance, accuracy, value, ease of understanding, discoverability, and consistency a framework that remains foundational for assessing content effectiveness in digital environments.

**Snyder et al. (2020)** demonstrated that disruptive technologies, including AI, IoT, and big data, accelerated digital transformation and enriched the content landscape. Technologically enriched content real-time dashboards, explainers, and solution narratives were found to enhance consumer trust, which positively influenced e-WOM.

**Chung (2021)** identified a decisive technological inflection in which smart analytics and realtime digital capabilities became operational necessities. Organisations that leveraged these tools to craft insight-driven content were better positioned to build stakeholder trust and stimulate positive online discourse.

**Marcellino and Paredes (2023) and Ijan and Ellyawati (2023)** confirmed that on short-form video platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, digital content marketing functions as the primary independent variable triggering e-WOM as a mediating construct in the purchase decision process.

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**Hermite and Hidayah (2023)** introduced an important nuance: the valence positive or negative of e-WOM carries higher statistical significance on buying behaviour than the sheer volume of brand posts, indicating that content quality and peer validation outweigh posting frequency.

**Mala et al. (2023) and Tafolli et al. (2025)** characterised e-WOM as a 'psychological safety net' that reduces perceived risk in digital transactions. Their work underscores that e-WOM operates frequently through brand image as a mediating variable: when consumers perceive branded content as authentic, participation in positive e-WOM is elevated, which in turn solidifies brand credibility and purchase intention.

**Chen et al. (2023)** identified storytelling particularly emotional or relatable narratives as the strongest factor in converting a passive viewer into an active buyer on visual platforms such as Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts.

**Gunarto and Anggraini (2024)** argued for a comprehensive analysis of digital communication strategies, advocating that corporate content marketing significantly influences e-WOM dissemination, brand equity, and value co-creation through emotional engagement and sustained brand loyalty.

**Porto et al. (2024)** extended this argument by establishing that the drivers of e-WOM are not uniform across social networks. Content marketing initiatives impact e-WOM differently depending on the platform's audience sociodemographic profile, psychographic characteristics, and consumer journey stage.

**Nandi and Prasad (2024)** quantified consumer engagement through three dimensions Vigour, Absorption, and Dedication finding no significant generational difference between Millennials and Gen Z in their e-WOM behaviour, suggesting that digital literacy has levelled the engagement playing field.

**Hoang and Tung (2023)** demonstrated that e-WOM's influence on purchase decisions is frequently mediated by brand image, particularly when branded content is perceived as authentic.

The body of literature as a whole supports a directionality: A well-designed content marketing encourages e-WOM, thereby building and reinforcing the trust of the brand and the purchasing intention. However, a key area of research remains at the consumer level, and that is how user engagement with different types of content relates to active sharing and advocacy actions towards the content across different demographic groups.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### *Research Design*

The study is descriptive research which employs quantitative analysis and interpretive analysis to understand the relationship between content marketing and e-WOM. The main data collection tools used were a structured questionnaire covering the following thematic areas: demographic profiling, content marketing awareness and behaviour, e-WOM patterns, content marketing perception and overall digital marketing effectiveness, with the latter consisting of closed-ended questions.

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### *Sampling*

Simple Random Sampling (SRS) was used to explore the study so that no bias would occur. The targeted audience were those who use social media and are digital consumers. A total of 90 respondents were used in the final analysis, which has provided a good representation across the age groups, occupations and educational backgrounds.

### *Tools of Analysis*

The analysis of the data was carried out with SPSS. The following statistical tools were used:

- Reliability Analysis (Cronbach's Alpha): to check the internal consistency of the scale.
- Univariate and Bivariate Data Analysis: to interpret characteristics of the distribution of two variables.
- Inter-respondent agreement using: Fleiss Multi-rater Kappa.
- Hypotheses testing of group differences: One-Way ANOVA.

## ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

### *Reliability Analysis*

The internal consistency of the scale consisting of 11 items was high, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.809. The overall item mean was 3.306 with a very small range of 0.609 indicating that all items measure constructs of similar difficulty and relevance.

### *Demographic Profile of Respondents*

| Characteristic | Category                       | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|----------------|--------------------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Age Group      | 21–30 years                    | 52        | 57.8%          |
|                | Below 20                       | 29        | 32.2%          |
|                | 31–40 / Above 40               | 3         | 3.3%           |
| Occupation     | Student                        | 49        | 54.4%          |
|                | Employee                       | 26        | 28.9%          |
|                | Self-Employed / Business Owner | 15        | 16.7%          |
| Education      | Undergraduate                  | 50        | 55.6%          |
|                | Postgraduate                   | 28        | 31.1%          |
| Internet Usage | Daily                          | 70        | 77.8%          |
|                | Weekly / Occasionally          | 20        | 22.2%          |

The sample is dominated by young adults (21–30 years: 57.8%), students (54.4%), and daily internet users (77.8%), making the findings particularly relevant to the digitally active consumer segment.

### *Content Consumption Patterns*

| Variable                              | Leading Response     | Percentage |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------|------------|
| Most preferred content type           | Videos               | 45.6%      |
| Primary platform used                 | Instagram            | 58.9%      |
| Content that influences most          | Entertaining content | 38.9%      |
| Branded content consumption frequency | Sometimes            | 32.2%      |
| Awareness of content marketing        | Yes                  | 77.8%      |

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Video is the most wanted format (45.6%) and Instagram is the most popular platform (58.9%). The most influential type of entertainment is content in that form (38.9%), followed by learning content (24.4%) and information content (23.3%). The value-driven content performs best in engaging consumers, as shown by promotional content scores the lowest influence (12.2%).

### e-WOM Behaviour and Review Patterns

| Variable                                  | Key Finding                                  |
|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| Read online reviews before purchase       | 42.2% always read; only 2.2% never do        |
| Most trusted review platform              | Google Reviews (34.4%), social media (32.2%) |
| Level of review influence on purchase     | Moderate (35.6%), High (26.7%)               |
| Ever shared experience/review online      | Yes: 46.7%, Maybe: 33.3%, No: 20%            |
| Trust in user-generated vs. brand content | Yes (UGC preferred): 44.4%                   |
| Influencer review credibility             | Neutral(36.7%), Somewhat credible (35.6%)    |

The review phenomenon is so interwoven in the buying decision process that it cannot be ignored in online review. 42.2% of people always read reviews before buying something and 86.7% say reviews had some influence on their buying decision. Interestingly, 44.4% trust user-generated content over the brand's content, highlighting the significance of peer validation in the digital consumer journey.

### Descriptive Statistics - Key Constructs

| Construct / Item                          | Mean | Interpretation                           |
|-------------------------------------------|------|------------------------------------------|
| Negative reviews discourage purchase      | 3.54 | Strongest purchase deterrent             |
| Emotional content triggers sharing        | 3.54 | Primary sharing motivator                |
| Trust in brands sharing valuable content  | 3.52 | Strong brand trust builder               |
| Positive reviews increase purchase intent | 3.39 | Significant influencer                   |
| Social media reliance for product info    | 3.38 | Moderate-high reliance                   |
| Sharing brand content on own profile      | 2.94 | Lowest — resistance to personal advocacy |

The two most salient drivers of behaviour are negative reviews (mean = 3.54) and emotionally evocative content (mean = 3.54). Consumers' consumption of and trust in digital content is recorded at its lowest mean (2.94), making it the toughest battleground for marketers to push into them.

### ANOVA Results — Hypothesis Testing

| Hypothesis                                                | F Value | Sig.   | Result                                                      |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|---------|--------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Platform used → Brand content sharing behaviour           | 1.392   | 0.244  | H <sub>0</sub> - Failed to reject H <sub>1</sub> - Rejected |
| Branded content frequency → Purchase intention            | 1.502   | 0.209  | H <sub>0</sub> - Failed to reject H <sub>1</sub> - Rejected |
| Platform used → Exposure to brand content on social media | 3.502   | 0.011* | H <sub>1</sub> - Accepted H <sub>0</sub> - Rejected         |
| Online review sharing → Trust in brands sharing value     | 4.796   | 0.011* | H <sub>1</sub> - Accepted H <sub>0</sub> - Rejected         |
| Content type engagement → Negative review impact          | 0.413   | 0.799  | H <sub>0</sub> - Failed to reject H <sub>1</sub> - Rejected |

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There were two statistically significant relationships found. The first is the platform used, which has significant impact on the frequency of respondents' exposure to branded content ( $F = 3.502$ ,  $p = 0.011$ ); Instagram users reported the highest exposure to branded content (mean = 3.453). Second, those who actively post their experiences/reviews on the Internet have significantly greater trust in brands that post valuable information ( $F = 4.796$ ,  $p = 0.011$ ;  $\text{Eta}^2 = 0.100$ ), supporting the notion that active involvement in e-WOM increases brand trust.

### *Key Findings*

- The clear focus is on video content (45.6%) and the social media platform Instagram (58.9%), which means that a strategy for visual platforms is central to good content marketing.
- Entertaining content is most influential on consumer behaviour (38.9%), compared to informational, educational and promotional content.
- Negative reviews are the most potent e-WOM influence, with more than 50% of the respondents stating that they dissuade purchases, and with a mean of 3.54.
- Emotional content is the most important factor for sharing behaviour (mean = 3.54), indicating the emotional connection is the key for viral content marketing.
- Active e-WOM involvement is reflected in the fact that nearly half (46.7%) of the respondents have shared their experiences/reviews online.
- Google Reviews (34.4%) and social media (32.2%) are the most trusted platforms, while influencer reviews receive a moderate level of scepticism (Neutral: 36.7%).
- 44.4% of respondents believe that user-generated content is more trusted than brand-generated content, reinforcing the authenticity premium in digital.
- Active review sharers have significantly more brand trust (ANOVA significant at  $p = 0.011$ ), suggesting that there is a reciprocal relationship between e-WOM participation and brand loyalty.
- As for the most recent brands, sharing content on their own profile has the lowest mean (2.94), reinforcing the role of active brand advocacy as the most critical conversion hurdle.

### *Suggestions*

- Optimise the probability of sharing and generation of e-WOM by prioritising emotional and entertaining forms of content, especially short-form video.
- Use user-generated content (UGC) to tap into the authenticity of peer content over branded content by investing in UGC programmes, such as review campaigns and community challenges.
- Respond to negative e-WOM promptly and constructively to actively manage negative voices; negative e-WOM has the greatest deterrent effect on purchase intention.
- Concentrate brand visibility on Instagram and YouTube, where brands are most likely to be exposed to and have a propensity to share.
- Use data analytics to monitor KPIs of content marketing campaigns such as reach, engagement, sentiment and conversion rates to continuously optimize content strategy.
- Develop employee-initiated content advocacy campaigns using the authentic voices employed inside the company as a low-cost growth platform to market and promote organic e-WOM.

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- Acknowledge the convergence of generational e-WOM behaviour: Gen Z and Millennials have very similar engagement patterns when it comes to digital, so segmenting by age is not the best approach, instead, segment by platform and content.

### CONCLUSION

The findings of this study are quite strong empirical evidence of the positive and directional relationship between content marketing and Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) in the context of digital consumer in India. The results validate these factors as important drivers for brand-generated content to create consumer advocacy – of its own design – online.

Today's consumers are not just recipients of brand messages, but they are also players helping to co-construct brand stories, the research reveals. If the content is authentic, entertaining or, simply, informative, consumers are “brand ambassadors” who share, endorse and recommend the brand and its message further than paid media dollars do. But non-congruent content or content that is too self-serving will not generate e-WOM and may lead to negative e-WOM and negatively influence purchase intent.

The ANOVA results validated that the platform dynamics partially mediate the content exposure, so as well as the formation of trust, it is necessary to think strategically in an individual platform. The internal reliability of the measurement tool is good ( $\alpha = 0.809$ ), so that the results of this study can be trusted. It is not just an added marketing tool for brands in digitally rich markets; content marketing is a fundamental piece of any brand marketing strategy that will help brands ensure that conversations are in the hands of consumers and in their favour. Investing in quality content, storytelling, and online interactions that respond to customers will lead to positive e-WOM and long-term competitive advantage.

Future studies could benefit from examining the e-WOM generation over time, the role of culture in India as a moderator and application of machine learning models for sentiment analysis of e-WOM content in real time for optimization of strategies.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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