

## The Effect of Content Marketing on Customer Advocacy with Brand Trust and Customer Engagement as Intervening Variables in the TikTok Application in Medan City

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### ABSTRACT

This research adopts a quantitative method approach. Primary and secondary data are obtained through documentation studies and online questionnaire collection using the Likert scale. The population for this study comprises all TikTok application users in the city of Medan. Path analysis is used to analyze the data in this research. The results indicate that content marketing positively and significantly affects brand trust. Content marketing also has a positive and significant direct effect on customer engagement. Brand trust has a positive and significant direct effect on customer advocacy. Customer engagement has a positive and significant effect on customer advocacy. The research also reveals that content marketing indirectly has a positive and significant effect on customer advocacy through brand trust, and content marketing has a positive and significant effect on customer advocacy through customer engagement as an intervening variable.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The advancement of information technology is currently an intriguing phenomenon that is being widely debated, influencing the number of internet users in Indonesia. According to the Asosiasi Penyelenggara Jasa Internet Indonesia (APJII) survey, 215,626,156 persons out of a total population of 275,773,091 use the internet. The number of internet users in Indonesia grows year after year, with APJII estimating that internet penetration in Indonesia would reach 78.19 percent by 2023. Based on the facts about the rise in internet users, it is evident that Indonesians are already accustomed to using the internet – not just for communication and information seeking, but as a way of life. One of the creative industry phenomena that is gaining traction in this era is the appearance of "social media platforms," which are forums where individuals may express ideas, products, and so on in the form of content on an application or site that can connect with a large number of people. Van Dijk (2013) claims that social media is a platform that emphasizes users' existence by assisting them in activities and teamwork, which fortifies user relationships and forges a social bond. In Indonesia, the following social media platforms are prevalent: Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Whatsapp, Instagram, and TikTok. The Tiktok app is one social networking platform that is now fairly well-liked.

A free social media application, TikTok enables users to view, distribute, and generate brief video segments (Ma and Hu, 2021). According to Anderson (2020), the TikTok app is a social media platform that enables users to edit and distribute brief videos produced on their smartphones. Erdly (2021) calls TikTok a "unique" venue for small company owners since it allows creative expression unlike Instagram, which is typically made up. The growth of social media has created an opportunity for businesses to market their products and services on social media in order to connect, interact with, and engage customers (Ebrahim, 2019). Companies use social media as part of their marketing plan since it is a low-cost platform that allows marketers to carry out integrated marketing operations with less effort. Businesspeople are taking advantage of this chance to increase the advertising medium, resulting in the "TikTok Poison" epidemic. TikTok has the ability to influence people's lifestyles by tracking social media trends. Therefore, it may be concluded that TikTok has the ability to persuade people to try something new. Given that the TikTok Application has more advantages than other traditional media and is becoming more and more competitive in the business world, it is imperative to have a deeper awareness of its advantages and disadvantages as well as opportunities and problems.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Marketing**

Marketing encompasses the deliberate actions undertaken by individuals to satisfy the desires and needs of others. Marketing, according to Kotler and Armstrong (2018), is a strategic method employed by firms to create value and build long-lasting relationships with customers, with the ultimate goal of receiving value in return. Kotler and Keller argue that marketing involves a variety of actions, institutions, and processes that attempt to create, communicate, deliver, and distribute offers that are valuable to consumers, clients, colleagues, and society in general.

### **Digital Marketing**

Chaffey and Chadwick (2016) describe digital marketing as the use of the internet and digital technology, including traditional communication techniques, to achieve marketing goals. In addition, Chaffey and Smith (2017) defined digital marketing as using technology to improve customer understanding. Content marketing, search engine optimization, paid advertising, social media marketing, and email marketing are the key focal areas for digital marketing optimization. Business experts are increasingly utilizing digital marketing methods since they are more effective than traditional methods. Digital marketing provides a multitude of benefits, such as increased convenience, speed, variety, and comfort. Consumers' lives are simplified and advertisers may reach their target group more efficiently.

### **Content Marketing**

Rowleys (2008) defines content marketing as a strategic management process that entails identifying, assessing, and responding to customer needs in order to produce profits through the dissemination of digital information via digital media. As stated by Mandloys Digital Agency (Lee, 2013: 4), content marketing is essential for attracting new customers, retaining current customers, and building a strong brand reputation. Consistently providing relevant, engaging, entertaining, and valuable content is critical for retaining or changing client behavior.

### **Customer Advocacy**

The term "advocate," which means to defend, maintain, champion, recommend, or support, is the foundation of consumer advocacy understanding. Kotler et al. (2017) describe customer advocacy as consumers who are loyal to a brand and willing to support and suggest a company to their social circles. Internet accessibility grants consumers the ability to express their thoughts, potentially reaching a wider audience, in the current digital age. Customer trust in recommendations from acquaintances may be greater than that of a prominent endorser, as per the influence of client advocacy.

### **Brand Trust**

Delgado et al. (2003) define brand trust as a sense of assurance that the brand is reliable and prioritizes client welfare. According to Liu et al. (2012), brand trust has an important role in how buyers behave before and after purchasing a product. Brand trust is what may keep customers loyal and strengthen the relationship between the two parties. Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) define brand trust as the consumer's willingness to rely on the brand to perform as promised.

### **Customer Engagement**

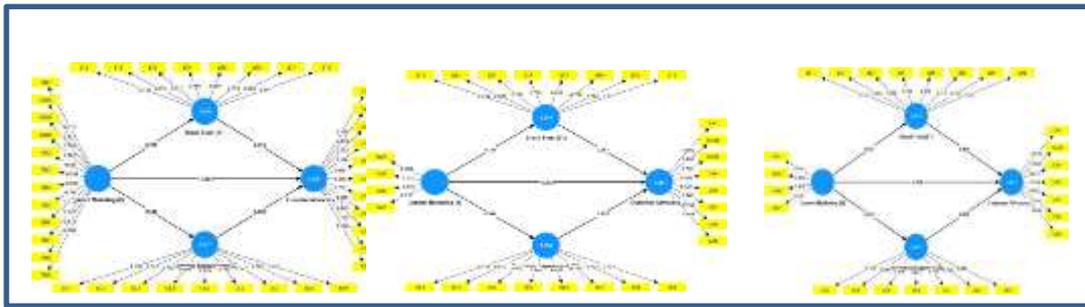
Engagement theory can be compared to the emotional relationship that exists between customers and companies. If a business can get customers interested, those customers will stick with it for a long time. The company's success in meeting consumer needs through customer involvement will have a favorable impact on its brand. The involvement in this process extends beyond the product itself and ultimately results in the product brand (Schamari & Schaefer, 2015). Tribulation between psychology, sociology, and behavior is where the notion of engagement originated (Brodie et al., 2011).

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study employs a quantitative method based on explanatory research, which explains the link between variables by evaluating hypotheses whose veracity will be examined. The research population comprises all users residing in Medan City who possess the TikTok application. In this study, sampling was done using a purposive sample strategy based on a set of specific criteria. There are 40 question items in this study, hence a sample size of  $40 \times 5 = 200$  is necessary. In this study, data was collected by a self-administered questionnaire survey and documentation, which was then analyzed using the Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) approach.

## **RESEARCH RESULT**

Convergent validity of the measurement model can be determined by the correlation between the item/instrument score and the construct score (loading factor), with each instrument's loading factor value being more than 0.70. Consequently, loading factors below 0.70 must be removed from the model. To achieve the required level of convergent validity, which must exceed 0.7, this study conducted three data processing trials. The final results are as follows:



**Figure 1. Loading Factor I to III**

All statement items greater than 0.70 can be deemed genuine based on the outer loading value upon deletion. Another approach for assessing the accuracy of a statement is the average variance extraction (AVE) test. This test is considered valid if the AVE value is more than 0.5. The AVE values from the survey that SmartPLS 4.0 was used to evaluate are as follows:

**Table 1. Average Variance Extracted (AVE)**

	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Rule of Thumb	Conclusion
Brand Trust	0.587	0.5	Valid
Customer Avocacy	0.655	0.5	Valid
Customer Engagement	0.624	0.5	Valid
Content Marketing	0.620	0.5	Valid

Subsequently, a discriminant validity assessment was conducted to examine the association between latent variables.

**Table 2. Heterotrait - Monotrait ratio (HTMT)**

	BT	CA	CE	CM
Brand Trust	-	-	-	-
Customer Avocacy	0.759	-	-	-
Customer Engagement	0.817	0.857	-	-
Content Marketing	0.849	0.535	0.620	-

Table 2 demonstrates that the HTMT value for each outer model construct has reached a value of <0.9, indicating a strong link between variables and meeting discriminant validity standards. The next discriminant validity test is cross loading, which involves comparing the variable indicator values to other variables.

**Table 3. R-square & Q-square**

	R-square	Q-square
Brand Trust	0.519	0.509
Customer Avocacy	0.647	0.211
Customer Engagement	0.283	0.272
Content Marketing		

According to Table 3, Brand Trust has an R-Square value of 0.519, indicating that Content Marketing can explain 51.9% of the Brand Trust construct, with the remaining 48.1% explained by factors not explored in this study. Customer Advocacy has an R-Square value of 0.647, meaning Content Marketing explains 64.7% of it, while other variables explain 35.3%. With an R-Square value of 0.283, Content Marketing explains 28.3% of Customer Engagement, whereas other variables explain 71.7%. The remaining 71.7% is explained by variables that were not explored in this study. Meanwhile, the Q-square value for the Brand Trust prediction is 0.509, indicating that the model has a high prediction; the Customer Advocacy prediction value of 0.211 has a medium forecast; and the Customer Engagement prediction value of 0.272 has a medium prediction.

**Table 4. Path Coefficient**

	<b>Original Sample</b>	<b>Sample Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>T statistics</b>	<b>P values</b>
<b>BT -&gt; CA</b>	0.291	0.292	0.119	2.450	0.014
<b>CE -&gt; CA</b>	0.602	0.603	0.072	8.372	0.000
<b>CM -&gt; BT</b>	0.721	0.724	0.040	18.133	0.000
<b>CM -&gt; CA</b>	-0.058	-0.059	0.071	0.814	0.416
<b>CM -&gt; CE</b>	0.532	0.537	0.057	9.317	0.000

According to the test results shown above in Table 4, the connection between concepts indicates that:

1. Brand Trust positively impacts Customer Advocacy, as evidenced by the T-Statistics value of 2,450, the significance level of 5%, and the P-Value of 0.014, which is less than 0.05.
2. Brand Trust positively effects Customer Advocacy, as shown by the T-Statistics value of 2,450, significance level of 5%, and P-Value of 0.014, which is less than 0.05.
3. Content marketing improves brand trust, as evidenced by the T-Statistics value of 18.133, the significance level of 5%, and the P-Value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05.
4. Content Marketing and Customer Advocacy: A T-Statistics value of 0.814, 5% significance level, 0.416 P-value, and 0.05 significance level indicate a negative and not very significant influence.
5. Content Marketing and Customer Advocacy: A T-Statistics value of 0.814, 5% significance level, 0.416 P-value, and 0.05 significance level show a negative and not significant influence.

### **The Effect of Content Marketing to Brand Trust**

Hypothesis testing reveals that Content Marketing directly affects Brand Trust positively and significantly. Content Marketing increased Brand Trust by 72% with other variables outside the research model by 28%. This hypothesis test supported the hypothesis. Mandloys Digital Agency defines content marketing as attracting, retaining, and boosting brand image (Lee, 2013: 4). Regularly creating relevant, engaging, entertaining, and useful information to impact customer behavior. The research shows that content marketing directly affects brand trust. This is due to the creation of real content that focuses on creating relationships with customers by asking them to offer evaluations, which can elicit trust or confidence from the audience in any brand they come across and purchase. Content can demonstrate a brand's reliability or customer benefits, which builds confidence. According to Holliman and Rowley (2014), a content marketing strategy can help brands gain trust and credibility. One of the keystones to content marketing success is establishing a reputation as a reliable brand, which is attained by promoting the distribution of messages that give consumers' opinions first priority.

### **The Effect of Content Marketing to Customer Engagement**

The hypothesis test reveals that content marketing positively and significantly affects customer engagement. The data shows a substantial influence of X on Z2 (t-statistic = 9.317, significance level = 5%, p-value = 0.000 < 0.05) with an initial sample value of 0.532. With other variables outside the research model at 46.8%, content marketing's impact to customer engagement was 53.2%. The results of this hypothesis test indicate that the hypothesis is accepted. According to De Valck et al.'s (2009) definition, customer engagement is the establishment of interactions, effects, experiences, or reactions felt by customers as a whole toward the products or services consumed. This research supports Aisyah and Bethany (2020), Dharmayanti and Juventino (2020), and Revida et al. (2023) findings that content marketing boosts customer engagement. This is possible because content marketing is a vital aspect of developing customer engagement so that the firm is consistently engaged with its customers.

### **The Effect of Brand Trust to Customer Advocacy**

Brand Trust's contribution to Customer Advocacy had a path coefficient value of 29.1%, compared to 70.9% for other factors outside the research model. Therefore, the hypothesis is accepted based on the findings of this hypothesis test. Trust is formed on the expectation that the other party would act in accordance with the customer's wants and desires. This will foster sincere customer advocacy, where people are satisfied with a product or service and willing to endorse it without remuneration. This is consistent with the opinion of Brodie et al. (2011), who stated that if customers believe in a brand, they will be inclined to share or suggest information about that brand to others.

### **The Effect of Customer Engagement to Customer Advocacy**

Customer engagement is a process-driven cycle that includes connection, interaction, satisfaction, retention, commitment, and advocacy. This research supports Dharmayanti and Theofilus (2020)'s findings that Customer Engagement has a positive and significant effect on Customer Advocacy and that Customer Advocacy is one of the most important things in the technological era because it can happen quickly, such as when we share interesting content with friends.

### **The Effect of Content Marketing to Customer Advocacy**

The hypothesis test demonstrates that Content Marketing negatively and insignificantly affects Customer Advocacy. As a consequence of this hypothesis test, the hypothesis is rejected. According to Kotler et al. (2017), customer advocacy refers to consumers who are loyal to a company and are eager to support and recommend products to their friends and family. In contrast, a bad experience will make customers unwilling to recommend a product or service. This study runs counter to studies by Annisaa et al. (2023), which found that consumer advocacy is influenced by content marketing when UINSU students use the Tiktok app. Similarly, Alda's (2020) research found that there is a favorable and significant association between Content Marketing and Customer Advocacy.

### **The Effect of Content Marketing to Customer Advocacy with Brand Trust as the Intervening Variable**

The hypothesis test reveals that Content Marketing indirectly increases Customer Advocacy through Brand Trust. Content Marketing influences Customer Advocacy through Brand Trust, as shown by the significant t-statistic value of 2.398 and p-value of  $0.017 < 0.05$ . The original sample value of 0.210 indicates a positive relationship. The hypothesis test results support it. Customer advocacy, according to Kotler et al. (2017), is when a customer is loyal to a brand and is ready to support and tell others about the product. Alternatively, customers will be hesitant to become advocates for a product or service if they have a negative experience. Good customer experience refers to the expectation that other parties will operate in accordance with the client's demands and desires. Establishing this basis will genuinely foster customer advocacy, as customers will be motivated to share or recommend the product to others without any form of remuneration, driven by their genuine contentment with the service or product.

### **The Effect of Content Marketing to Customer Advocacy with Customer Engagement as the Intervening Variable**

The hypothesis test results indicate that through customer engagement, the content marketing variable indirectly and significantly positively affects customer advocacy. The results of this hypothesis test indicate that the hypothesis is accepted. As stated in engagement theory, it can be compared to an emotional tie between customers and the organization. Customer engagement is a process-driven cycle that includes connection, interaction, satisfaction, retention, commitment, and advocacy. These findings are consistent with Annisaa et al. (2023) research, which found a positive and significant influence of Content Marketing on Customer Advocacy through Customer Engagement on UINSU Students' use of the TikTok Application. Customer advocacy allows a product to grow quickly because customers are willing to share their positive experiences and attention with others.

### **DISCUSSION**

This research reveals some important insights regarding the relationship between content marketing, brand trust, customer engagement, and customer advocacy. First, the research confirmed that content marketing has a significant positive impact on brand trust, increasing trust by 72%. This is consistent with the definition of Mandloys Digital Agency and the views of Holliman and Rowley (2014), who emphasize that the creation of relevant and engaging content helps build customer relationships and trust. Second, the data shows that content marketing significantly increases customer engagement, with a sizable influence of 53.2%. This is in line with previous findings by Aisyah and Bethany (2020) and Revida et al. (2023), who highlighted that engaging content drives consistent interactions between companies and their customers.

In addition, the study shows that brand trust significantly contributes to customer advocacy, with a path coefficient value of 29.1%. This supports Brodie et al. (2011) that trust encourages customers to support the brand sincerely. Similarly, customer engagement was also shown to have a positive impact on customer advocacy, corroborating Dharmayanti and Theofilus' (2020) findings that engagement drives the cycle of connectedness and advocacy processes. However, this study also shows that content marketing directly does not significantly affect customer advocacy, contrary to some previous studies. This suggests that other factors or negative experiences reduce the potential advocacy benefits of content marketing. Interestingly, when examining the indirect effects, this study found that content marketing has a positive impact on customer advocacy through brand trust and customer engagement. This highlights the importance of these mediating factors in utilizing content marketing to increase customer advocacy. Overall, these findings emphasize the multifaceted role of content marketing in shaping customer relationships, stressing the need for strategies that build trust and engagement to encourage genuine advocacy.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on this research, it can be determined that the presence of TikTok has been approved to hold a variety of significant information. Unfortunately, this information does not always fulfill quality, validity, or quantity standards, which reduces customer trust. Another issue that comes up is directly tied to engagement and authenticity. To encourage consumer advocacy, businesses should not only prioritize content quality, but also engage in active user participation and brand development. This study demonstrates how providing feedback or responding to messages with solutions is a sign of genuineness. Efforts to promote the identical product in the immediate vicinity will concurrently foster customer loyalty. Uploading engaging and enjoyable content that appeals to the user's target audience is another way to convey positive emotions. By including product links to direct sales websites, businesses may also boost client involvement. This is designed to foster teamwork and a sense of volunteering to be an advocate for the company

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