

# Managing Competitive Advantage In The Cluttered Content Environment

Anu Vij

**Abstract --** Both established and newer business firms are continuously endeavoring to beckon customers in order to gain a foothold in the extremely cluttered marketplace. Conventional marketing forms consistently fail due to their inability to connect with their target market! "Marketing and advertising today often miss the mark because they lack relevance and credibility!"(Williams2001). Usage of digital media has helped enormously in this context yet the convenience with which most businesses are adopting it presents a formidable challenge to stand out among the ensuing competition as well as leading to dilemmas related to choice of the appropriate media as well as innovative messages for promotion! This is where the concept of marketing content emerges and trumps over its traditional format! "Businesses succeed due to their ability to create a 'buzz' around the product with aggressive and strategic marketing" (King 2005). Easier said than done, as the marketers who use content as part of their marketing mix strategy must ensure that their content is meaningful for their audience and is able to engage them for a longer term than the competition. The present study addresses the issue of gaining and managing an edge over the competition through content marketing. The content strategy of select premium firms from different sectors operating in the UAE is analyzed for this paper. Use of chi square statistical technique is enlisted to bring forth the impact of relevant methods of content marketing used by the firms. A model is thus suggested to firms that is not only customer centric but also intends to hit the bull's eye by minimizing the competitive clutter.

**Keywords—** competitive advantage, content analysis, digital marketing, UAE

## I. Introduction

In the contemporary times it is definitely a herculean task for a firm to be seen or heard amongst its numerous competitors. Companies are struggling to find the space in the overpopulated marketing industry. Markets are bursting with products addressing similar needs of same target markets. To stand out, every company has come up with innovative communication strategy and is endeavoring to make an impression that would last in the minds of their targeted segment. Markets have become over crowded which have complicated the decision making processes of the consumer while choosing between brands. This cut throat competition has induced these companies to come up with novel promotional methods to cut through the clutter and gain an edge over their competitors.

Firms that were smart enough to realize this proactively ventured into the realm of marketing content along with the brand. Informative and motivating content has served as a considerable pull factor in the market. Companies promoting their brands and themselves this way create new ways to disseminate information to their customers using one or many media as a vehicle. The media used vary from custom magazines, print or online newsletters, digital content, websites or microsites, white papers, webcasts/webinars, podcasts, video portals or series, in-person roadshows, roundtables, interactive online, email, events. "The essence of this content strategy is the belief that if we, as businesses, deliver consistent, ongoing valuable information to buyers, they ultimately reward us with their business and loyalty" (Wikipedia). However organizations using content marketing to communicate with its customers have been witnessing incessant stream of challenges. Though the marketer instead of pitching products or services, is trying to make the buyer more intelligent, yet the so called informed customer might very well look similarly for substitute brands thus stripping away the leverage firms intend to gain from this strategy. The question invariably arises as to how to manage the content strategy in the cluttered competitive environment?

## II. Literature Review

According to Pulizzi, J. (2012) the average company now spends approximately 25% of its total marketing budget on content creation and distribution. This number will most likely grow over the next few years as more brands have the opportunity to communicate directly with their customer base, building owned channels that turn into earned media. Pulizzi in his article credits five factors responsible for making it happen – technology advance, talent availability, content acceptance, social media and visibility in search engines such as Google. Kho, N. D. (2014) while quoting Pulizzi in her article questions about acceptance of content marketing by the companies. "A 2013 CMI study found that only 44% of B2B companies have a documented content strategy." However, Hosford, C. (2013) in an online survey of 197 B2B marketers found that 97% use some kind of content marketing. Further, 26% of respondents said their content marketing initiatives were "very" or "fully" integrated into their sales and marketing initiatives, compared with just 16% last year. Looking ahead to 2014, 57% of marketers will be "very" or "fully" engaged in content marketing, according to the study. When asked about the *objectives* of content marketing, brand awareness took precedence over thought leadership and engagement. Content marketing's key strengths, according to the study, include its ability to improve lead generation, make brands a trusted source, help nurture leads, improve search

engine optimization, and create more relevant touch points with prospects and customers. The study found marketers exploring all content types to determine the right combination to achieve their objectives. Social media is considered the most important type of content used to improve sales and marketing effectiveness, cited by 78% of respondents. Other popular types of content include online articles, videos, live events, e-newsletters, white papers, case studies and blogs.

Maddox, K. (2010) conducted a study on content marketing spending which was based on an online survey of 259 marketing professionals conducted in January. It was found that 59% plan to increase their content marketing budgets this year, up from 56% last year and 42% in 2008. The survey also revealed a significant difference in the content marketing spending plans of large companies and small companies. For companies with fewer than 100 employees, 42% of the marketing budget will be spent on content marketing.

### **iii. Research Objectives**

According With the above background, the present study was conducted

- To understand and analyze the various possible content format and their incorporation in the marketing channels.
- To explore the extent of management focus on contents' components on their company's websites.
- To find the association of marketing contents with that of types of companies.

### **iv. Content Marketing in UAE**

United Arab Emirates (UAE), a federation of 7 emirates with the second largest economy in the Arab Middle East after Saudi Arabia (EIA 2005) is known for international trade and tourism. The country has the seventh largest proven oil reserves in the world at 97.8 billion barrels and possesses sixth largest proven natural gas reserves in the world at 214 trillion cubic feet (EIA 2005). The emirate of Abu Dhabi is the focal point of the UAE's oil and gas industry, followed by Dubai, Sharjah, and Ras al Khaimah in that order while other emirates Fujairah, Ajman and Umm al-Qaiwain are on the way of developing infrastructure likewise. These emirates vary considerably in size and population, but all have undergone modernization and urbanization (Clements 1998) since the 1960s when the area was described as one of 'barren coastlands largely populated by nomadic tribes' where 'the only occupations are fishing and pearling' (Goodwin 2003). In the early nineties, the UAE government began spending on infrastructure (Balasubramanian 1992, and 1993), focusing mostly in Abu Dhabi and Dubai. Propelled by a wider federation policy, Dubai started to invest substantially in tourism (Trade and Industry, 1990; Middle East Economic Digest, 1995), which was soon to be a pillar of the economy (Crookston 1998). Tourism was positioned at the center of the diversification programme alongside construction, telecommunications, media, real estate and financial trading. There was thus a strong shift towards services, but manufacturing still remains a sector of significance (EIU

2005). Although the country is known for its infrastructure, high living costs and technology advances, impacts on its fragile environment are inevitable requiring certain investments in environment related projects which again require to be promoted to woo the private sector (Vij, M., & Vij, A. (2012). The country has been attracting a lot of foreign investments in almost all its sectors and the business environment has become even more competitive. The companies operating in UAE are focused on their marketing efforts to claim their share of cake from a limited market of approximately 11 million of population (Saed. R., Vij. M. & Vij A. (2012). A steep rise in the purchasing power of local as well as expatriate population has prompted the marketers operating here to channelize efforts in order to generate interest amongst the various customers groups. UAE's GDP has now exceeded 1 trillion Dirhams, from 11 billion Dirhams in 1973, depicting a rate of economic expansion that has exceeded even that of Singapore. The UAE has the world's third highest GDP per capita (UAE's 2010 GDP figure).

### **v. Methodology**

Although there could be a number of marketing channels wherein the contents have to stand out in an environment bombarded with similar products/services and their promotions, the author sticks to the landing page of the company website which is visited by the potential customer guided by sponsored advertisements on search engines or other related websites. One should not forget that it takes a lot for the marketer to capture customers' attention through internet advertisements and guiding them to the landing pages. However retaining their attention long enough at the landing page and converting them viable business prospects is easier said than done!

The model suggested below (Figure 1) explores the proposed elements of content (G Pallab, 2014) and its design on the landing page that are helpful in creating a significant difference as compared to the conventional contents elements on the landing page. As many as seven elements related to contents' presentation are identified in the proposed model. The element "coverage" refers to the most important thing to be presented on the landing page. However, to what extent it can attract the attention of the visitor on the webpage is always questionable as the marketers who simply try to push their offerings on page might not receive the same attention as the ones who try to connect better with the customers' requirements by offering a solution! The element "guidance cues" refer to usage of signs towards the focal attention. "Contrast" element means using contrasting colors (at least for the action buttons) on the webpage. "Whitespace" is seemingly a simple aspect yet becomes very important in terms of dividing the cluttered contents on a webpage in such a n ingenious way so as to afford the visitor some uncluttered eye space. "Relevance and Scarcity" refers to including such information that pertains significantly to the offering or idea marketed and impacts the customer favorably. "Demonstrating credibility" refers to not only displaying appropriate testimonials but certain awards, reviews, accreditations and so on from third party in an interesting way enhancing the credibility of the company. The last but not the least element

“try before you buy” is about providing a Preview of the product/service helps people make informed purchasing decisions. This can be done by including a short video, slide show of the highlights or a Request for Demo.

The elements were further divided into set of four questions each in a questionnaire which was shown to the marketing managers of 30 selected companies through a group of undergraduate students.



Figure 1 – Proposed model illustrating the Contents' elements on a landing webpage

Furthermore, the students were oriented about the topic and the complete modus operandi to conduct interview sessions. The companies' websites and their sponsored advertisements were also thoroughly verified before conducting one-to-one sessions with the managers. The sample of 30 organizations was selected which comprised of three important sectors of UAE – durables (electronics and furniture), retailers (hypermarkets) and services (hotels). A total of 30 questionnaires (10 from each category) were found valid for the analysis. Likert-type scale was used, respectively anchored by (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree.

The data were analyzed by using SPSS 16.0 statistical program whereby factor analyses, reliability and correlation analyses were utilized in order to evaluate the relationships and the influences in-between. Further Chi Square test and coefficient of contingency figures aided to find any association between the nominal variables and landing web page contents of the companies. In order to generate balanced analyses, the companies' web pages were also examined regularly over the data tabulation and result generation period of three months to observe if the content of the companies studied showed any modification or status change.

## VI. Result and Discussion

United Arab Emirates (UAE), a federation of 7 emirates with the second largest TABLE 1 reflects the mean and standard deviation of the factors listed under “contents' elements”. For each factor of the constructs, the measure was derived by taking the mean value of all the items listed under

the factor. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the factors/constructs surpassed the 0.70 threshold recommended by Nunnally (1978) for the test of scale reliability. The alpha values were as high as 0.88, 0.86, 0.90, 0.87, 0.86, 0.80, .081 and 0.82 respectively for the mentioned contents' elements. The alpha values are shown in the TABLE 1 together with the correlation analysis results.

TABLE 1: Results of Reliability and Correlation analysis

	Mean	Std Dev.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Coverage	5.40	1.101	α=.88						
Guidance cues	5.61	1.820	.655**	α=.87					
Whitespace	5.33	1.003	.712**	.423*	α=.90				
Contrast	5.71	1.201	.412*	.542**	.234*	α=.86			
Relevance and scarcity	5.01	1.003	.513*	.423*	.256*	.430*	α=.80		
Credibility	5.07	0.932	.632**	.456*	.357*	.378*	.342*	α=.81	
Try before you buy	5.04	0.945	.621**	.433*	.420*	.321*	.266*		α=.82

\*p< .05, \*\*p<.01

It is quite clear from the above findings that the contents' elements are directly correlated with each other which mean that the managers were quite informed about the elements and the way they should be designed on the websites. Interestingly, the results were almost same for the three sectors – durables, retailers, and services. The extent of association with the nominal variables, i.e. age of the firm, origin country and nature of business, was determined by applying chi square association test and examining the coefficient of contingency generated. The results of Chi Square Distribution Tests are classified in the following manner:

- Dependent\* means Dependency at 1% level of significance
- Dependent\*\* means Dependency at 2% level of significance
- Dependent\*\*\* means Dependency at 5% level of significance

TABLE 2 - Association Tests between “Contents' elements” and the nominal variables i.e. Age of the Firm, Origin Country and Nature of Business

	Chi Square Value	Degrees of Freedom	Coefficient of Contingency	Result
<b>Coverage</b>				
Age of Firm	0.087	4	0.050	Independent
Origin Country	0.091	4	0.062	Independent
Nature of Business	0.093	4	0.064	Independent
<b>Contrast and whitespaces</b>				

Age of Firm	29.10	4	0.185	<i>Dependent**</i>
Origin Country	42.120	4	0.321	<i>Dependent*</i>
Nature of Business	50.673	4	0.032	<i>Dependent*</i>
<b>Guidance cues</b>				
Age of Firm	36.71	4	0.246	<i>Dependent*</i>
Origin country	25.52	4	0.043	<i>Dependent*</i>
Nature of Business	21.48	4	0.042	<i>Independent</i>
<b>Relevancy and Scarcity</b>				
Age of Firm	34.67	4	0.271	<i>Dependent*</i>
Origin country	21.01	4	0.215	<i>Dependent*</i>
Nature of Business	36.40	4	0.291	<i>Dependent*</i>
<b>Demonstrating Credibility</b>				
Age of Firm	43.21	4	0.395	<i>Dependent*</i>
Origin country	4.89	4	0.138	<i>Dependent***</i>
Nature of Business	4.63	4	0.144	<i>Dependent***</i>
<b>Try before You Buy</b>				
Age of Firm	12.74	4	0.340	<i>Dependent*</i>
Origin country	0.026	4	0.054	<i>Independent</i>
Nature of Business	0.037	4	0.019	<i>Independent</i>

TABLE 2 presents interesting findings with regard to contents' elements selection and positioning utilized by three selected business sectors. With regard to "coverage" of the contents all the sectors showed their inclination towards presenting the most optimum contents on the website and not much variation was found in the responses of the firms interviewed. The responses were differing to the importance of "contrast and whitespaces" on the webpage. It was observed that the newer organizations are more concerned about thinking on these lines while the relatively older companies are more inclined towards presenting as much possible as they can on the landing page, thus leaving lesser white spaces. After a careful observation on their webpages, it was also observed that even the known hotel chains (in UAE) believe in using light shades and no contrasts at all whereas the retailers believe in using coloured graphics; which brings a contradiction to the proposed model. Responses on "guidance cues" were also found different from one another. It was observed that the retailers were more anxious about their online purchases thus encouraging them to use the cues more

frequently than that of companies selling durables and even the hoteliers. It is understandable for the durables companies which would not often sell directly from their website. The hoteliers however need to learn a few lessons from the reservation websites like "www.booking.com" or "www.agoda.com" which operate on war foot level in terms of guiding the website visitor to book a hotel through them. Similarly the next element "relevance and scarcity" is best used by the same websites as not by the hotel properties themselves. Nevertheless, the responses were also different for the element by the selected sectors. Ideally speaking all the three selected should adopt the contents related to "last chance/limited time offer" on the webpage but the retailers seem to be bit more concerned than their counterparts from durables and hotels. When asked about mentioning contents reflecting "demonstrating credibility", the responses were found to be skewed towards older organizations irrespective of the business sector. However, on a careful observation on the websites, it was found that even the older organizations lack mentioning any such information from a third party or including the same in the form of feedback from the customers! Last but not the least, the element proposed in the model "try before you buy" received mixed responses. Interestingly, irrespective of the type of business the relatively newer organizations believe in showcasing certain clippings or experiential videos about their products whereas the older companies seem to be employing conservative approach of displaying a few pictures of their offerings (which too are not replaced for a long time).

## VII. Conclusion

Although an emerging concept tethering on shaking legs, the implications of content marketing are far reaching in comparison to conventional ways of marketing. One can only envisage the times when it will become a vital component for survival irrespective of the nature of business. In the present paper an attempt was made to examine the organizations' approach towards various contents' elements on their webpages and to find out if there were any notable differences among their responses. The responses were mixed and at many places notable opinion differences were found with regard to the age of the organization and nature of the business. Overall it was found that the retail businesses and hoteliers were more concerned about the website contents than the durable companies. One possible reason for the difference could be due to different consumer purchasing behavior for online retail items and booking hotels with that of durables which are considered to be highly involved decisions. The proposed model in the paper presents a set of contents' elements on the webpage which has a lasting impression on the website visitor. All the elements were tested with the help of a questionnaire and also by examining the webpage of the sample companies. Although many elements were more or less included by a significant portion of the sample, the absence of elements "credibility" and "try before you buy" is proposed as a major area of improvement. The companies need to address these issues by significantly augmenting the quality and credibility of their content riding on customers' feedback and third party recognition. Though it seems a formidable challenge to include all the elements mentioned in this study but at the

same time also presents a huge opportunity for the companies to stand out in the cluttered marketplace as well as advertising space! The stage is already set and the game changers will definitely rule in the coming times!

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