

“The role of content marketing in enhancing customer loyalty: an empirical study on private hospitals in Saudi Arabia”

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Ahmed Suhail Ajina (Saudi Arabia)

THE ROLE OF CONTENT MARKETING IN ENHANCING CUSTOMER LOYALTY: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON PRIVATE HOSPITALS IN SAUDI ARABIA

Abstract

Due to increasing competition in the private hospital sector in Saudi Arabia, the organizations need to adopt the new ways to foster the brand loyalty and repeated visits. In this context, content marketing may have pleasant effects on a business in terms of customer engagement, trust and loyalty. The present research attempts to investigate the multi-dimensional relationships among content marketing, loyalty, trust and customer engagement in the private hospital sector using primary data collected through a questionnaire from 400 randomly selected respondents. A simple random sampling technique is utilized to select the patients or their family members visiting the private hospital to have their perception regarding hypothesized variables. The findings indicate that content marketing has a positive impact on the factors like customer engagement, trust and loyalty. In comparison, content marketing is found more effective in persuading the loyalty of the customers in comparison of trust and loyalty. Further, the customers' trust towards a brand has a strong positive relationship with the loyalty. Moreover, the positive effect of customer engagement on the trust has also been found. Based on the results, this study suggests that the private healthcare institutions should adopt a multi-channel content marketing approach to exploit its maximum benefit. Multiple social media platforms and popular healthcare blog sites should be chosen for an effective content marketing advertisement.

Keywords content marketing, loyalty, trust, engagement, hospital

JEL Classification M31, M37, M39

INTRODUCTION

The global business environment is becoming increasingly competitive across the industries. So, the organizations need to employ new strategies to attract the customers through brand awareness. The advent of digital media as a marketing platform has opened new avenues for marketers to target the desired audience and to create a general interest about a particular product, service or brand (Ryan, 2016). Content marketing has been proved as one of the popular digital marketing technique, which draws the attention of the audience towards a particular area of interest. Content marketing strategies do not necessarily have an only focus to promote a product or service by highlighting its features and attributes, like a typical promotional content. Additionally, it is largely involved in creating interest among the audience towards a brand by emphasizing certain aspects of value creation (Baltes, 2015).

Baltes (2015) argues that content marketing strategies may vary strikingly across different organizations. It usually depends on the nature of target audience and the industry in which the company operates. However, irrespective of the nature of the business venture, content

marketing may be utilized for the purposes like improving brand awareness, generating leads, fostering customer loyalty and developing an audience base (Odden, 2012). Jefferson and Tanton (2015) have further amplified that content marketing can be used to augment the market needs. For example, the informational or entertainment-based contents may be exposed to educate the audience about solving the potential problems or the potential ways of improving lifestyle, which may resultantly promote the use of a particular product. Moreover, the content marketing leverages may display the thought-provoking material in the forms of texts, videos or images (Jefferson & Tanton, 2015). Thus, it may be claimed that content marketing might be employed to attract the customers towards a particular product by using indirect methods of persuasion. It may also generate curiosity and interest amongst the audience, which may result in gaining the higher sales volume and brand loyalty.

Once we talk about the brand loyalty, we cannot ignore the service quality, which is very important to win the brand loyalty for any service sector business. In this regard, Service Quality (SERVQUAL) model is very important to discuss, which captures the five dimensions of service quality, i.e. reliability, assurance, tangibility, empathy and responsiveness. This model is also fruitful in finding the service quality gaps between the actual and expected service quality. In the Saudi healthcare sector context, some studies have utilized the SERVQUAL model to find the relationships of service quality dimensions, marketing mix of the health services and patients' satisfaction in Saudi Arabia (Al-Borie & Damanhouri, 2013; Ahmad et al., 2013; Mahmood & Alkhateeb, 2017; Amor et al., 2018).

Walston et al. (2008) report that the privatization of the healthcare sector in Saudi Arabia is responsible for an increasing healthcare business competition in the kingdom. Newly emerged private hospitals are enticing the patients by offering value-oriented services. The increasing competition is compelling the existing organizations to adopt new marketing strategies through digital media in addition to contemporary methods of marketing. Globally, the enterprises are moving towards content marketing, which has shown the promising results in terms of creating a general awareness among the audience regarding a particular area of interest, and the healthcare sector is not exception in this regard. By exhibiting the non-product contents to the audience, it educates and promotes the awareness and benefit of a particular product to shape the lifestyle in a better way. In turn, this may help to create a sense of interest among the audience and may enhance profitability of the business.

After tracing the importance of content marketing, we do not find any research in the health sector of Saudi Arabia addressing multi-dimensional relationships among content marketing and clients' engagement, trust and loyalty. Although, some studies have investigated the issues regarding usage of social media, word of mouth and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the sectors other than health sector (Ajina et al., 2019; Ajina, 2019a; Ajina, 2019b). But the Saudi health sector literature is still silent towards the very important multi-dimensional relationships amongst content marketing and clients' engagement, loyalty and trust. Exploiting this literature gap, this present research is targeting to investigate the effect of content marketing on the clients' engagement, trust and loyalty in the private hospital sector of Saudi Arabia, aims to find the effect of customers' engagement on the loyalty and trust and attempts to test the effect of trust on the loyalty.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

SERVQUAL model provides multi-dimensional instruments and it becomes the workhorse in the service quality literature once Parasuraman et al. (1991) identified the five service quality dimensions. This model is very helpful in identifying the gap between expected quality before service and

actual perceived service after service experience in the different service quality dimensions. A number of studies has been conducted on the relationships of service quality dimensions, marketing mix and clients' satisfaction in the health sector of the Saudi Arabia. For example, Al-Borie and Damanhouri (2013) apply SERVQUAL model on the data collected from 1,000 respondents in a mix sample of

public and private hospitals. They find that all five service quality dimensions of SERVQUAL model are found statistically significant in determining the patients' satisfaction. In case of a particular King Khalid hospital Alkharj, Mahmood, and Alkhateeb (2017) repeat the SERVQUAL model and find the significant gaps in the actual and expected service quality of all quality dimensions of SERVQUAL model. Amor et al. (2018) investigate the effect of service quality on the clients' loyalty. They find that all five SERVQUAL dimensions have significantly contributed in determining the clients' loyalty. However, tangibility dimension is found for largest effect. Further, they conclude that large hospitals mostly provide better service quality in comparison of small hospitals. In case of the private hospitals located in Jeddah, Ahmad et al. (2013) investigate the effects of marketing mix on the patient's satisfaction. They find that services' quality, promotional activities, processes and personal strategies play a significant role in determining the patient's satisfaction. However, pricing policy and distributional strategies do not have statistically significant effects.

The basic purpose of the service quality is to win the customer loyalty, which is often defined by the long-term relationship between the customers and the organization or the brand. It plays a crucial role in maintaining the sustainability of the firm, especially from the financial standpoint (Mandhachitara & Poolthong, 2011). Loyal customers are likely to make the repeated purchases and may actively engage in convincing their peers as well. Loyalty is anticipated to provide a stable customer base which may provide a steady source of cash flow (Hill & Alexander, 2017). In this merit, the company may not necessarily have to invest more on attracting the new customers. In order to achieve sustainable competitive advantages, most companies are involved in building a strong base of loyal customers. Hollebeek (2011) mentions that customer loyalty may be explained through the behavioral and attitudinal aspects of customer satisfaction, i.e. product quality, pre and post purchase interaction with the company and cognitive resonance with the brand image, etc.

So et al. (2016) state that customer engagement can have direct positive impact on the loyalty. It has also been revealed that high degree of custom-

er engagement may enhance the customer's brand evaluation. Any form of encounter or engagement with the customers beyond the purchase encounter might be fruitful to augment the image of a brand. Customer engagement may be defined by the process of interaction with the customers and having motive of building the long-term relationships. Sashi (2012) argues that customer engagement is very beneficial to build strong brand loyalty and brand awareness. It is often accomplished through various types of marketing campaigns, especially through social media platforms, mobile applications and microblogging portals. Customer engagement is also essential to achieve better customer retention rate. Baird and Parasnis (2011) enhance this discussion that a relationship between an organization's brand and the customer is not limited to the purchase of the product or service, but it should also be extended for the future communications. In return, this may allow to stay in touch with the customers to have feedback on the aftersales services or for any query/complaint regarding the product.

Casaló et al. (2008) argue that the loyal customers are more likely to have a positive word of mouth among their peers. This might be beneficial for an organization in terms of brand recognition and awareness in a targeted customer base. Kotler and Keller (2009) have stated that the cost of acquisition may be claimed significantly higher than that of the cost of retention. Therefore, retaining the existing customers may support an organization to maintain a steady cash flow and also helps in reducing the operating cost. It has been reported that the customers who are engaged with a brand are more likely to repeat the purchases (Brodie et al., 2011). The returns on customer engagement can be measured by various factors such as web traffic, level of interaction in the social media, growth of audience and gradual growth of sales volume.

After the discussion of loyalty, customer trust carries a prime importance in winning a good customers' base. Customer trust is often defined by the perception of the customers regarding the degree of benevolence and honesty of a brand (Chu et al., 2012). A customer trusts an organization if he perceives that the organization is always caring his interest. Moreover, trust is also related to the

degree of certainty in the belief of the customers that their favorite brand has a capacity to deliver the desired value (Guenzi et al., 2009; Moreno-Munoz et al., 2016). Sashi (2012) has further improved this discussion that the organizations are inclined to maintain the trust of the customers by meeting their needs and preferences. An organization would only have capacity of seamlessly communication with her customers regarding their personal preferences if she maintains a good level of engagement with them. Further, this may also help to understand the current market trends of customers' demands in a better way (Van Doorn et al., 2010). A company may improve its brand image and eventually the sales volume if it satisfies the unmet market demand. Vivek et al. (2012) state that customer engagement is directly linked to the level of confidence of a customer while choosing a brand or a product. Thus, it infers that customer engagement is strongly linked to the customer trust.

There are a number of ways of marketing. But content marketing has become quite popular over the years, because it has been proven to be beneficial for the marketers to draw the attention of the customers and to create interest for a particular brand or product related activities at very low cost. Spinuzzi (2018) defines the content marketing as a technique of marketing a product or service by offering free content to the audience, which can be informational or entertaining in nature. The contents are often published on popular online platforms in the form of social media posts, blog posts, webinars and video sharing portals, etc. Pulizzi (2012) states a more formal definition of content marketing that it is a process of marketing and business development in which the relevant and valuable contents are exhibited to attract, obtain and engage a predetermined target audience with an objective of profitable customer action. Although, content marketing may utilize all forms of media platforms, including print, online and mobile, etc. But its effectiveness and popularity increase with the use of online or digital media.

Holliman and Rowley (2014) opine that the content marketing may assist a firm in brand building and developing trust in this digital era. The widespread access to internet, and the popularity of social media and microblogging portals have

opened the new windows to the marketers to increase the brand awareness in the market. Nosrati et al. (2013) mention that a good quality content may convince the customers to make purchase decisions in favor of a brand. Korfiatis et al. (2012) state that the success of the content marketing depends on the quality of the content, which is exposed to the audience. In the content marketing, the marketers offer the educational or entertainment-oriented information to the potential customers or an audience base with a hope that it may bend the customers' behavior in the favor of their brand. However, the exposed information is only effective if it deems to be good and interesting. A good quality content contains a reliable and useful information as per the perception of the audience (Hilligoss & Rieh, 2008). Keh and Xie (2009) argue that the perceived nature of content largely depends on the credibility of the source of the information. A good quality content may significantly improve the brand image among the customers if it could realize the use of a particular product for a maximum value to the customers and it also perceives to be reliable and trustworthy.

Oestreicher-Singer and Zalmanson (2013) point out the utility of content marketing in fostering a high degree of customer engagement. The content marketing has an ability to engage the customers to a great extent, especially through social media platforms. The rising popularity of social media gives the opportunity to the marketers to share their content with a large number of people (Palmer & Koenig-Lewis, 2009). Moreover, the marketers may engage the customers through the conversations published in the content and consequently may create the bond between the customers and the brand (Bijmolt et al., 2010). Therefore, content marketing may help in fostering the customer engagement, which may lead to accelerated customer loyalty and trust.

In case of Saudi Arabia, no single research has been conducted to test the effect of content marketing on the customer's engagement, loyalty and trust. Though, some studies have focused on the use of social media in the marketing of the products in the sectors other than hospital or health sector. For example, Ajina (2019a) highlights the importance of word of mouth (WOM) on the different social media as a cheapest and fastest chan-

nel of advertising. He finds that behavior and attitude of customers are found very effective in fostering the WOM on the social media. Ajina (2019b) investigates and estimates the perceived value of social media marketing. He finds that customer's engagement has significant effect on the perceived value, customer's loyalty and WOM. Further, perceived value has positive effect on WOM and loyalty and WOM has positive effect on the loyalty. Ajina et al. (2019) investigate the effect of CSR on the consumer behavior. They find that CSR awareness positively affects the CSR perception and CSR perception positively affects the CSR expectations. Further, CSR expectation have positive effect on the perceived value and customers' support, and perceived value has positive effect on the customers' support and loyalty.

The review of Saudi literature identifies that SERVQUAL model has been extensively investigated in the Saudi health sector, but investigation of content marketing is totally absent in the hospital sector. Moreover, the reviewed literature develops the theoretical predictions and hypotheses that customers' engagement and trust are very important in determining the loyalty. Further, content marketing could also have direct positive effects on the customers' engagement, trust and loyalty. Hence, the content marketing may have direct effect on the customers' loyalty and also have the indirect effects on the customers' loyalty through the trust and engagement. Considering these hypotheses, no comprehensive study is available to test the multi-dimensional nature of the relationships among the content marketing and customers' engagement, trust and loyalty in case of Saudi private hospitals. The present study is motivated to fill this literature gap.

2. METHODOLOGY, HYPOTHESES AND RESULTS

At first, the measurement scales for our hypothesized constructs are discussed in Table 1. Following Ajina et al. (2019), content marketing is captured by using Likert scale of 1-5 and by inquiring the perception of the participants about the quality of contents posted on social media by the hospitals. Most of respondents (40% of total respondents) choose the option 4 and options 3 and 5 are chosen by 28.2% and 8.5% of the total respondents, respectively. It means that quality of content is at least good in the perception of 76.7% of total respondents. Only 1.5% and 21.8% of total respondents choose options 1 and 2, respectively. Further, engagement, trust and loyalty are measured following Algesheimer et al. (2005), Kassim et al. (2010) and Harris et al. (2004), respectively. Further, the expected directions of relationships and the hypotheses of the study have been presented in Figure 1.

Table 1. Measurement scale of constructs

Construct	Measurement scale
Content marketing	It is measured by asking the participants about the quality of content posted in the social media from 1 to 5 where 1 is poor and 5 is outstanding
Engagement	Algesheimer et al. (2005)
Trust	Kassim et al. (2010)
Loyalty	Harris et al. (2004)

The reviewed literature suggests that customers' engagement and trust are very important in determining the loyalty and content marketing could also have direct positive effects on the customers' engagement, trust and loyalty as well. Therefore,

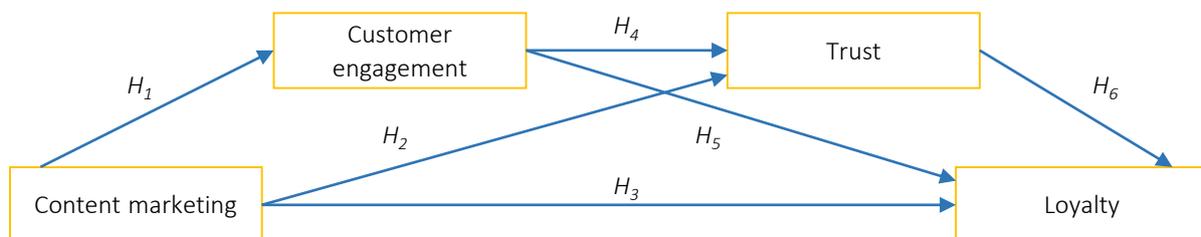


Figure 1. Hypothesized relationship between content marketing, customer engagement, trust and loyalty

the content marketing has direct effect on the customers' loyalty and also may have the indirect effect on the customers' loyalty through the trust and engagement. Considering this multi-dimensional nature of the relationships among the content marketing and customers' engagement, trust and loyalty, we hypothesize the following relations:

Alternative hypotheses

- H_1 : A positive effect of content marketing on the customer engagement.
- H_2 : A positive effect of content marketing on the trust.
- H_3 : A positive effect of content marketing on the loyalty.
- H_4 : A positive effect of customer engagement on the trust.
- H_5 : A positive effect of customer engagement on the loyalty.
- H_6 : A positive effect of trust on the loyalty.

This study is based on the primary data collected through a well-structured questionnaire consisted of personal information of the respondents and the four constructs, which are content marketing, trust, customer engagement and loyalty. The data are collected from 400 respondents (patients of private hospitals in Saudi Arabia or their families) through questionnaire survey in which questionnaires are distributed and then collected, once respondents filled the responses. A simple random sampling technique stemmed from probability sampling technique is utilized to select the respondents. The main approach of this study is based on positivism as the empirical exercise is targeted on the collected data. The validity of each construct is ensured before proceeding for further analyses. We use the structural equations modelling to build and to validate our hypotheses regarding the relationships among content market and customers' trust, customer engagement and loyalty.

At first, we discuss the personal information of the respondents presented in Table 2. In the gender variable, the male sample is found at 72% of total sample and female sample is 28%. This distribu-

Table 2. Personal information of respondents

Demographic variable	Classification	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Gender	Male	288	72.0	72.0	72.0
	Female	112	28.0	28.0	100.0
	Total	400	100.0	100.0	-
Age	Under 20	43	10.8	10.8	10.8
	From 20 to 29	167	41.8	41.8	52.5
	From 30 to 39	88	22.0	22.0	74.5
	From 40 to 49	75	18.8	18.8	93.3
	50 or above	27	6.8	6.8	100.0
	Total	400	100.0	100.0	-
Education	High school or under	43	10.8	10.8	10.8
	Undergrad.	215	53.8	53.8	64.5
	Graduate	142	35.5	35.5	100.0
	Total	400	100.0	100.0	-
Income	Less than 5,000	21	5.3	5.3	5.3
	From 5,000 to 10,000	84	21.0	21.0	26.3
	From 10,001 to 15,000	175	43.8	43.8	70.0
	From 15,001 to 20,000	92	23.0	23.0	93.0
	Over 20,000	28	7.0	7.0	100.0
	Total	400	100.0	100.0	-
Usage	Less than 1 hour a day	19	4.8	4.8	4.8
	About 1 to 3 hours a day	70	17.5	17.5	22.3
	About 3 to 5 hours a day	142	35.5	35.5	57.8
	About 5 to 7 hours a day	116	29.0	29.0	86.8
	More than 7 hours a day	53	13.3	13.3	100.0
	Total	400	100.0	100.0	-

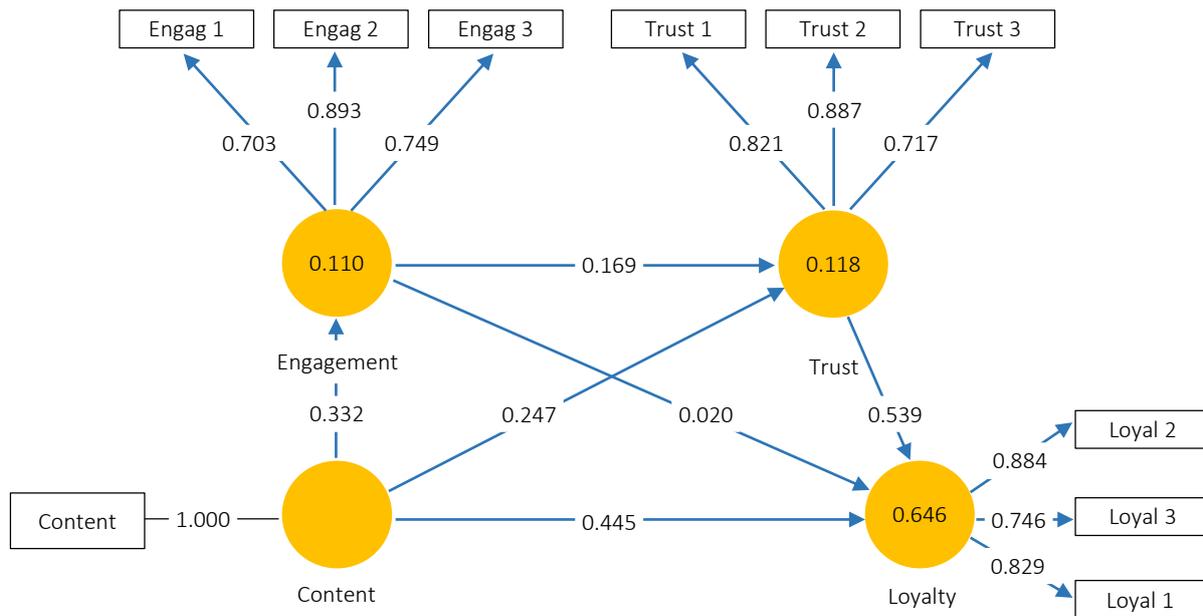


Figure 2. PLS model algorithm

tion is showing the participation of both genders in our survey.

Table 2 also shows the age distribution. We found that most of the participants, 41.8% of total sample, are from age group of 20-29 years followed by second highest contribution of 30-39 years and least from the upper age group of more than 50 years. The age distribution of sample shows that most of representation is from comparatively younger group in our sample. In the education variable, 53.8% of the sample is from the education level of undergraduates followed by second highest group of graduates consisted of 35.5%. Further, we collect the data from the respondents with education level of under or high school. Hence, our sample is well-distributed in terms of education level as most of representatives (about 90%) are at least from undergraduate group and the selected sample is well-qualified to understand the asked questions. In the income distribution, the highest proportion (43.8%) is from 10,001 to 15,000 Saudi Riyal (SR) of income group followed by 15,001-20,000 SR income group. Further, the proportion of different income groups showed that we have collected the data from all types of income groups. In the usage of social media websites, we find the highest proportion is found between 3 and 5 hours per day of internet usage with second highest of 5-7 hours per day. It means that all of our respondents have a good experience of web surfing. Hence,

their opinion can be considered very respectable because of their rich experience in watching the marketing contents posted by different types of firms. Hence, they are in better position to compare the marketing contents of hospital services with the other types of business contents. Overall, Table 2 showed that the data have been collected from a well-diversified sample. The demographic distribution has showed that the collected data are representing the all segments of the population and any possible group of population is not ignored.

To validate our hypotheses, we apply the PLS model algorithm at first. PLS model is utilized due to existence of endogeneity in our hypothesized model and PLS model is a structural equation modelling, which cares such issue. Figure 2 shows the composite scores among the hypothesized relationships of the constructs and items. Content marketing shows the highest composite score for the loyalty and second highest score has been observed for the engagement. Further, the trust shows a very high composite score for the loyalty, but the engagement has very minute scores for the trust and for the loyalty. The composite score shows that the effect of engagement on the loyalty can be ignored and it can be dropped in the structural model. Contrariwise, all items show a high level of composite scores with their respective constructs.

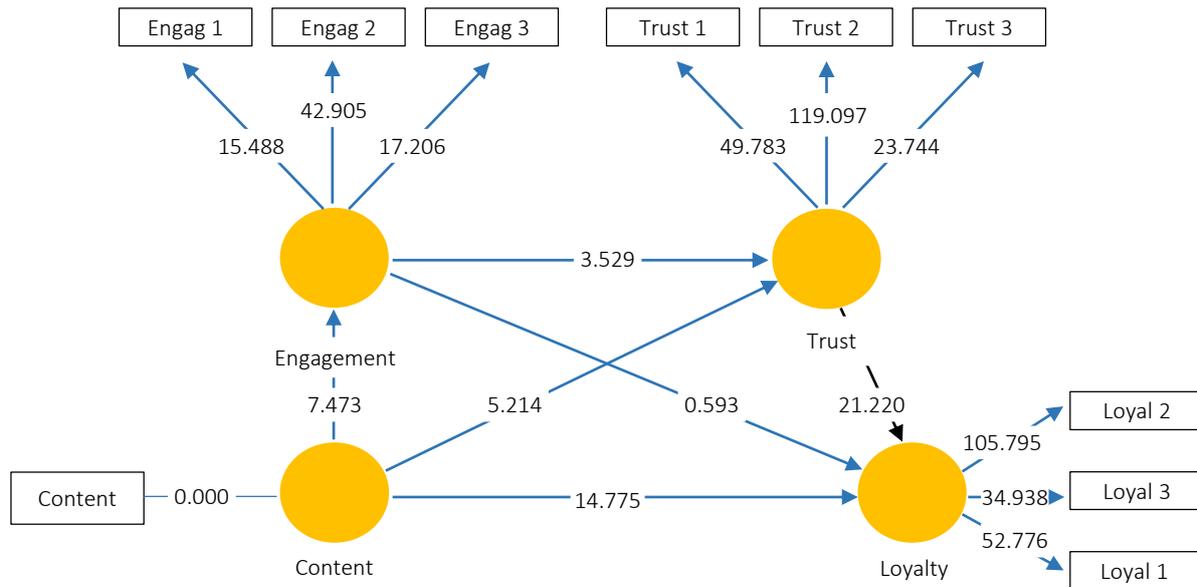


Figure 3. PLS model bootstrapping

Afterwards, we run the PLS model bootstrapping to estimate the inference statistics for all the model's parameters. Figure 3 corroborates the Figure 2 results and shows that content marketing has best inference for the loyalty followed by the second best inference for engagement. Further, trust shows a very good inference for the loyalty, but engagement has minute inference for trust and loyalty. Moreover, all items of each construct show a high level of inferences for their respective constructs.

After analysis of PLS model algorithm and bootstrapping, we test the convergence validity from the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) scores. The AVE scores should be more than 0.5 to corroborate the convergence validity (Henseler et al., 2009). Table 3a shows that AVE scores are more than 0.6 for all the constructs. Therefore, we can conclude the convergence validity in our hypothesized constructs, and we do not need to drop any of our construct from the hypothesized relationships. Further, we observe the internal consistency from the composite reliability scores. These scores should be more than 0.7 to validate the internal

consistency (Nunally, 1978). Table 3a shows that all the composite reliability scores are more than 0.8. Consequently, we ensure a strong internal consistency in our model.

After testing the reliability issues, we test outer model loadings to ensure the discriminant validity and results are reported in Table 3b. The results of factor loadings show that all scores are more than 0.7 and are less than 1. Based on the estimated scores, we may conclude that loaded items in the respective constructs are valid. Hence, discriminant validity is corroborated. Therefore, we should retain all of the constructs and their associated relevant items for the further analyses.

After corroborating the reliability and validity issues, we test the overall fitness of the model in Table 3c. Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMSR) shows the discrepancies between expected and observed correlations. The result shows that SRMSR score is less than 0.1 in both saturated and estimated models. Therefore, the models seem as good fitted. Further, the exact model fit is estimated through d_ULS and d_G to

Table 3a. Reliability

Reliability	Composite reliability	AVE	Square root of AVE
Content	1	1	1
Engagement	0.828	0.618	0.786
Loyalty	0.861	0.675	0.822
Trust	0.852	0.658	0.811

Table 3b. Outer model loadings

Loadings	Content	Engagement	Loyalty	Trust
Content	1	–	–	–
Engag1	–	0.703	–	–
Engag2	–	0.893	–	–
Engag3	–	0.749	–	–
Loyal1	–	–	0.829	–
Loyal2	–	–	0.884	–
Loyal3	–	–	0.746	–
Trust1	–	–	–	0.821
Trust2	–	–	–	0.887
Trust3	–	–	–	0.717

test the discrepancies between empirical correlation and employed correlation. The results show that the *p*-values are more than 0.05 in both *d*_ULS and *d*_G. So, we can conclude that difference is not significant at 5% level of significance and the model is again claimed for a goodness of fit. Moreover, the Chi-square value is also reasonably high. Based on all goodness of fit tests, the model criteria are fulfilling the minimum requirement to conclude an overall fitness and we may proceed for further analyses.

Table 3c. Model fit

	Saturated model	Estimated model
SRMR	0.086	0.086
<i>d</i> _ULS	0.406	0.406
<i>d</i> _G	0.140	0.140
Chi-Square	331.653	331.653
NFI	0.779	0.779

After confirming the validity, reliability and goodness of fit issues, bootstrapping is applied on the established structural model and results are reported in Table 4. The estimated paths of the structural model are found significant at 1% level of significance, except of a relationship between engagement and loyalty. This finding is also corroborating the low score from the PLS model algorithm and bootstrapping. Hence, we can drop this relationship for further analysis. Further, none of

Table 4. Path coefficient-bootstrapping results

Path coefficient	Original sample	Sample mean	Standard deviation	t-value	p-value
Content → engagement	0.332	0.336	0.047	7.021	0.000
Content → trust	0.247	0.249	0.052	4.732	0.000
Content → loyalty	0.445	0.447	0.030	14.991	0.000
Engagement → loyalty	0.020	0.018	0.030	0.650	0.516
Engagement → trust	0.169	0.171	0.052	3.258	0.001
Trust → loyalty	0.539	0.538	0.026	21.06	0.000

the path shows the negative mean and all hypothesized relationships are considered statistically significant except a relationship between engagement and loyalty.

Considering the results of the path analyses, we estimate the beta coefficients of all the hypothesized relationships, except an insignificant relationship between engagement and loyalty. The beta coefficients are reported in Table 5. We discuss all the relationships according to the proposed hypotheses in the following way:

*H*₁: A positive effect of content marketing on the customer engagement.

At first, Table 5 shows the relationship flowing from content marketing to customer engagement. The estimated coefficient of determination shows a positive correlation between customer engagement and content marketing. Further, *p*-value of a positive beta coefficient is statistically significant at 1% level of significance. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis of no-relationship and accept *H*₁ that content marketing has a positive impact on the customer engagement with a standardized coefficient of 0.329.

*H*₂: A positive effect of content marketing on the trust.

Table 5. Estimated coefficients

Relationship	R ²	Unstandardized beta	Standardized beta
Content → engagement	0.329	0.372 (0.000)	0.329 (0.000)
Content → trust	0.092	0.340 (0.000)	0.303 (0.000)
Content → loyalty	0.378	0.711 (0.000)	0.615 (0.000)
Engagement → trust	0.068	0.258 (0.000)	0.260 (0.000)
Trust → loyalty	0.461	0.701 (0.000)	0.679 (0.000)

Note: () contains *p*-values of beta coefficients.

A hypothesis of positive effect of content marketing on the trust is tested. The results show that content marketing and trust are positively correlated. The *p*-value of the positive beta coefficient signifies the positive effect of content marketing on the trust. Therefore, we accept the *H*₂ that content marketing is positively affecting the trust with a standardized coefficient of 0.303.

*H*₃: A positive effect of content marketing on the loyalty.

In the relationship between content marketing and loyalty, the result shows the positive correlation. The *p*-value of beta coefficient is also positive and significant at 1% level of significance. Hence, we accept *H*₃ that content marketing is positively impacting the loyalty with a standardized coefficient of 0.615.

*H*₄: A positive effect of customer engagement on the trust.

In testing of *H*₄, we find a positive correlation between trust and customer engagement. The *p*-value of beta is very low and signifies that customer engagement has a positive impact on the trust with a standardized coefficient of 0.260.

*H*₆: A positive effect of trust on the loyalty.

We do not test the “*H*₅: the impact of customer engagement on the loyalty” as path analysis suggests that this relationship is insignificant. Hereafter, we accept the *H*₆ with a very low *p*-value and conclude that trust has positive effect on the loyalty with a standardized coefficient of 0.679. Further, we also find the positive correlation between trust and loyalty.

The results reported in Table 5 show that all hypothesized relationships are positive and statisti-

cally significant, except the insignificant relationship between customer engagement and loyalty. Hence, theoretical predictions are corroborated with an empirical exercise and all hypotheses are proven true in the perceptions of our respondents, except the relationship between customer engagement and loyalty.

3. DISCUSSIONS

This present research has been conducted to test the multi-dimensional relationships among content marketing and customers’ loyalty, trust and engagement by assuming six hypotheses. The first three hypotheses are tested to check the direct impact of content marketing on the customers’ loyalty, trust and engagement. The statistical analyses have shown that we accept *H*₁, *H*₂ and *H*₃. Hence, the content marketing has the positive impact on customers’ loyalty, trust and customer engagement. However, it should be noted that content marketing has a relatively stronger impact on the loyalty compared to trust and customer engagement. In addition, we also find the highest correlation between content marketing and loyalty in testing the hypothesis of *H*₁, *H*₂ and *H*₃. These findings suggest that content marketing strategies have greater influence on building a loyal customers’ base with compare to the building trust and the fostering customer engagement. In turn, it may lead to a positive word of mouth and repeated visits of hospital. So, the patients and their family are less likely to switch to another medical institution in case of a need of medical service. The correlation between content marketing and customer engagement is 0.329 and between content marketing and trust is 0.303. These positive correlations indicate that content marketing is definitely helpful in fostering trust and confidence among the customers and is also engaging them at personal level.

In testing of H_4 , we find the positive effect of customer engagement on the trust and also find a positive correlation coefficient between customer engagement and trust. Therefore, customer engagement has a statistically significant effect in building trust and brand confidence among the customers. Hence, increasing customer engagement may help in fostering the trust. However, H_5 is not accepted and customer engagement does not have statistically significant effect on the loyalty and customer engagement domain needs to be strengthened to have a significant effect on the loyalty. In the regression analyses, the results have corroborated that the customer engagement has a positive impact

on trust building. So, a properly executed content marketing strategy may lead to the repeated purchases of the products by the customers and may also inspire them for a positive word of mouth.

The regression results have further emphasized that the trust has positive and significant effect on the loyalty by accepting the hypothesis H_6 . So, the customers who trust the value propositions of a hospital are more likely to be loyal to the hospital services. Therefore, it can be concluded that the building customers' trust towards a brand can be very effective and beneficial in developing the customers' loyalty.

CONCLUSION

The present research has investigated the role of content marketing on the customer engagement, trust and loyalty in the private hospitals of Saudi Arabia. Further, we also test the effect of customer engagement on the trust and loyalty, and effect of trust on the loyalty. Before, Saudi literature has investigated the SERVQUAL model to find the service quality gaps in the healthcare sector and has also investigated the role of social marketing and CSR on the customers' loyalty in the sectors other than the healthcare sector. The investigation of the relationship between content marketing and customers' loyalty, customer engagement and trust, in case of hospital service, was absent in the Saudi marketing literature. We contribute in the body of marketing literature of Saudi Arabia by investigating the multi-dimensional relationships among content marketing and customer engagement, trust and loyalty through PLS modelling approach. To serve our purpose, we collect the data from 400 respondents through a simple random sampling technique and develop the six hypotheses in the multi-dimensional relationships among content marketing and customer loyalty, trust and customer engagement. In the empirical results of hypotheses' testing, we find that content marketing has the positive effect on the customer engagement, trust and loyalty. In comparison, the effect of content marketing on loyalty is found largest in comparison of trust and customer engagement. Therefore, we may conclude that content marketing strategies of private hospital have greatest influence on the customers' loyalty. Hence, repeated visits of hospital and positive word of mouth are expected in return. Moreover, customer engagement has a positive effect on the trust. But, the effect of customer engagement on loyalty is found statistically insignificant. Therefore, we may conclude that the customer engagement has statistically significant effect on the customers' trust, but not on the loyalty. Lastly, we also find the positive effect of trust on the loyalty.

SUGGESTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Based on the research output, it can be suggested that the private hospitals in Saudi Arabia should invest in building a robust marketing team to deliver the proficient content marketing. As mentioned by Oestreicher-Singer and Zalmanson (2013), social media platforms are very useful for display of content marketing. Moreover, social media platforms like Facebook may be utilized to target a specific demographic segment. By doing that, a specific segment of market may be focused well on communicating right marketing content for a targeted customers' base (Gummerus et al., 2012). In response, this activity may increase return on the investment for the content marketing and a properly executed content marketing strategies may help the private medical institutions to foster the customer loyalty and trust.

Further, we find that trust has been found as an effective determinant of customer loyalty. Therefore, the content marketing should be focused on communicating the core values of the organizations. Keh and Xie (2009) mention that reliability plays a major role in fostering the trust among the customers. Therefore, it is suggested that the private hospitals in Saudi Arabia should formulate their content marketing strategies to highlight the merits and the accolades of the institutions with a purpose of spreading a message of reliability.

Moreover, content marketing strategies should not be restricted to the use of limited platform such as Facebook or Twitter. The marketing team should focus on a multichannel approach to achieve a better coverage in spreading the marketing content. They should use all types of social media platforms to share their content, posted on the official page of the organization. In order to gain access to a larger number of audiences, the marketing team should take the advantage of paid or sponsored posts to reach a greater number of people who belong to the targeted demography. Apart from text-based content, the private health institutions should also invest in creating video content to post on the YouTube. Operating on more than one channel may help to create a stronger and long lasting impact on the audience. It is further recommended that the marketing team should post quality content on the health-care-oriented websites or popular healthcare blogs.

It is pertinent to highlight here that the contents should not belong to the direct advertisements of hospital brand. Rather, the contents should be educational in nature, which may have an ability to increase the general awareness of the people regarding healthcare, preventive measures, common symptoms of diseases, etc. While educating the audience, the content should also indirectly highlight the reliability and value proposition of the brand, which should be beneficial for the patients and their families to choose the right hospital in case of a need of medical service.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This research work is largely limited due to shortage of time and resources. This research has been focused only on the multi-dimensional relationships among the content marketing and customers' engagement, trust and loyalty, whereas the area of brand perception and others have been avoided. Further, it should be highlighted that this study is focused on only the private healthcare sector and the estimated research output may not be beneficial for other sectors. Later studies may cover the public health sector along with private health sector to compare the effectiveness of content marketing in a wider spectrum. We also accept that this study has been conducted in a smaller geographical area of Saudi Arabia. Although conducting a nationwide survey could be painstakingly difficult, but it could have much more accurate results. Moreover, future research should focus on the situational approach to modelling decisions in supply chain management, as well as customer consumption behavior trends. It should also include reflections on the constant adaptation to customer requests, as well as indicate possible solutions for future studies.

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