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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Designing an Indigenous Model for Social Media Content Marketing in Iran: A Grounded Theory Approach

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Introduction:

Content marketing is defined as the strategic creation and distribution of valuable, relevant, and consistent content designed to attract and engage a clearly defined target audience. Although content marketing shares foundational principles with traditional marketing, it must be adapted to the linguistic, cultural, normative, and customary contexts of each society. This adaptation process, known as localization in international marketing, is a standard practice adopted by multinational corporations. In essence, content localization involves tailoring content to reflect the language, culture, values, and social norms of the target audience. Evidence suggests that content marketing localization remains underdeveloped in Iran. The widespread but imprecise use of the term "content production" has hindered the establishment of a proper scientific framework in this

domain. Accordingly, the central research question guiding this study is: What is the localized content marketing model for social media in Iran?

Method:

This study employed a qualitative research design based on the grounded theory approach. Participants comprised academics and experts in the fields of communication and marketing. The sample consisted of ten specialists and professors, selected through purposive sampling in accordance with the principle of theoretical saturation. Data were collected via semi-structured interviews and analyzed using coding techniques (open, axial, and selective).

Findings:

The causal conditions in the proposed model pertain to the transition from the concept of "audience" to that of the "user." More specifically, with the emergence of the information society- of which Iran is a part- consumers are no longer regarded as passive recipients of messages. Instead, due to technological advancements, citizens have evolved into active users who selectively choose the messages they consume. In the current communication era, the initiative once held by marketers has completely shifted to the user. Consequently, as a result of this shift from audience to user, the nature of content production for marketing purposes has also changed, moving from traditional advertising to content marketing (i.e., the production of marketing content). Thus, it can be argued that in the present era, content marketing constitutes the most effective method for advertising and sales within the information society and cyberspace.

The contextual conditions in this model, aligned with the causal conditions, reflect a transition from traditional media to new media. The intervening conditions involve exchange-based marketing (or direct marketing through advertisements) as opposed to relationship-based marketing. In other words, two distinct types of marketing exist: first, exchange-based or traditional marketing, and second, relationship-based marketing, which is grounded in cyberspace.

The phenomena at the core of this model refer to the content created specifically for users. These phenomena encompass entertaining, informative, educational, and even news-related materials. Content marketing strategically employs such content to subtly promote a product or to build the reputation and credibility of a company. The interactions and strategies within the communicative model of social media content marketing emphasize the continuous production of marketing content aimed at addressing all informational, educational, and entertainment needs of users. In this model, the focus of interactions is on the ongoing creation of content to prevent users from turning to competitors or alternative content producers. The outcomes of this communicative model of content marketing are user acquisition and retention, which ultimately lead to product sales.

The identified components of localized content marketing in Iran thus suggest a transformation in causal conditions: users are evolving from passive recipients to active searchers. Within a new media-driven context, society has transitioned into an information society, and audiences have been transformed into active users. This phenomenon has given rise to the following: marketing content production, automated content generation, entertaining content creation, user satisfaction, and sustained user engagement as organizational assets. Concurrently, the following intervening conditions were identified: traditional transactional marketing, content production without a marketing-oriented approach or clear objectives, user-generated content, and information overload. The strategy proposed by this model emphasizes the continuous production

of marketing content-adopting a brand-oriented approach-to address all informational, educational, and entertainment needs of users. Ultimately, this strategy aims to attract and retain users while facilitating product sales as the primary outcome of the model.

Conclusions:

The results of this study indicate that content marketing in the era of the information society and cyberspace is an essential tool for attracting and retaining users. The proposed model, grounded in the principles of localized content marketing in Iran, identifies the shift from passive audiences to active users as a key causal condition. This transformation necessitates a fundamental change in approach from traditional marketing to relationship-based marketing, wherein the production of high-quality, user-centric content takes precedence over direct advertising. The model demonstrates that content marketing is not merely a strategy for product sales but also a means of retaining users as organizational assets and enhancing their satisfaction. The ultimate outcome of this model is not only increased sales but also the establishment of sustainable relationships with users and the reinforcement of brand positioning in their cognition. Finally, this localized model can assist Iranian companies and brands in effectively harnessing the potential of social networks, aligning themselves with the dynamics of the information society, and achieving greater success in today's competitive market.

Based on the research findings and the significance of content marketing in cyberspace and social media, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the application of this model and improve localized content marketing in Iran: development and adoption of localized content creation tools; education and cultural promotion of content marketing; focus on the needs and interests of Iranian users; investment in creative and interactive content production; establishment of performance indicators for content marketing; support for startups active in the field of content marketing; development of long-term strategies for content marketing; emphasis on ethics and transparency in content marketing; and collaboration with influential local users and content creators.

Data Availability Statement

Data available on request from the authors.

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Ethical considerations

Not applicable.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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