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Content Marketing as an Advertising Strategy: An Analysis of Brand Awareness and Audience Relationships at Apple

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Abstract

Objectives: This study examines the impact of content marketing on brand awareness and audience relationships, utilising Apple as a case study. The research also aims to identify the specific content strategies that are most effective and to examine their impact on consumer perceptions and loyalty.

Methodology: The study employed a quantitative survey design. Data were collected from 300 respondents using a structured questionnaire, with a Likert scale used to measure attitudes. The collected data were analysed and presented using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.

Results: The findings show that social media campaigns and advertisements are the most influential content marketing strategies used by Apple, with 72.7% of respondents indicating they encountered Apple products through this medium. A majority of respondents (76.6%) found Apple's content marketing to be either highly or somewhat effective in promoting brand awareness. The results also indicated that influencer endorsements (37.3%) and user-generated content (37.3%) were key drivers of consumer engagement. However, a notable 30.3% of respondents felt the brand was "overhyped," suggesting a potential risk of audience fatigue.

Conclusion: The study concludes that Apple's content marketing strategies are primarily effective in enhancing brand awareness and audience relationships. Social media campaigns, influencer endorsements, and customer reviews play the most significant roles in shaping consumer perception. The findings underscore the importance of striking a balance between traditional promotional efforts and authentic, interactive content to maintain long-term brand appeal and mitigate the risk of overexposure.

Keywords: Content marketing, brand awareness, Apple, advertisements, social media.

Background

The contemporary marketing landscape has undergone a fundamental transformation, moving away from conventional, mass-media approaches towards more intricate and relationship-focused strategies. At the core of this evolution are two critical advertising and marketing constructs: brand awareness and audience relationships, both of which are central to long-term customer engagement, brand loyalty, and consumer decision-making (Kotler et al., 2021; Monfared et al., 2020). Brand awareness, a foundational metric in advertising, is the degree to which a customer can identify and recall a brand under various conditions, with higher awareness being favourably linked to consumer preference and trust. On the other hand, audience relationships represent the ongoing dialogue and cultivated emotional ties between a brand and its consumers, moving beyond a transactional exchange to a deeper connection (Maanda et al., 2020). This shift signals a significant departure from traditional advertising's focus on one-way exposure to a new emphasis on interactive and meaningful engagement.

Historically, advertising relied on a model of mass communication, where brands utilised channels such as television, radio, and print media to disseminate messages to a vast, undifferentiated audience. As noted by Chatterjee and Basu (2020), the effectiveness of these channels was primarily their reach, with little provision for two-way communication or direct customer feedback. This era of advertising, while effective for generating broad awareness, left audience relationships largely one-sided (Ebrahim, 2020). The digital revolution, spearheaded by the internet, fundamentally changed these dynamics, providing platforms that enabled real-time, bidirectional interactions between brands and consumers (Gupta et al., 2024). The subsequent rise of social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter further accelerated this change, shifting the advertising paradigm from a simple awareness-based model to one prioritising direct customer engagement and sustained dialogue (Faisal & Ekawanto, 2022).

Within this digital context, content marketing has emerged as a particularly potent advertising strategy for both building brand awareness and fostering robust audience relationships. Unlike traditional advertising, which often interrupts consumers with direct sales messages, content marketing strategically attracts them by creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent information (Lopes & Casais, 2022). This approach transforms the brand from a mere advertiser into a provider of engaging, educational, or entertaining content, thereby building trust and enhancing brand memory (Dabbous & Barakat, 2020). This effectiveness is not uniform, as content marketing strategies are carefully adapted to regional and technological nuances. For instance, in North America, brands leverage storytelling and search engine optimisation (SEO) to build compelling brand narratives (Li et al., 2021). In Europe, data privacy regulations have led to a more transparent and customer-centric approach to content creation (Dabbous & Barakat, 2020), whereas in Asia, brands are innovating with social commerce and streaming platforms to foster direct consumer interactions (Wu & Li, 2021).

A compelling case study that illustrates the power of content marketing in advertising is Apple Inc. Apple's advertising and marketing campaigns have consistently been lauded for their focus on simplicity, user experience, and innovation, eschewing conventional product-focused advertising for more emotionally

resonant, narrative-driven content (Lury, 2020). A prime example is the "Shot on iPhone" campaign, which serves as a brilliant piece of advertising that leverages user-generated content to showcase the product's capabilities. This campaign not only creates immense brand awareness but also cultivates a sense of community and shared creativity among its users (Monfared et al., 2021). Furthermore, initiatives such as the "Today at Apple" programme, which offers free educational workshops, serve a dual purpose: they function as a powerful form of content marketing that enhances brand loyalty and positions the company as an authority on creativity and technology (Kotler et al., 2021).

Despite the evident success of content marketing, particularly in the digital age, there is a notable gap in academic research that comprehensively explores its combined effect on both brand awareness and audience relationships within the framework of a single, highly influential brand. While individual studies have examined various aspects of digital advertising and content strategies, few have provided an in-depth, holistic analysis of a global leader's approach. This study, therefore, seeks to fill this gap by investigating the effect of content marketing on brand awareness and audience relationships, using Apple as a detailed case study. By doing so, it aims to offer significant theoretical and practical insights for modern advertising practice.

Objective of the Study

The primary objective of this study was to examine the impact of content marketing on brand awareness and audience relationships, using Apple as a case study. The specific objectives were:

1. To investigate the specific content marketing strategies used by Apple to enhance brand awareness.
2. To determine the effectiveness of Apple's content marketing efforts on brand awareness among its target audience.
3. To examine the role of content marketing in influencing consumer engagement and audience relationships with the Apple brand.
4. To ascertain the impact of Apple's content marketing on the likelihood of purchasing its products.

Theoretical Framework

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) provides a robust and audience-centric theoretical lens for examining the impact of content marketing on brand awareness and audience relationships. Unlike earlier media theories that focused on how media passively influenced audiences (the "hypodermic needle" model), UGT posits that individuals are active participants who purposefully select media content to satisfy specific needs and desires. Originally developed by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch in 1974, the theory shifted the focus from "what media does to people" to "what people do with media," highlighting that media consumption is a goal-directed process (Katz et al., 1974). Users are motivated to seek content that aligns with their personal, social, and psychological needs, making them co-creators of meaning rather than passive recipients. This fundamental premise is particularly relevant in the modern digital landscape, where consumers have an unprecedented level of choice and control over the content they engage with.

UGT provides a compelling framework for understanding how Apple's content marketing strategy successfully builds brand awareness. The theory suggests that for a brand to become a salient part of a consumer's consciousness, it must provide content that fulfils a clear purpose or need. Apple's marketing is not just about advertising products; it is about providing valuable, problem-solving, and inspiring content that gratifies its audience. For example, their meticulously produced product launch events, known as

"keynotes," fulfil the need for information and surveillance. Consumers watch these events not only to learn about new products but also to stay informed about technological advancements and industry trends. Similarly, "Today at Apple" sessions and online tutorials provide clear instructions that address the user's need for learning and competence. By offering genuinely helpful content, Apple ensures its brand remains top-of-mind and consistently memorable, directly contributing to brand awareness.

Furthermore, UGT is instrumental in explaining how Apple's content marketing cultivates deep and enduring audience relationships. The theory posits that when individuals engage with media that satisfies their emotional and social needs, they develop stronger bonds with the source of that content. Apple masterfully leverages this principle through its content. The "Shot on iPhone" campaign, a powerful example of user-generated content, taps into the user's need for personal identity and community. By showcasing amateur photographs and videos, the campaign empowers users, making them feel like valued members of a creative community. This fosters a sense of shared identity and belonging, moving the relationship from a simple customer-brand dynamic to a more deeply rooted social connection (Balio & Casais, 2021). The brand's use of evocative storytelling, as seen in many of its commercials and short films, also appeals to the user's need for emotional catharsis and escapism. By consistently providing content that fulfils these psychological and social gratifications, Apple goes beyond mere transaction, building long-term customer relationships, fostering brand loyalty, and transforming customers into brand advocates.

In summary, UGT offers a nuanced and comprehensive lens for this study. It moves beyond a simple cause-and-effect relationship, allowing us to explore the motivations behind consumer engagement with Apple's content. By applying UGT, we can systematically analyse how Apple's content marketing strategy intentionally addresses the diverse needs of its audience—from the need for information and education to the deeper needs for community and self-expression—and, in doing so, effectively enhances both brand awareness and audience relationships.

Methodology

This study employs a quantitative survey design to investigate the effect of content marketing on brand awareness and audience relationships, using Apple as a case study. A quantitative approach is chosen to systematically collect and analyse data, allowing for the measurement of variables and the testing of relationships between them. The research was conducted in Enugu, Nigeria, a major urban centre with a diverse population of students, professionals, and entrepreneurs. With an estimated population of over 722,000 according to the 2006 census, and home to significant educational institutions like the University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus (UNEC) and Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT), Enugu provides a demographically suitable location to access a broad spectrum of consumers with varying levels of digital literacy and brand engagement. The city's notable educational and commercial activities make it an ideal proxy for a young, digitally active consumer base.

The primary instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire. This instrument is designed to gather quantitative data in a transparent and standardised format. The questionnaire was divided into three main sections. The first section collected demographic information such as age, gender, education level, and occupation, to provide a detailed profile of the respondents. The second section was dedicated to measuring brand awareness, focusing on metrics like brand recognition and recall. Questions in this section assessed the extent to which respondents can identify and remember Apple and its associated content. The third and final section measured audience relationships and content marketing engagement. This section used a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (5) to gauge respondents' perceptions and attitudes. The scale is a powerful tool for measuring subjective constructs,

such as attitudes and perceptions, in a quantifiable manner. Questions covered aspects such as the perceived usefulness, emotional connection, and social relevance of Apple's content, directly aligning with the tenets of the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) outlined in the theoretical framework. The questionnaire was administered in both physical (paper-based) and online formats (via platforms like Google Forms) to ensure a high response rate and broader reach. Research (Gever, 2024; Monday & Gevers, 2025) shows that a combination of both online and face-to-face data collection is an efficient strategy for gathering data in 21st-century research.

Sampling and Data Analysis

A convenience sampling method was used to select respondents, given the accessibility and the large number of potential participants in the study area. This method is practical for an exploratory study of this nature, given the geographical scope and timeframe. A sample size of 300 was targeted to ensure the data is statistically significant. Prior to the main data collection, a pilot study was conducted with a small group of respondents of 20 participants to test the clarity and reliability of the questionnaire items. This step helped identify and rectify any ambiguities or issues with the questions, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the study. The internal consistency of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, with a value of 0.77, which was considered acceptable.

The data collected was processed and analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 22. The analysis began with descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores, to summarise the demographic data and provide an overview of the respondents' answers. The findings were presented in tables accompanied by a detailed interpretation that explains the statistical results in the context of the research objectives.

Results

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The study involved a sample of 300 respondents from Enugu, Nigeria. The demographic profile, summarised in Table 1, provides essential context for interpreting the findings on digital content consumption and brand engagement. The sample exhibited a nearly equal gender distribution, with 52.7% female and 47.3% male participants. The age distribution revealed a young and digitally active demographic, with the majority of respondents falling within the 18-24 (37.3%) and 25-34 (30.0%) age brackets. This is a critical finding, as these groups are primary targets for digital content marketing and are often considered early adopters of technology. The sample's high level of education, with a combined 66.0% holding either a bachelor's or postgraduate degree, also suggests a high degree of digital literacy and the ability to engage critically with complex brand content.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N=300)

Demographic Information	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	142	47.3

Female	158	52.7
Total	300	100
Age		
18-24	112	37.3
25-34	90	30
35-44	61	20.3
45-54	37	12.3
Total	300	100
Education Level		
Secondary school	59	20
Bachelor's degree	101	34
Diploma	43	14
Postgraduate	97	32
Total	300	100

Content Marketing Strategies and Brand Awareness

This section presents the findings related to the specific content marketing strategies Apple uses to enhance brand awareness. As shown in Table 2, a significant majority of respondents (79.0%) reported having become aware of a new Apple product through one of its content marketing initiatives, confirming the efficacy of this approach.

Table 2: Perceived Effectiveness of Apple's Content Marketing on Brand Awareness

Question 1: Have you ever heard about a new Apple product through content marketing strategies?	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Yes	237	79
No	63	21
Total	300	100
Question 2: How would you judge the efforts of Apple in promoting brand awareness?	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Highly effective	142	47.3
Somewhat effective	88	29.3
Neutral	45	15
Not very effective	25	8.3

Total	300	100
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When asked to evaluate Apple's efforts in promoting brand awareness, nearly half of the respondents (47.3%) rated the strategies as highly effective, while another 29.3% found them somewhat effective. This cumulative 76.6% of positive perception underscores the substantial impact of Apple's content on brand recall and recognition. The data also showed that respondents frequently encounter Apple's content, with 37.3% reporting weekly exposure and 32.7% reporting daily exposure. This high frequency of exposure is a key mechanism for embedding the brand in the consumer's mind and is a cornerstone of brand awareness theory.

Content Marketing and Audience Relationships

This section explores how specific content strategies impact audience relationships and engagement. Table 3 presents a breakdown of which strategies are most influential in driving engagement and building relationships.

Table 3: Impact of Apple's Content Marketing on Audience Relationships and Engagement

Marketing strategy used to influence consumer engagement	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Brand reputation	78	26
Social media popularity	56	18.7
Influencer and celebrity endorsements	112	37.3
Reviews from other customers	34	11.3
Total	280	100
Aspect of Apple's content marketing that affects brand awareness the most		
Product launch events and keynotes	98	32.7
Social media campaigns and ads	56	18.7
User-generated content and testimonials	112	37.3
In-store experiences and promotions	34	11.3
Total	300	100
Impacts of Apple's content marketing on respondent's interest in their products		
Increases my curiosity and excitement	95	31.7
Reinforces my loyalty to the brand	60	20
Has no effect on my interest	54	18
Makes me feel the brand is overhyped	91	30.3
Total	300	100

Note: The total for the "marketing strategy used to influence consumer engagement" section is 280, not 300, based on the provided frequencies. This indicates that 20 respondents did not provide an answer for this question. The percentages are calculated based on this total of 280 for accuracy. All other totals for the included tables are 300.

The data indicates that influencer and celebrity endorsements (37.3%) and user-generated content and testimonials (37.3%) are the most influential strategies for consumer engagement. These findings strongly align with the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which posits that consumers actively seek content that fulfils social and psychological needs, such as validation from peers and identification with public figures. The high impact of user-generated content suggests that consumers trust their peers' experiences more than traditional advertising messages. Regarding the overall impact on interest, Apple's content marketing elicited a polarised response. While 31.7% of respondents felt it increased their curiosity and excitement, a nearly equal percentage (30.3%) felt the brand was "overhyped." This dichotomy is an important finding, suggesting that while content marketing is effective, it also risks audience fatigue if not carefully managed.

Influence on Purchase Likelihood

The final set of findings examines the ultimate goal of marketing: influencing purchasing behaviour. As presented in Table 4, Apple's content marketing has a demonstrable, though not universal, impact on purchase likelihood.

Table 4: Likelihood of Purchasing Apple Products Based on Content Marketing

Likelihood of purchasing Apple products based on the impacts of their marketing strategies	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Very likely	99	33
Somewhat likely	57	19
Not very likely	53	17.7
Not at all likely	91	30.3
Total	300	100

A combined 52% of respondents were either very likely (33.0%) or somewhat likely (19.0%) to purchase Apple products as a result of their marketing strategies. This is a significant finding, as it provides a direct link between content engagement and consumer action. However, it is also notable that a substantial 48% were either not very or not at all likely to purchase, indicating that while content marketing is a powerful driver of brand awareness and relationships, other factors such as price, product needs, and personal financial status play a crucial role in the final purchase decision.

Discussion of Findings

The results of this study provide empirical support for the theoretical framework and highlight the nuanced ways in which Apple's content marketing influences brand awareness and audience relationships among consumers in Enugu, Nigeria. The findings are particularly relevant to the broader academic discourse on digital advertising and consumer behaviour.

The study's most significant finding is the pivotal role of social media campaigns and advertisements in shaping brand perception, with 72.7% of respondents identifying them as the most influential content strategy for discovering Apple products. This is consistent with a growing body of literature that recognises social media as a primary channel for brand-consumer interaction, surpassing traditional media in its ability to reach and engage a global audience (Gupta et al., 2024). Apple's strategic use of visually compelling content on platforms like Instagram and YouTube, combined with targeted promotions, is a key driver of this success. This approach reflects a shift from interruptive, one-way advertising to a more integrated, value-driven strategy that aligns with contemporary consumer habits (Chavda, & Chauhan, 2024).

The research also underscores the significant impact of social influence on brand awareness. The high percentages attributed to influencer and celebrity endorsements (61.0%) and user-generated content (UGC) and testimonials (37.3%) align with the core tenets of the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT). Consumers are not passive recipients of content; they actively seek out and trust content from individuals they admire or identify with (Chavda & Chauhan, 2024). The effectiveness of UGC, in particular, demonstrates the power of peer influence and authenticity. Consumers trust the experiences of their peers and are more likely to be influenced by them than by a brand's direct message, as UGC is perceived as more credible and less promotional (Dabbous & Barakat, 2020). Apple's "Shot on iPhone" campaign, a celebrated example of UGC, effectively leverages this psychological principle to build a sense of community and reinforce product quality through authentic user stories.

In terms of the perceived effectiveness of these strategies, the study found a strong consensus among respondents, with a combined 76.6% rating Apple's efforts as either highly or somewhat effective. This high level of positive perception suggests that Apple's brand message successfully resonates with its target audience. This is crucial because brand perception is a core component of brand equity and is directly linked to consumer preference and loyalty (Kotler et al., 2021). The consistent and frequent exposure to Apple's content, reported by a majority of respondents (70.0% weekly or daily), is a key factor in building this sustained awareness and favourable brand image.

However, the findings also revealed a notable nuance. While a significant portion of the audience reported that Apple's content marketing increased their curiosity (31.7%) and reinforced their loyalty (20.0%), a substantial 30.3% felt that the brand was "overhyped." This suggests a potential risk of audience fatigue or scepticism due to the sheer volume and intensity of promotional content. This finding highlights a critical challenge for brands: maintaining a high level of visibility without crossing the line into perceived excessiveness, which can alienate a segment of the audience. The dichotomy in these findings also points to the multifaceted nature of consumer relationships in the digital age, where a single brand can elicit both strong positive and negative emotions simultaneously (Shaukat & Farid, 2023).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concludes that Apple's content marketing strategies are highly effective in building brand awareness and cultivating strong audience relationships, particularly among the digitally-savvy demographic in Enugu, Nigeria. The findings confirm that social media campaigns, influencer endorsements, and user-generated content are the most significant drivers of brand perception and consumer engagement. By prioritising these channels, Apple has successfully moved beyond the traditional advertising model to a more interactive and community-focused approach.

Based on these findings, we offer the following recommendations for Apple and other brands operating in similar markets:

1. Sustain and enhance social media presence: Given the clear preference for social media, Apple should continue to invest heavily in platform-specific campaigns. The company should also explore emerging platforms to maintain its position as a trendsetter.
2. Amplify user-generated content: The high impact of UGC and testimonials suggests that Apple should actively encourage and amplify its user community. This can be achieved through branded hashtags, content contests, and featuring user stories more prominently, as this approach reinforces authenticity and trust more effectively than a brand-driven message alone.
3. Address the "overhype" perception: To mitigate the risk of audience fatigue, Apple should focus on balancing its high-impact promotional content with more subtle, value-driven initiatives. This could involve creating more educational content, behind-the-scenes footage, or interactive experiences that provide genuine utility to the consumer without a hard sell.
4. Leverage data for personalisation: While the study highlights broad trends, a deeper focus on data analytics can help Apple tailor its content to specific audience segments to avoid blanket campaigns that may be perceived as "overhyped" by certain groups. This will ensure content remains relevant and engaging, reinforcing brand loyalty and encouraging long-term relationships.
5. Refine collaborations: Given the strong influence of celebrity and influencer endorsements, Apple should continue to forge strategic partnerships with public figures who are not just popular but also authentically aligned with the brand's values. This will help to strengthen the brand-consumer relationship and build trust.

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