The Effectiveness of Content Marketing in Customers' Online Engagement Based on the 2PDM Model (The Case Study of Persian Printed Books)

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Article Info	ABSTRACT

Objective: Customer engagement is the customer's involvement and connection with the brand. Most businesses will face serious problems in keeping customers and their loyalty and willingness to repeat purchases and recommend a service to others until this interaction is not optimally established. The objective of the current research was to measure the effects of content marketing on engaging online customers, in the field of publishing Persian printed books based on the 2PDM model.

Materials and Methods: The present research was conducted using the case study research method, following a qualitative research design. The research population consists of Persian book publishing companies in the cultural and artistic fields in Tehran, among which a well-known publisher was selected by the judgmental sampling method. The observation was used to collect data from three channels including the website of the publisher, Instagram, and Telegram, using digital analytics tools (Google Analytics and Keyhole) before and after the implementation of content marketing.

Results: The results of measuring customers' online engagement metrics on the Instagram channel of the selected publisher showed that the rate of customers' online engagement has increased by 4.61 percent compared to the previous situation. Considering a 35.8 percent increase in the number of Telegram members compared to the previous situation, a 13.2 percent increase in the average page/session, and a one-minute increase in the average session duration on the website, it can be concluded that content marketing activities have effects on customers' online engagement in three channels: the website, Telegram, and Instagram.

Conclusion: The insights obtained from this study can be a practical help for the realization of content marketing and the efficacy of content marketing activists in book publishing companies, especially in Persian printed book publishing, and can also help publishing specialists in optimizing the design and implementation of content marketing.

Introduction

The high cost of traditional advertising platforms (broadcasting and magazines) and the reduction of their efficacy, the lack of confidence of publishers and bookstores to invest in new marketing strategies, and their ignorance of how to attract, engage and retain customers (Koob, 2021; Cuevas-Molano, Sanchez-Cide & Gordo-Molina, 2022; Lopes & Casais, 2022) along with other supporting economic, political and cultural issues has caused serious problems in the book publishing economy, especially in Iran. The complexity of this condition makes it necessary to attract, engage and retain customers of book publishing companies. Furthermore, the purchase behavior and the brand-conscious behavior of current consumers have been changed or influenced by the Internet, multimedia systems, and other broadband services (Çavuşoğlu, et al., 2021; Fan & Li, 2010; Natchaya & Siriluck, 2010; Van Bommel et al., 2014). Therefore, consumers do not trust any brand advertisements until and unless they see proof that the company's online store keeps its promises. These forces of change necessitate the importance of engaging customers in online environments using new strategies (content marketing) for customers and companies so that customers can easily get the information they need to make decisions about the product, and as a result, companies can promote their brands quickly. Thus, customers' online engagement is a useful marketing strategy to create long-term relationships between a brand and customers in the online environment (Weerasinghe, 2019). However, due to the novelty of content marketing in terms of implementation and measurement of its efficacy, few academic studies have empirically investigated the content marketing efficacy on customers' online engagement (Bielski, 2008; Bowden, 2009; Brodie et al., 2013; Weerasinghe, 2019). In this regard, Bunpis and Sabri Haron (2014) stated that content marketing has been discussed more in the context of business-to-business (B2B) services, and very few studies have examined this strategy in the context of business-to-consumer (B2C). Therefore, considering the novelty and high popularity of the content marketing strategy in the world (Anthony, 2014; Hänninen, 2015; Jensen, 2016; Weerasinghe, 2019; Naseri, Noroozi Chakoli & MalekolKalami, 2021), it is necessary to conduct academic research for supporting the execution and implementation of the content marketing strategy to identify its impact from the point of view of customers' online engagement.

This research intends to implement the 2PDM (Planning, Production, Distribute and Communicate, Measurement and Optimization) content marketing model and to investigate whether its use in terms of customers' online engagement in the three media, including Instagram, Telegram, and the website has efficacy in book publishing companies.

Since the existence of a comprehensive framework for understanding the stages, components, and dimensions of content marketing is one of the requirements for its effective implementation, in the current research, the 2PDM model was chosen to implement and measure content marketing efficacy. The 2PDM content marketing model was the first validated and localized model in Iran

that covers all necessary dimensions and components to apply this strategy (Naseri, 2017; Naseri & Noruzi, 2018).

Customer engagement connects the user emotionally and intellectually (Strauss & Frost, 2014). Weerasinghe (2019) considers customer engagement as a type of customer-brand communication and believes that this interaction occurs when Internet users communicate or collaborate with brands, companies, or each other. To measure it on websites, usually, the parameters of "likes", "comments", "shares" and "followers" in various social media and "average page/session" and "average session duration" are used (Barkers et al., 2013; Winn, 2017). Therefore, to measure customers' online engagement on the website of the selected publishing company, the parameters "average page/session" and "average session duration" were used. In addition, the customers' online engagement rate on Instagram was obtained from the ratio of comments and likes to the total number of posts created (customers' online engagement = comments + likes/number of posts) (Elisa & Gordini, 2014). To measure this metric in Telegram, the number of Telegram channel members was considered.

Theoretical Considerations and Literature Review

i) Customer engagement

Today's challenge for companies is to attract and draw customers' attention to view brand advertisements and posts and convince them to share and comment on the posts. To improve these interactions, businesses need to establish two-way communication with their customers (Kumar et al., 2010). Customer interaction with a brand, product, or company is known as "customer engagement" (Bhargava & Ojha, 2019). This term was first presented by Brode et al. in 2011 (Cuevas-Molano, Sanchez-Cide & Gordo-Molina, 2022). Customers of a brand *interact* with that brand via the Internet and social media by clicking, liking, sharing, watching, and commenting on their posts (Lin & Lu, 2011; Araujo & Neijens, 2012; Ruiz-Mafe et al., 2014). In this regard, most authors have described this *interaction* as a motivational, emotional, or psychological state (Kumar & Pansari, 2015; Harrigan et al., 2017), which includes a range of cognition, emotions, and behavioral dimensions (Brodie et al., 2013).

The key element in the *interactions* is the *knowledge exchange* with and between customers (Vivek, 2009). In this way, social media and new marketing strategies have provided an opportunity for *knowledge exchange* between businesses and customers (Nambisan, 2002; Wagner and Majchrzak, 2007; Bhargava & Ojha, 2019). According to the Content Marketing Institute, the best strategy to stimulate customers' online engagement is *content marketing* (Content Marketing Institute, 2014). In addition, Sashi (2012) confirms the creation of effective interaction with customers through the production of *persuasive content*. Content marketing seeks to attract and acquire customers by creating and distributing persuasive, valuable, relevant, and appropriate

content to direct them to profitable action (Content Marketing Institute, 2014). This strategy engages customers to visit the website more and interact with the brand by producing vividness, interactivity, entertainment, novel content, and description of a product. These features are known as factors affecting customers' engagement (Tokunaga, 2013; Bhargava & Ojha, 2019). In this regard, Rhom, Kathcheva & Milne (2013) also stated the five main motivations of consumers in interacting with brands through social media: entertainment, brand engagement, access to consumer services, and product information.

ii) Parameters to measure customers' engagement

Concurrent with the use of content marketing strategy, many quantitative evaluation parameters have been presented to measure, compare and assess its efficacy. These metrics are divided into four groups based on the main stages of the customer's buying journey (sales funnel process): 1) consumption; 2) customers' share or engagement; 3) customers' lead generation; and 4) sales (Elisa and Gordini, 2014).
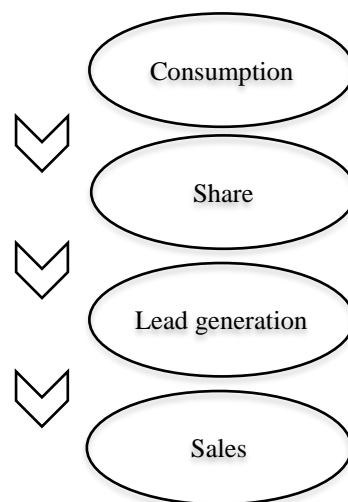

Figure 1. Content marketing performance metrics (Elisa & Gordini, 2014)

In this regard, Baer (2012) and Pulizzi (2014) acknowledge that the consumption metric shows how many people view, listen to, or download each piece of content. The customer engagement metrics help us find out how often content is shared with others.

The customers' lead generation is the response yielded more than the content consumption. Sales metric helps to find out how a piece of content has influenced sales goals and attracted customers to buy a product. Meanwhile, the share metric is useful to evaluate how much the content is successful in customers' engagement and entertainment and getting them to share the content. Because it measures the amount of content sharing by customers and the amount of their engagement. Therefore, this metric is a useful tool for measuring the second pillar of content marketing (customer engagement). Some parameters of this metric are 1) the number of likes,

shares, and tweets; 2) forwards; and 3) inbound links (backlinks). This metric is used to measure the spread and sharing of content among a large number of customers and the network between them. However, a review of the literature shows that there is no general agreement on what the most important metrics are. Therefore, every business should use at least one key metric or parameter according to its predetermined goals.

Elisa and Gordini (2014) investigated the views of 235 marketing managers from Italian companies to identify the main metrics and analyze the efficacy of the content marketing strategy using an online questionnaire. Their findings concerning the share metric showed that the efficacy of this strategy was 72%. Khusainova (2015) also used two methods of document analysis (library) and the case study to discover the views of blog visitors on social networks. Her findings showed that content marketing has effects on consumption, share, and sales metrics in the context of research. She believes that producing valuable content is a fundamental and new development for marketers to achieve marketing goals. This strategy can help companies in building trust, attract customers and increase the efficacy of marketing efforts. Weerasinghe (2019) also investigated the impact of content marketing on customers' online engagement through a survey method and using a questionnaire and found a positive relationship between content marketing and online interactions of customers.

Materials and Methods

In this research, content marketing was based on the 2PDM model (this model is one of the first content marketing models in Iran, which was obtained in separate research using the meta-synthesis method and was validated and localized by marketing specialists in Iran with the help of fuzzy Delphi) (Naseri & Noruzi, 2018)).

The content marketing was implemented by a Persian publishing company (Aban Book Publishing Company, https://abanbooks.com) for six months and its efficacy was tested in terms of customers' online engagement on the website, Instagram and Telegram. For this purpose, the case study method was used.

On the one hand, the approach used in this research is exploratory and instrumental; because it seeks to show the implementation and efficacy of content marketing from the point of view of customers' online engagement through the implementation of content marketing in book publishing companies, and thus help develop the existing model 2PDM. On the other hand, a case study is an instrumental type. In a sense that the case selection itself is not of interest to the researchers; rather, what is important about choosing this case in this research is to clarify and better understand the efficacy of content marketing for other businesses. The case study method is one of the qualitative research methods used in marketing and business analysis by researchers and marketers (Easton, 2010; Jarvinen, 2016). Both Ontronen's research (2015) which evaluated the

performance of content marketing in the food and beverage industry in Finland, and Khusainova's study (2015) which measured the efficacy of content marketing for photographers, have used the case study method. Thus, the case study was recognized as an appropriate method for the present research for in-depth examination covering a specific example or scenario, which provides both knowledge and actionable information.

Results

The implementation of content marketing based on the 2PDM model (Figure 2) is shown in four stages as follows.
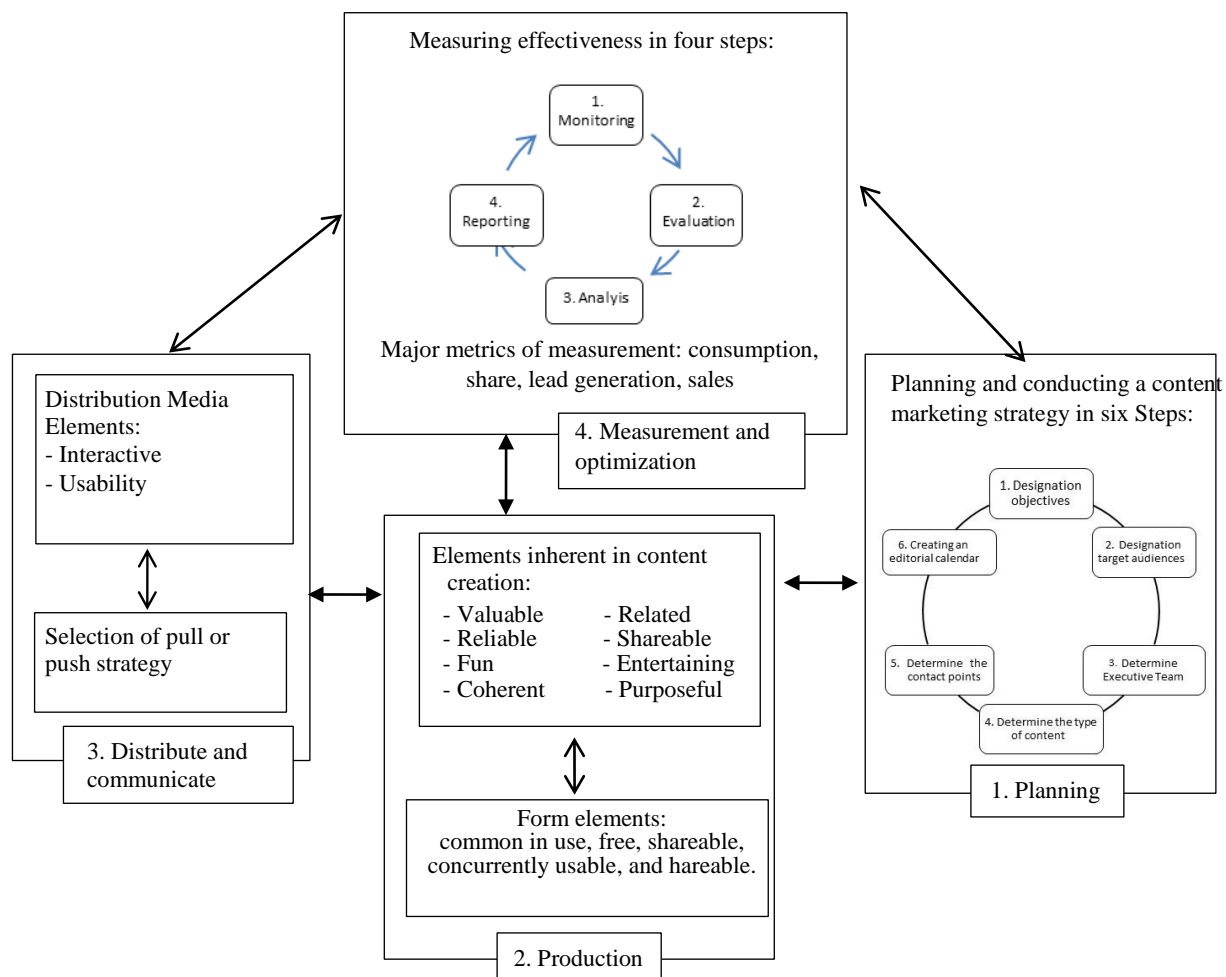

Figure 2. Content Marketing Process Model (2PDM) (Naseri & Noruzi, 2018)

I. The first stage (Planning): At this stage, the content marketing strategy for the study was developed and implemented in six steps as follows:

- **The first step**. Designation of the objectives of implementing content marketing (why?): In the current research, increasing customers' online engagement was considered the main goal of implementing content marketing.

- **The second step**. Designation of the target audience (who?): Digital analytics tools were used to identify the target audience. Based on this, using digital analytics tools (Google Analytics), demographic and geographic information and information related to the software and hardware used by them were obtained. In addition, to better understand the target audience, the profiles of Instagram channel members were set as the basis of further work and identification. Based on this, by observing and checking the personal page of the members on Instagram (225 people out of 785 members whose profiles were not private), it was found that a group of art lovers, enthusiasts, and students of art, photography, graphics, designers, authors, book reading promoters, managers of book cafes, art galleries, booksellers, publishers, and some common people form the target audience of this book publishing company, who enjoyed diverse subject interests.

- **The third step**: In this step, according to the type of services and information products of the selected book publishing company, the characteristics of the target audience, and the level of available facilities, the types of content intended for production were created in four categories and their combinations:

  o *Informative content* (code 01): It refers to the content that provides useful information to the audience related to the subject of the books or related business.

  o *Educational content* (code 02): It refers to content that teaches skills to the audience concerning the relevant business.

  o *Entertainment content* (code 03): It refers to content that allows the audience to spend time and enjoy reading and viewing the content.

  o *Combined content* (code 04): It refers to content that includes one or more of the features stated above. In this step, according to the level of facilities, the level of skill required, and the support of social media under the ownership of the studied publishing company, four common formats (written text, photo, video, and infographics) were selected for content creation.

- **The fourth step**. Determining the contact points (where?): It refers to identifying the points or places where the audience interacts with the business. Since the researchers of the current study used the website, Telegram, and Instagram to interact and communicate with the audience, these three media were chosen to communicate with them. The researchers could have set up other social networks and online environments such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Aparat.com, as the contact points for the selected book publishing company.

However, since the purpose of the present study was to evaluate the efficacy of content marketing activity on customers' online engagement in the existing conditions, other virtual environments that were not active were excluded.

- **The fifth step**. Creating a timeline or editorial calendar (when?): To ensure that the content marketing plan is useful in reaching the goal set by the deadline, a timeline is developed. Based on this timeline, the content publication frequency and the content distribution channel were determined.

- **The sixth step**. Determining an executive team (how?): In this step, according to the type of created content and the level of skills required for it, the members of the executive team were selected and the responsibility of each of them was determined. These people consisted of 12 permanent members, and each of them with different skills took responsibility for drawing, sounding, graphics, mixing and editing, taking photos, creating ideas, and writing scenarios for the content of each book. The researchers were also responsible for the quality of the work.

II. The second stage (content production/creation): The second stage of the content marketing model (2PDM) refers to content production/creation. At this stage, it was tried to create content related to the subject of the books of the selected publishing company, and the created content should be attractive in providing information to the audience. For example, the content was mostly related to the life and the main characters of the books and was created in the form of photos, texts, and videos.

The video created for the book "*Garmaba (Warm-Water Bath) Culture*" is an example of them, which depicts the learning story of the content of the book in the form of a painting as well as in the form of a story. Also, how to teach "*Book of Signs*" in the form of a short educational video, as well as depicting marriage ceremonies and traditions of Iranian tribes in the form of infographics for the book entitled "*Bride Out*" are two other cases. In addition to these, for the created content to have a "reliable" feature, it was tried to provide the information from the main source (books in progress for content creation) or its author if he and/or a member of his/her family is still alive.

Besides, much attention was paid to the issue of "originality" in the creation of the content, and hence the creation of original content was emphasized as much as possible. In this sense, the creation of content from the stage of idea generation, scenario development, imaging, sounding to editing and mixing was simply the result of the efforts of the executive team and not a copy of other sources. In addition, in the creation of content, we tried to use common formats such as video, photo, text, infographics, and audio. These formats were not only supported in terms of volume and template by the media channels owned by the selected

publishing company (i.e., Telegram and Instagram) but also provided the audience with the ability to share on common social network sites.

Another important point is that the created content was related to the selected books and the business of the selected publishing company, and it was expected to be in line with the interests of the target audience. Samples of created content along with the code and specifications of each content can also be seen on the Telegram[1] and Instagram[2] channels of the selected publishing company. Importantly, in the creation of content, attention was also paid to the physical format and characteristics to ensure that the created content is in accordance with the facilities and features of the distribution media in terms of format, file size, durability, and usability to make them shareable, downloadable, and discoverable.

III. The third stage (distribution and communication): At this stage, the content created based on the publication schedule was published in two selected media, i.e., Telegram and Instagram; and from there it was linked to the website of the selected publishing company. In addition, at this stage, the type of content distribution strategy was determined. In this way, since the effects of content marketing on customer engagement were to be considered regardless of other marketing interventions and techniques, including viral marketing, a pull strategy requiring only publishing content on channels owned by the studied sample was chosen for content distribution and the push strategy that requires doing activities such as sending content via e-mail to people or sending to other related Telegram groups was avoided. It should be remembered that at this stage, to communicate with customers, their comments and questions were also responded to.

IV. The fourth stage (measurement and optimization): This stage included measuring and evaluating the results obtained from three stages (planning, production, distribution, and communicating with the audience), and optimizing the activities performed was a part of the feedback cycle. To measure content marketing activities for a period of six months in the studied publishing company, two digital analytics tools were used: 1) *Google Analytics* as a web analysis tool, and 2) *Keyhole* as a social network reporting and monitoring tool.

Considering that the number of digital analytics tools is increasing every year, it was tried to use common and practical tools that are free at the same time. For example, *Google Analytics* is one of the most suitable Google web services for website data analysis, which is used in most websites. This tool has different sections to provide data analysis based on user behavior and depending on the purpose of its use, different parameters are analyzed. The most common things that are analyzed using these tools are the total number of website sessions, number of

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[1]. https://t.me/abanbookpub

[2]. Aban Book Publication: https://abanbooks.com

pages/sessions, average session duration, Bounce rate, number of new visitors, and return rate of visitors.

These tools not only provide time series data with detailed visitor statistics but also has user-friendly features. Therefore, these tools were chosen for website information analysis, and for this purpose, its "HTML" code was placed on the website of the selected publishing company, and the required data were collected for further analysis. To analyze Instagram data, Keyhole's tool was also used due to the possibility of analyzing audience interaction rates and providing free services. Also, in parallel with creating and publishing content, and measuring the activities, some measures were taken to optimize the content marketing process. Among these measures, we can mention the selection and use of the same tags for related content. This helped the visibility of related content. The second measure was to shorten the content publishing interval. Using digital analytics tools, the social networks most visited times by the audience were identified and the contents were attempted to be published in those time frames. In the following, the activities related to the measurement stage are reported in the form of each of its steps:

- **Step one.** **Monitoring**: In this step, the necessary parameters to reach the predetermined objective of implementing content marketing were identified and defined (Table 1).

Table 1. Determining the desired metric and measurement parameters

Digital Analytics	Parameter(s) used	Objective	Metric
Google Analytics Keyhole	Website: Average page/session; Average session duration. Instagram: Likes; Comments. Telegram: Number of users.	Increasing interaction with customers	Customers' online engagement

Based on Table 1, visitors refer to customers, users, or people who visit the website. These people are divided into two categories of new visitors (unique), and returning visitors. Returning visitors are those who have been on the website for a period before.

Page views mean the total number of times a page has been viewed. It can be explained that returning visits by a returning visitor are also included in this value. The *average session duration* refers to the average time that users' duration of use lasts.

Likes is a parameter that not only shows the visibility of the content but also shows how much content is liked and approved by the audience. *Page views* on the Telegram channel refer to the number of views related to each post, which is shown below each post.

The *average page/session* refers to the average number of pages that have been visited during a period (returning visits to the same page are also counted in this case). *Comments* refer to the ideas, views, and feedback of the audience, which are included in each post.

- ***Step two. Measurement***: In this step, the customer online engagement metric was measured using the parameters required for it, and the findings were analyzed. Thus, to better understand the findings, description, and analysis of the data obtained from the three media, i.e., Instagram, Telegram, and the website of the selected publishing company, before and after the implementation of content marketing and by the type of media and parameters has been presented for this metric as follows:

1. *Measuring customers' online engagement metrics on Instagram*

The measurement of the parameters of this metric on the Instagram channel (Figure 3) showed the following:

- The average number of likes before content marketing: 86.7
- The average number of likes after content marketing: 91.57
- The average number of comments before content marketing: 2.2
- The average number of comments after content marketing: 1.68
- Total number of posts before content marketing: 20
- Total number of posts after content marketing: 38
- Customers' online engagement before content marketing: 88.9
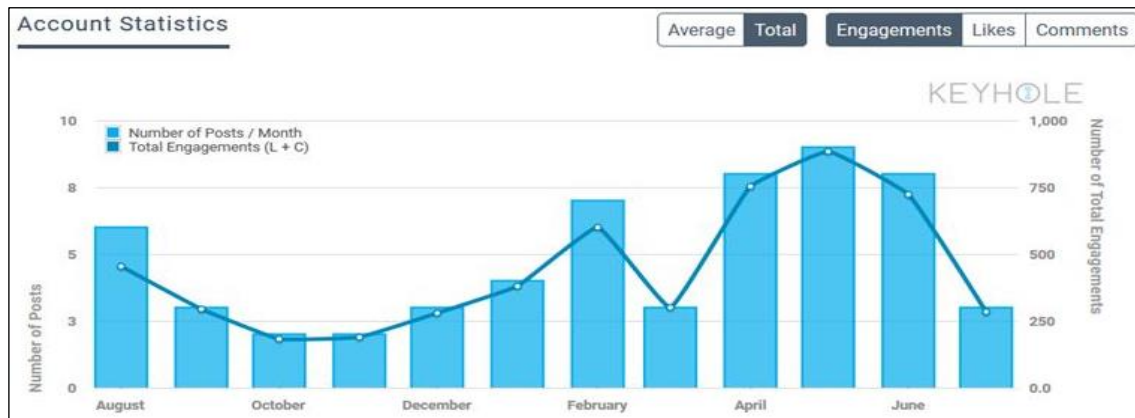- Customers' online engagement after content marketing: 93.2.

Figure 3. Status of customers' online engagement metric on Instagram before and after content marketing

Based on the data in Table 2, customers' online engagement rate is based on the following equations:

Customers' online engagement rate = (number of comments + number of likes) / total number of posts

Considering that this value (customers' online engagement rate) has increased by 61.4% compared to the previous situation, it can be concluded that the created content has been successful in engaging customers on the Instagram channel.

Table 2. Status of Instagram of selected publishing company before and after content marketing in terms of customers' online engagement metric

Status before content marketing				Status after content marketing			
Time of publication /month	No. of posts	No. of likes	No. of comments	Time of publication /month	No. of posts	No. of likes	No. of comments
August	6	445	9	February	7	597	3
September	3	293	1	March	3	294	6
October	2	180	2	April	8	740	13
November	2	180	9	May	9	862	22
December	3	275	4	June	8	705	18
January	4	361	19	July	3	282	2
Total	20	1734	44	Total	38	3480	64
Customers' online engagement rate			**88.9**	**Customers' online engagement rate**			**93.2**

2. Measurement of customers' online engagement metrics on the Telegram channel

To measure this metric on the Telegram channel, the number of members was used as a measurement parameter. Based on this, it was discovered that:

- – The number of members before content marketing: 111
- – The number of members after content marketing: 173

Considering that the number of Telegram members has grown by 35.8% compared to the previous situation, it can be concluded that content marketing activities have effects on customers' engagement on the Telegram channel.
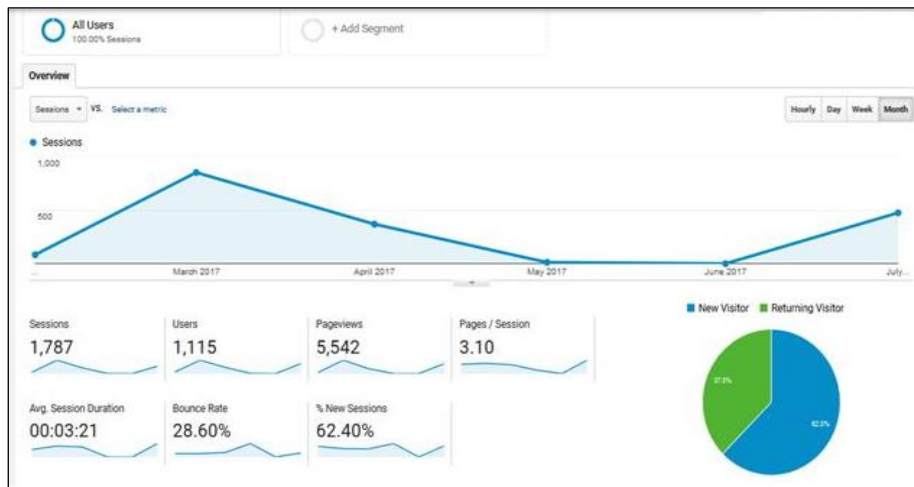
3. Measurement of customers' online engagement metrics on the website

The results of measuring this metric on the website of the selected publisher showed that:

- – The average page/session before content marketing: 2.69
- – The average page/session after content marketing: 3.10
- – The average session duration on the website before content marketing: 00: 2: 13 minutes
- – The average session duration on the website after content marketing: 00: 03: 21 minutes
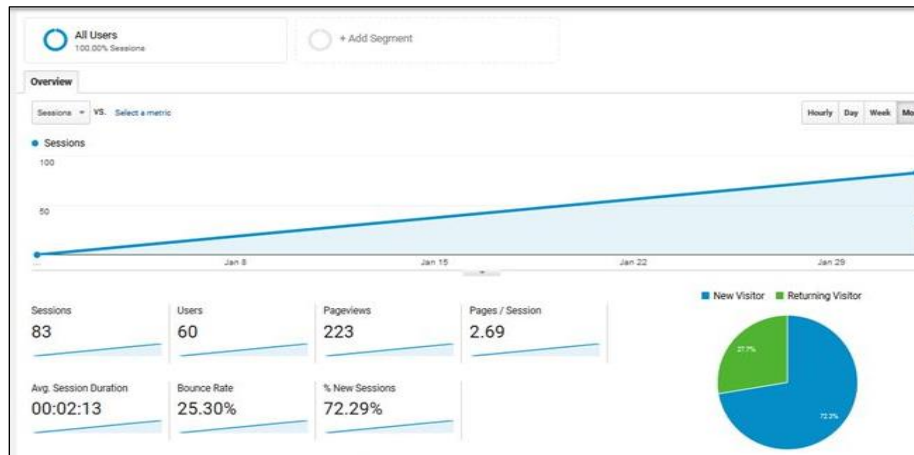
(A). Before the implementation of content marketing

(B). After the implementation of content marketing

Figure 4. The status of customers' online engagement metrics on the website before (A) and after (B) the implementation of the content marketing strategy

Based on the data in Figure 4, session refers to the time that the user is actively connected with the website. The value of this parameter was 83 for one month before the start of content marketing and 297 for each month after the start of content marketing. The average page/session has also increased from 2.69 pages in each session to 3.10 pages. In addition, the average session duration of each user has increased from 00:2:13 minutes to 00:03:21 minutes. Therefore, according to the average increase in page/session (13.2%) and the increase in the average session duration of users using the website for more than one minute, it can be concluded that the created content in terms of customers' online engagement metrics in the website of the selected publishing company has been effective.

Conclusion

The observational results showed that taking into account the content quality components, content marketing activities according to the 2PDM model in the context of the research have the necessary efficacy to be recommended for use in future research and practice. What distinguishes the present research from existing research, including Rahim and Clemens (2012), Weerasinghe (2019), and Koob (2021), is not only the approach but also the fact that in their research, the process and method of implementation of the content marketing were not considered so that they have only focused on content marketing performance metrics from the point of view of content marketing specialists and customers. Compared to Elisa and Gordini's (2014) research, it can also be seen that their research findings confirm the efficacy of content marketing not only in attracting customers but also in increasing customers' online engagement and providing the necessary support for the current research findings. Moreover, by comparing the current research with Khusainova's research (2015), it can be concluded that both studies have achieved the same results in evaluating the efficacy of content marketing in terms of customers' online engagement.

The results also showed that regular measurement of content marketing performance, using the obtained data as a guide for improving the content, has a positive effect on the efficacy of content marketing activities. The insight obtained from this study can be an important practical help for the realization of content marketing and its efficacy, and help specialists in optimizing the design and implementation of content marketing.

Author Contributions

Data Availability Statement

Data is available on request from the authors.

Acknowledgments

Ethical considerations

The authors avoided from data fabrication and falsification.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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