

# The Influence of Content Marketing on Consumers' Purchase Intention Based on SOR Theory

Jiayi YU<sup>1</sup>, Jian LI<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> School of English for International Business, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, China, E-mail: yjy15975097768@163.com

<sup>2</sup> Corresponding author: School of English for International Business, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, China, E-mail: 1340720658@qq.com

## Abstract

The popularization of social media makes content marketing gradually attract the attention of enterprises and marketing academia. On this basis, this paper hopes to investigate the relationship between content marketing and purchase intention and introduce brand identity into the empirical model. The following conclusions are drawn: (1) content marketing positively affects purchase intention; (2) content marketing positively affects brand identity; (3) brand identity positively affects purchase intention; (4) brand identity partially mediates the relationship between content marketing and purchase intention.

**Keywords:** Content marketing, Brand identity, Purchase Intention, SOR theory

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Research Background

With the popularity of social media, consumers now actively search for and get exposed to brand information. Therefore, content marketing whereby enterprises deliver consumer-driven content on social media has attracted more and more attention from enterprises and marketing scholars. According to the latest report published by the content marketing institute in 2022<sup>1</sup>, content marketing is an opportunity for enterprises, especially small ones, to gain competitive advantages. In addition, the report also points out that many marketers give up traditional sales-based content and turn to explore more high-value marketing materials. Furthermore, data from *The China Content Marketing Ten-year Trend Report*<sup>2</sup> shows that content marketing is becoming increasingly important in digital marketing. In 2021, nearly 90% of advertisers used content marketing in their marketing campaigns, with an average growth rate of over 10%. It's obvious that considering what kind of content can arouse consumers' interest is very crucial for enterprises to set content marketing strategies. Based on the previous studies this paper discusses the relationship between content marketing and consumers' purchase intention from the perspective of consumers combined with brand identity.

### 1.2 Purposes of the Research

Predecessors such as Adjei (2010) discovered the influence of brand content on consumers' purchase intention and verified the positive correlation between the two through relevant experiments. Similarly, Qin et al. (2022) confirmed that authentic and interesting information can enhance purchase intention. Drawing on the existing research, this study intends to examine the relationship between content marketing and consumers' purchase intention within the theoretical framework of SOR theory with the employment of quantitative research methods. Besides, this study also tries to probe into the mediating role of brand identity in the relationship between content marketing and consumers' purchase intention on the grounds of the studies by Li (2017), who verified that brand identity plays a mediating role in the relationship between the perceived value of virtual brand community and consumers' purchase intention of new products. Ultimately, relevant suggestions would be given to enterprises to promote their marketing strategies in the paper's final part.

### 1.3 Significance of the Research

Existing research has confirmed that interesting or resonant brand content can positively affect consumers' purchase intentions (McMillan et al., 2003). Therefore, this paper intends to further probe into the impact of content marketing on consumers' purchase intentions. In addition, since scholars like Li (2017) have found that brand identity plays an intermediary role in the relationship between customer perceived value and consumer purchase intention, this paper introduces brand identity as an intermediary variable in the model of content marketing and purchase intention to explore the relationship between the three. The research results will enrich the existing theoretical achievements in the field of content marketing and help enterprises enhance their marketing strategies accordingly.

### 1.4 Innovation of the Research

---

<sup>1</sup> Data source: Content Marketing Institute. ( <https://contentmarketinginstitute.com/articles/b2b-power-content-marketing-research/> )

<sup>2</sup> Data source: Trend ( <http://www.iuechina.com/news/ziben/caij/72754.html> )

Setiawan et al. (2016) have conducted studies in this field on the perception-emotion-behavioral intention aspect, this paper attempts to interpret from the angle of the Stimulus-Organism-Response perspective. Thus the innovative points lie in the following aspects: Firstly, this paper constructs the path of the role of content marketing on purchase intention, which provides a new perspective on multi-dimensional content marketing and enriches the study of the relationship between them to a certain extent. Secondly, it introduces brand identity as a mediating variable to further strengthen the explanation of the relationship between content marketing and purchase intention.

### 1.5 Hypotheses and Research Design

Prior studies have shown that brand content can trigger consumer emotion and promote purchase intention (McMillan et al., 2003; Berger et al., 2012; Li et al., 2017; Qin et al., 2022 ). In view of the SOR theory, this paper hypothesizes that after stimulating by content marketing, customers will develop a sense of recognition for the brand, then further improve their willingness to buy.

## 2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Content Marketing

#### 2.1.1 The Definition of Content Marketing

The concept of content marketing was formally introduced in 1996, but scholars still have not reached a unified definition of the concept of content marketing. Pulizzi and Barrett (2009) considered content marketing a comprehensive term encompassing all marketing related to creating or sharing content forms for engaging current and potential consumers. Zhou et al. (2013) argued that content marketing places more emphasis on customer engagement by delivering content that customers are interested in. He et al. (2016) emphasized that content marketing focuses on communicating and interacting with consumers and is dedicated to creating valuable content for specific consumer groups. In summary, this paper defines content marketing as a new marketing form in which companies post content on social media, deliver brand messages, and generate consumer interaction aiming to promote consumers' purchase intention.

#### 2.1.2 Dimensions of Content Marketing

Table 1. Dimensional Division of Content Marketing

Dimensions	Author	Dimensional division
Two-dimensional	Lieb (2011)	Valuable content and entertainment content
	Yang (2014)	Information content and entertainment content
Three-dimensional	Zuk (2009)	Conversation, storytelling, and consumer interaction
	Zhou & Chen (2013)	Knowledge-based content, entertainment content, emotional content, interactive content
Four-dimensional	Yan (2019)	Functional content, entertainment content, brand interactive content, social interactive content, self-actualization content
Five-dimensional	Gao (2019)	

The table above summarizes the dimensions of content marketing divided by various scholars. This thesis intends to divide content marketing into information content, authentic content, emotional content, and entertainment content according to the main characteristics of content marketing at the present stage. Specifically, information content refers to providing practical information for the customers. Authentic content means that the content presented to the customers is real and reliable. Emotional content refers to content that can strike a chord and let customers resonate. Entertainment content refers to content that stimulates customers' curiosity and positive emotions.

#### 2.1.3 Previous Studies on Content Marketing

Early researches on content marketing mainly focus on the conceptualization of content marketing and the distinction between content marketing and traditional marketing methods. For instance, Zuk (2009) believed that there is a two-way interaction between brand and consumers in content marketing, where the brand is equivalent to a thought leader who creates knowledge and shares it with consumers. Researchers then began to focus on the impact of content marketing on other marketing variables. Adjei et al. (2010) proposed that the communication content between brands and consumers will affect purchase intention. Berger et al. (2012) have proved that content arousing positive emotions is more likely to stimulate consumers' willingness to buy.

## 2.2 Consumers' Purchase Intention

### 2.2.1 Definition of Consumers' Purchase Intention

The concept of willingness originates from the field of psychology. Eagly and Chaiken (1993) believed that willingness is a psychological term different from attitude, which can be understood as the purposeful motivation generated before the occurrence of individual or group behaviors. This psychological term has gradually been applied to the field of management and marketing. Fishbein et al. (1977) considered that purchase intention is another manifestation of consumption desire. Yu et al. (2016) proposed that purchase intention determines whether consumers will take specific actions on a certain product or service. In this paper, consumers' purchase intention is defined as the possibility of consumers making specific consumption behavior on a certain object.

### 2.2.2 Previous Studies on Consumers' Purchase Intention

Purchase intention is usually used as a post-dependent variable to study the factors affecting it. Factors affecting purchase intention can be summarized into the following three categories. The first is consumer personality which includes personality, age, social status, and cultural background. The second is the product or service factor, including internal and external factors. Internal factors refer to the core interests of products or services which can meet the basic needs of consumers, and external factors refer to the factors that help consumers understand and recognize the product, such as brand positioning and brand values. Pu et al. (2022) once showed that the service quality of salespeople positively affects the purchase intention of audiences. The third is the consumption situation factor. For instance, Wei et al. (2020) conceived that the usefulness, accessibility, and entertainment of short videos will affect consumers' purchase intention through emotions. This paper focuses on whether and how brand content marketing can influence consumers' purchase intention.

## 2.3 Brand Identity

### 2.3.1 The Definition of Brand Identity

The definition of brand identity is derived from sociology and psychology. Lastovicka and Gardner (1979) defined brand identity as the degree of attachment to a brand. Bagozzi et al. (2006) considered brand identity as the similarity between consumers' images and brand image. Jin (2006) contended that brand identity represents consumers' personal values and social attributes. Consumers buy products mainly because they recognize the social attributes of a brand and hope to show their self-image through it. Based on existing studies, this paper defines brand identity as the degree to which consumers believe that a brand matches their personal image and social status.

### 2.3.2 Previous Studies on Brand Identity

At present, there are more after-effect studies than antecedent studies on brand identity. The research on brand identity as an antecedent variable can be roughly divided into two parts. Part is to explore the influence of brand identity on other brand factors, including brand loyalty, brand attraction, and so on. The other part explores the influence of brand identity on consumers' cognition and purchasing behavior. Some studies also take brand identity as an intermediary variable to explore its influence on other consumption behaviors. For example, Li et al. (2017) explored the mediating influence of brand identity between perceived value and consumers' purchase intention. Many researchers also take brand identity as the result variable to explore the factors that drive brand identity. These driving factors can be summarized as consumer factors, brand characteristics, and external factors.

## 2.4 The SOR Theory

### 2.4.1 The Definition of SOR Theory

The SOR (Stimulus-Organism-Response) model was proposed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974) based on environmental psychology. Specifically, stimulus (S) represents factors that affect individual cognition or emotion, organism (O) represents the individual mental state or subjective evaluation after being stimulated, and response (R) represents specific behavioral performance after changes in individual mental state or subjective evaluation. This paper will conduct the research based on this theoretical model.

### 2.4.2 Previous Studies on SOR Theory

Previous studies on SOR theory have paid much attention to predicting and interpreting consumer behavior. In the marketing field, SOR theory was first applied to the retail world. Eroglu et al. (2003) argued that customers would generate various emotions stimulated by the tangible environment and intangible atmosphere in stores, and verified that emotions such as happiness can positively affect customer satisfaction. With the birth and development of the Internet, SOR theory has been gradually applied to the study of various network situations. Hu and Chaudhry (2020) used the SOR model to study how rational bonds enhance consumer stickiness to explore the impact of live streaming on consumers' purchase intention. Against the backdrop of these, this paper hopes to fill this gap by exploring the impact of content marketing on purchase intention through a rooted theory approach.

### **3. Hypothesis Development**

#### *3.1 The Effect of Content Marketing on Purchase Intention*

Content marketing refers to the marketing means by which the brand produces and delivers content information to stimulate consumers. By combing and analyzing the literature, it is found that content marketing may have an impact on purchase intention. McMillan et al. (2003) affirmed in their research on online advertising that interesting content can better stimulate consumers' willingness to buy the products or services of enterprises. Qin et al. (2022) maintained that the information content can enhance consumers' trust in the short videos, while the interesting and emotional content can enhance consumers' perceived value. These lead to the following hypotheses:

- H1. Content marketing positively affects purchase intention
- H1a. Information content positively affects purchase intention
- H1b. Authentic content positively affects purchase intention
- H1c. Emotional content positively affects purchase intention
- H1d. Entertainment content positively affects purchase intention

#### *3.2 The Effect of Content Marketing on Brand Identity*

Prior research examined various driven factors that influence brand identity. Sha et al. (2010) proved that perceived ease of use in a virtual community indirectly affects brand identity through perceived usefulness; Kuenzel (2010) and Jin (2006) both indicated that brand personality can affect brand identity; He et al. (2011) concluded that both corporate social responsibility (CSR) and service quality (SQ) have direct effects on brand identity and customer satisfaction. Since content marketing usually represents the image of a brand or an enterprise, we hypothesize:

- H2. Content marketing positively affects brand identity
- H2a. Information content positively affects brand identity
- H2b. Authentic content positively affects brand identity
- H2c. Emotional content positively affects brand identity
- H2d. Entertainment content positively affects brand identity

#### *3.3 The Effect of Brand Identity on Purchase Intention*

The importance of brand identity in marketing has been emphasized by previous studies. Research by Wang et al. (2010) noticed that both individual brand identity and social brand identity have significant effects on consumers' attitude loyalty and behavior loyalty. Mao et al. (2020) and Tang (2020) demonstrated the relationship between brand identity and consumer purchase decisions. Therefore, another hypothesis is made:

- H3. Brand identity positively affects consumers' purchase intention

#### *3.4 The Mediating Role of Brand Identity*

Consumers measure brand image by the content it communicates. Kim et al. (2001) had faith that consumers' recognition of brand value is the essence of brand identity. They held that if a specific brand can represent the identity of consumers, consumers will hope to establish a long-term relationship with the brand. Furthermore, brands' content can trigger consumers' emotions and indirectly influence their behaviors (Berger et al., 2012; Li et al., 2017). Therefore, this study suggests that brand identity plays an intermediary role between content marketing and purchase intention:

- H4. Brand identity plays an intermediary role in the influence of content marketing on purchase intention
- H4a. Brand identity plays an intermediary role in the influence of information content on purchase intention
- H4b. Brand identity plays an intermediary role in the influence of authentic content on purchase intention
- H4c. Brand identity plays an intermediary role in the influence of emotional content on purchase intention
- H4d. Brand identity plays an intermediary role in the influence of entertainment content on purchase intention

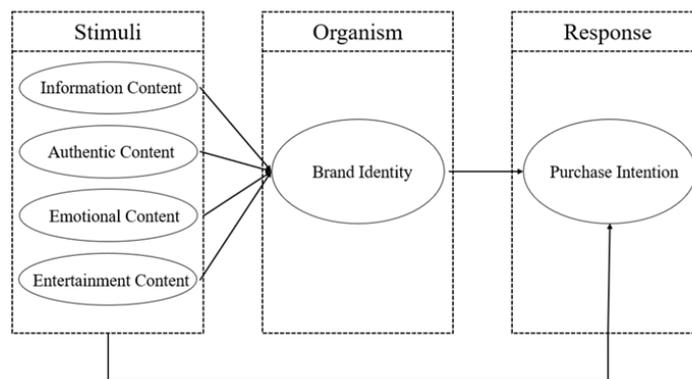


Figure 1. Research Model

#### 4. Method

This study adopts quantitative analysis and a questionnaire survey as the main research approach. Fifty questionnaires were distributed first as a pre-experiment to further ensure the effectiveness of the questionnaire. After analysis, the original questionnaire was modified and then distributed on a large scale. In this study, questions are measured by a 5-point Likert scale, and the degree of approval decreases from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Specifically, the scores were scored based on the participant's response to each statement as 1 point for strongly agree, 2 points for agree, 3 points for neutral, 4 points for disagree, and 5 points for strongly disagree. The respondents choose the most consistent option with their actual situation. The structured questionnaire is designed according to the theoretical model and carried out via online platforms and the data collected is analyzed with an online analysis program Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS).

Table 2. Content Marketing Measurement Scale

Variable	Dimension	Measurement Items	Reference
Content Marketing	Information content	I can get information about the product and the brand from the content the brand published	Sun (2016)
		I can get useful information from the content the brand published	
		I can get valuable information from the content the brand published	
	Authentic content	I can get something I wanted to learn about through the content the brand published	Qin (2022)
		The content the brand published is authentic	
		The content the brand published is reliable	
	Emotional content	The display of the brand's products is detailed	Sun (2016)
		The content the brand published makes me feel no distance	
		The content the brand published makes me empathize	
	Entertainment content	The content the brand published hits my hearts	Sun (2016)
		The content the brand published resonates with me emotionally	
		The content the brand published is interesting	
		The content the brand published excites me	
		The content the brand published makes me feel addicted	
		The content the brand published filled me with imagination and curiosity	

This study discusses content marketing from four dimensions: information content, authentic content, emotional content, and entertainment content. The specific items and reference sources are shown above.

Table 3. Brand Identity Measurement Scale

Variable	Dimension	Measurement Items	Reference
Brand identity	Personal brand identity	The product features and personality of the brand are consistent with my image	Jin (2006)
		The product features and personality of the brand are consistent with my values	Sun (2016)

	The product features and personality of the brand are consistent with my lifestyle
	The product features and personality of the brand are consistent with my taste
	Using the brand reflects my social status
Social brand identity	Using the brand makes me gain the respect of others
	Using the brand helps me gain face
	The brand distinguishes me from different people

This study discusses brand identity from two dimensions: personal brand identity and social brand identity. There are 8 items total and specific items and reference sources are shown above.

Table 4. Purchase Intention Measurement Scale

Variable	Measurement Items	Reference
Purchase intention	If necessary, I will consider buying the products of the brand	Dodds et al. (1991) Sun (2016)
	I'm very eager to buy the products of the brand	
	Among similar products, I am more likely to buy this brand	
	Compared with other products, I am willing to pay a higher price to buy this brand	
	The brand is worth buying	

There are 5 items total and specific items and reference sources are shown above.

## 5. Statistics and Data Analysis

### 5.1 Introduction to the Sample

Questionnaires were distributed through online platforms, and a total of 217 questionnaires were collected. After eliminating invalid questionnaires, 200 valid questionnaires were obtained, with an effective recovery of 92.2%. Table 5 presents the characteristics of the respondents.

Table 5. Characteristics of Respondents

	Number	Percentage		Number	Percentage
1. Gender			3. Education		
Male	107	53.5	High school diploma	24	12.0
Female	93	46.5	Specialty	43	21.5
Total	200	100	Bachelor's degree	117	58.5
			Master's degree	12	6
2. Age group			Doctor of Philosophy	4	2
Below 20	116	58.0	Total	200	100
20-30	54	27.0			
30-40	24	12.0	4. Monthly living expenditure (yuan)		
Above 40	6	3.0	Below 1,000	36	18.0
Total	200	100	1,000-2,000	108	54.0
			2,000-3,000	33	16.5
			3,000-4,000	13	6.5
			Above 4,000	10	5.0
			Total	200	100

### 5.2 Data Analysis

#### 5.2.1 Reliability Analysis

Table 6. Reliability Analysis

Item	Numbers of items	Cronbach's $\alpha$	Overall Cronbach's $\alpha$
------	------------------	---------------------	-----------------------------

Information content	4	0.776		
Authentic content	3	0.785	0.931	
Emotional content	4	0.791		
Entertainment content	4	0.832		0.961
Personal brand identity	4	0.750	0.894	
Social brand identity	4	0.896		
Purchase intention	5	0.869	0.869	

It can be concluded from the table that Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient of the whole scale and each dimension are greater than 0.7, giving evidence that the scale has good reliability.

### 5.2.2 Validity Analysis

Table 7. KMO and Bartlett Test of the Content Marketing Scale

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling	0.872
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square
	df
	Sig.
	529.216
	105
	0.000

Table 8. Factor Analysis of the Content Marketing Scale

Variable	Dimension	Serial Number	Component			
			1	2	3	4
Content Marketing	Information content	Q1	0.829			
		Q2	0.703			
		Q3	0.732			
		Q4	0.733			
	Authentic content	Q5		0.655		
		Q6		0.668		
		Q7		0.738		
	Emotional content	Q8			0.807	
		Q9			0.754	
		Q10			0.653	
		Q11			0.781	
	Entertainment content	Q12				0.699
		Q13				0.647
		Q14				0.679
		Q15				0.794

The KOM value of the content marketing scale is 0.872 ( $> 0.8$ ), and Bartlett's sphericity test results are significant, so factor analysis can be performed on this scale. According to the result the of component factor analysis, the factor loading coefficient of each item of content marketing is above 0.6, presenting that the scale setting validity is good.

Table 9. KMO and Bartlett Test of Content Marketing Scale

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling	0.868
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square
	df
	Sig.
	253.116
	28
	0.000

Table 10. Factor Analysis of Brand Identity Scale

Variable	Dimension	Serial Number	Component
Brand identity	Personal brand identity	Q16	0.704
		Q17	0.727
		Q18	0.680
		Q19	0.700

	Q20	0.812
Social brand identity	Q21	0.888
	Q22	0.867
	Q23	0.762

The KMO value of the brand identity scale is 0.868 (> 0.8), and Bartlett's sphericity test results are significant. Furthermore, the factor loading coefficient of each item is above 0.6, indicating that the scale setting validity is good.

Table 11. KMO and Bartlett Test of Purchase Intention Scale

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling		0.873
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	127.165
	df	10
	Sig.	0.000

Table 12. Factor Analysis of Purchase Intention Scale

Variable	Serial number	Component
Purchase intention	Q24	0.836
	Q25	0.774
	Q26	0.796
	Q27	0.834
	Q28	0.824

The KOM value of the purchase intention scale is 0.873 (> 0.8), and the Bartlett sphericity test results are significant. The factor loading coefficient of each item is above 0.6, manifesting that the scale setting validity is good.

### 5.2.3 Correlation test

Table 13. Correlation Coefficients of Variables

	Content marketing	Information content	Authentic content	Emotional content	Entertainment content	Brand identity	Personal brand identity	Social brand identity	Purchase intention
Content marketing	1								
Information content	0.845**	1							
Authentic content	0.887**	0.716**	1						
Emotional content	0.899**	0.646**	0.698**	1					
Entertainment content	0.934**	0.692**	0.793**	0.819**	1				
Brand identity	0.819**	0.648**	0.719**	0.721**	0.822**	1			
Personal brand identity	0.869**	0.681**	0.738**	0.805**	0.858**	0.891**	1		
Social brand identity	0.8692**	0.552**	0.624**	0.583**	0.703**	0.955**	0.717**	1	
Purchase intention	0.785**	0.629**	0.726**	0.672**	0.771**	0.866**	0.777**	0.824**	1

Note: \*\*, Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

In this paper, the Pearson correlation coefficient (r) was used to test the correlation of each variable. Pearson's r varies between -1 and +1, where +1 is a perfect positive correlation, and -1 is a perfect negative correlation. 0 means there is no linear correlation at all. As can be seen above, the correlation coefficients are all between -1 and 1 and are significantly correlated at the level of 0.01. What's more, there is a significant correlation between the two variables (P < 0.01), which lays the foundation for regression analysis.

### 5.2.4 Hypothesis testing

#### 5.2.4.1 Regression Analysis of Content Marketing on Purchase intention

Table 14. Regression Results of Content Marketing and Purchase intention

Variable		Purchase intention					
		M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6
Control variable	Gender	-0.261	-0.033	-0.095	-0.140	-0.122	0.027
	Age	0.158	-0.001	0.008	0.027	0.071	0.020
	Educational background	-0.067	0.038	0.005	-0.029	0.048	0.026
	Monthly disposable income	0.044	0.029	0.020	0.037	0.041	0.030
Independent variable	Content Marketing		0.788***				
	Information content			0.826***			
	Authentic content				0.773***		
	Emotional content					0.737***	
	Entertainment content						0.851***
	F	0.782	17.328	7.092	7.480	9.441	15.829
	R <sup>2</sup>	0.055	0.620	0.401	0.540	0.471	0.599
△R <sup>2</sup>	-0.015	0.585	0.344	0.497	0.421	0.561	

Note: \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1 (two-tailed).

Six models are constructed to study the relationship between content marketing and purchase intention. M1 takes the control variable as the independent variable and purchase intention as the dependent variable to conduct regression analysis. M2, M3, M4, M5, and M6 respectively add content marketing and its four dimensions (information content, authentic content, emotional content, and entertainment content) based on M1 to do the regression analysis of purchase intention.

According to the output results of SPSS statistical software, R<sup>2</sup> increases from 0.055 to 0.620 after content marketing is added to M2 ( $\beta=0.788$ ,  $P<0.001$ ), suggesting that content marketing can explain 62% of consumers' purchase intention, and content marketing has a significant positive impact on consumers' purchase intention, and H1 is verified. H1a, H1b, H1c, and H1d are supported in the same way.

#### 5.2.4.2 Regression Analysis of Content Marketing on Brand Identity

Table 15. Regression Results of Content Marketing and Brand Identity

Variable		Brand identity					
		M7	M8	M9	M10	M11	M12
Control variable	Gender	-0.112	0.120	-0.059	0.005	0.035	0.196
	Age	0.090	0.112	-0.065	-0.037	-0.002	-0.057
	Educational background	-0.054	0.084	0.020	-0.017	0.068	0.045
	Monthly disposable income	0.049	0.047	0.024	0.041	0.045	0.034
Independent variable	Content Marketing		0.828***				
	Information content			0.855***			
	Authentic content				0.753***		
	Emotional content					0.784***	
	Entertainment content						0.910***
	F	0.327	23.032	7.836	11.587	12.063	24.371
	R <sup>2</sup>	0.024	0.685	0.425	0.522	0.532	0.697
△R <sup>2</sup>	-0.049	0.655	0.371	0.477	0.488	0.668	

Note: \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1 (two-tailed).

Six models are constructed to study the relationship between content marketing and brand identity. M7 takes the control variable as the independent variable and brand identity as the dependent variable to conduct regression analysis. M8, M9, M10, M11, and M12 respectively add content marketing and its four dimensions (information content, authentic content, emotional content, entertainment content) based on M7 to do the regression analysis of brand identity.

According to the output results of SPSS statistical software, R<sup>2</sup> increases from 0.024 to 0.685 after adding content marketing to M8, ( $\beta=0.828$ ,  $P<0.001$ ), implying that content marketing can explain 68.5% of brand identity, which also means content marketing has a significant positive impact on brand identity. H2 is confirmed. Likewise, H2a, H2b, H2c, and H2d are verified in a similar fashion.

#### 5.2.4.3 Regression Analysis of Brand Identity and Purchase Intention

Table 16. Regression Results of Brand Identity and Purchase Intention

Variable	Purchase intention		
	M1	M13	
Control variable	Gender	-0.261	-0.161
	Age	0.158	-0.078
	Educational background	-0.067	-0.019
Independent variable	Monthly disposable income	0.044	0.001
	Brand identity		0.887***
	F	0.782	34.384
	R <sup>2</sup>	0.055	0.764
	$\Delta R^2$	-0.015	0.742

Note: \*\*\* p<0.01,\*\* p<0.05,\* p<0.1 (two-tailed).

Two models are constructed to study the relationship between brand identity and purchase intention. M1 uses the control variable as the independent variable and purchase intention as the dependent variable to conduct regression analysis. In M13, brand identity is added based on M1 to conduct regression analysis with purchase intention. According to the output results of SPSS statistical software, R<sup>2</sup> increases from 0.055 to 0.764 after brand identity is added to M13, ( $\beta=0.887$ , P<0.001), showing that the brand identity can explain 76.4% of consumers' purchase intention, and brand identity has a significant positive impact on consumers' purchase intention. H3 is verified.

#### 5.2.4.4 Testing the Mediating Effect of Brand Identity

Table 17-1. Regression Results of Content Marketing and Purchase Intention Adding Brand Identity

Variable	Purchase intention				
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5
Gender	-0.261	-0.033	0.107	-0.095	-0.144
Age	0.158	-0.001	0.100	0.008	0.062
Educational background	-0.067	0.038	0.075	0.005	-0.012
Monthly disposable income	0.044	0.029	0.042	0.020	0.001
Content Marketing		0.788***	0.246***		
Information content				0.826***	0.115***
Authentic content					
Emotional content					
Entertainment content					
Brand identity			0.729***		0.831***
F	0.782	17.328	29.871	7.092	28.739
R <sup>2</sup>	0.055	0.620	0.775	0.401	0.768
$\Delta R^2$	-0.015	0.585	0.749	0.344	0.742

Note: \*\*\* p<0.01,\*\* p<0.05,\* p<0.1 (two-tailed).

Table 17-2: Regression Results of Content Marketing and Purchase Intention Adding Brand Identity

Variable	Purchase intention					
	M6	M7	M8	M9	M10	M11
Gender	-0.140	-0.144	-0.122	-0.151	0.027	-0.125
Age	0.027	0.055	0.071	0.073	0.020	0.065
Educational background	-0.029	-0.017	0.048	-0.009	0.026	-0.010
Monthly disposable income	0.037	0.006	0.041	0.004	0.030	0.004
Authentic content	0.773***	0.215***				
Emotional content			0.737***	0.089***		
Entertainment content					0.851***	0.142***
Brand identity		0.741***		0.828***		0.779***
F	7.480	31.218	9.441	28.570	15.829	28.860
R <sup>2</sup>	0.540	0.783	0.471	0.767	0.599	0.769
$\Delta R^2$	0.497	0.758	0.421	0.740	0.561	0.742

Note: \*\*\* p<0.01,\*\* p<0.05,\* p<0.1 (two-tailed).

It can be seen from the above analysis that the independent variable content marketing and the intermediate variable brand identity both significantly affect the purchase intention of consumers, which has reached the test condition of mediating

effect. Therefore, the mediating effect of brand identity in the relationship between content marketing and its four dimensions with purchase intention can be examined.

Summarized from the analysis of the above table, M3 is still significant after adding the brand identity based on M2 ( $\beta=0.729$ ,  $P<0.001$ ), and  $R^2$  increases from 0.620 to 0.775, revealing that M3 adding the intermediary variable is better than M2. Meanwhile, the standardization coefficient of content marketing on purchase intention decreases from 0.788 ( $P<0.001$ ) to 0.246 ( $P<0.001$ ), which means brand identity plays a partial mediating role between content marketing and purchase intention. H4 is confirmed. H4a, H4b, H4c, and H4d are supported similarly.

## 6. Conclusion

### 6.1 Summary of Major Findings

The main research conclusions can be drawn from the above data analysis. First of all, content marketing and its different dimensions all have a significant positive impact on purchase intention. This shows that content marketing is an important factor to promote consumers' purchase intention. Secondly, data show that content marketing and its different dimensions all have a significant positive impact on brand identity. It suggests that valuable information enterprises deliver to consumers through content marketing can stimulate consumers' curiosity and increase their trust and recognition of the enterprise. Thirdly, brand identity can positively predict consumers' purchase intention. Brand identity, as the image of a brand in the mind of consumers, plays a very important role in enhancing consumer loyalty. Ultimately, brand identity plays a partial mediating role between content marketing and purchase intention. That is to say, the content marketing of enterprises infiltrates product information into consumers' cognition, and then consumers will judge whether the brand concept and product features conform to their image. In this process, they gradually form the recognition of the brand and then make decision-making behavior.

Based on the surveys conducted in this research, it can be concluded that content marketing has dramatically transformed traditional marketing strategies, and has been becoming an irreversible trend to improve consumers' purchase intention. Besides, brand identity can prompt consumers to make decisions that favor the brand, and drive consumer behavior to achieve product sales growth.

### 6.2 Practical Implications

With the acceleration of globalization and the popularization of standardization, the quality of goods and services become more and more homogeneous, and the traditional consumption pattern has been difficult to arouse the interest of consumers. Coupled with the rapid improvement of the economy and people's living standards, consumers' demand for products is no longer only focused on the material level, but gradually pay attention to spiritual needs. In short, in the era of social media, enterprises pay more and more attention to their brand image, and consumers are more active in understanding brand information and finding the brand that conforms to their values. It's obvious that both businesses and consumers are turning their attention to content marketing. Combined with the above views and the research conclusions of this paper, the following marketing implications can be proposed.

To begin with, enterprises should produce content that can trigger more empathy from the consumers considering different layers of consumer needs. For example, information content introduces products or services to consumers in detail, authentic content enhances consumers' trust in the brand, and emotional content enables consumers to form resonance by conveying the brand's lifestyle and values. Besides, entertainment content can satisfy the diversified entertainment demand of consumers.

In addition, enterprises are supposed to skillfully use content marketing to build consumer brand identity. The research results show that consumers will have a different brand identity based on the information provided by the brand, and brand identity will be translated into consumers' purchase intention. Therefore, when publishing content, brands need to develop different content marketing programs for different product positioning and customer characteristics.

### 6.3 Limitations and Prospects

This thesis studies the influence of content marketing on consumers' purchase intention but it is subject to certain limitations due to the limited research time, research conditions, and other factors. Firstly, this study adopts a questionnaire survey to collect data. The questionnaire is a self-report scale, and the respondents are asked to complete the questionnaire online, which may make it difficult to ensure the authenticity of the results. In this case, the authenticity of the results may be varied. Secondly, among the research objects, most of the surveyors are college students, which will affect the representativeness of the samples and reduce the general adaptability of the research. Thirdly, due to the limited academic attainments and research capabilities, there is inevitably some room left room satisfied.

Given the research limitations mentioned above, further research directions are proposed. Firstly, it would be better to enlarge the sample size. Secondly, this study only selects brand identity as the intermediary variable in the process of content marketing's influence on consumers' purchase intention, which is somewhat incomplete. Future studies can be

further explored, and the classification of content marketing can also be more detailed. Ultimately, no specific enterprise or brand is given in this research, so researchers can adjust according to their own needs.

### Acknowledgments

This thesis is the culmination of a long and arduous journey—one that I have only been able to make as a result of the dedicated support I have received from so many people along the way. The deepest and sincerest gratitude goes to my supervisor Professor Li Jian, for her continuous and invaluable guidance throughout my research. It is a great honor and privilege that I was allowed to work under her supervision. I would like to thank her for her patience and support.

### References

- Adjei, M.T., Noble, S.M., & Noble, C. H. (2010). The Influence of C2C Communications in Online Brand Communities on Customer Purchase Behavior. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 38 (5):634-653.
- Bagozzi, R. P., & Dholakia, U. M. (2006). Antecedents and Purchase Consequences of Customer Participation in Small Group Brand Communities. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 23, 45-61.
- Berger, J. A., & Milkman, K. L. (2012). What Makes Online Content Viral? *Journal of Marketing Research*, 49, 192 - 205.
- Dodds, W.B., Monroe, K.B., & Grewal, D. (1991). Effects of Price, Brand, and Store Information on Buyers' Product Evaluations. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 28, 307 - 319.
- Eagly, A.H., & Chaiken, S. (1993). The psychology of attitudes. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 34, 298.
- Eroglu, S., Machleit, K. A., & Davis, L.M. (2003). Empirical Testing of a Model of Online Store Atmospherics and Shopper Responses. *Psychology & Marketing*, 20, 139-150.
- Fishbein, M., & Ajzen, I. (1977). Belief, Attitude, Intention, and Behavior: An Introduction to Theory and Research. *Contemporary Sociology*, 6, 244.
- He, H., & Li, Y. (2011). CSR and Service Brand: The Mediating Effect of Brand Identification and Moderating Effect of Service Quality. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 100, 673-688.
- Hu, M., & Chaudhry, S. S. (2020). Enhancing Consumer Engagement in E-commerce Live Streaming via Relational Bonds. *Internet Res.*, 30, 1019-1041.
- Kim, C. K., Han, D., & Park, S. (2001). The Effect of Brand Personality and Brand Identification on Brand Loyalty: Applying the Theory of Social Identification. *Japanese Psychological Research*, 43, 195-206.
- Kuenzel, S., & Halliday, S. V. (2010). The Chain of Effects from Reputation and Brand Personality Congruence to Brand Loyalty: The Role of Brand Identification. *Journal of Targeting, Measurement & Analysis for Marketing*, 18, 167-176.
- Lastovicka, J. L., & Gardner, D. M. (1979). "Components of Involvement" in Attitude Research Plays for High Stakes. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 27 (7):53-73.
- Lieb, R., & Pulizzi, J. (2011). Content Marketing: Think Like a Publisher - How to Use Content to Market Online and in Social Media. *Que Publishing*.
- Mehrabian, A., & Russell, J. A. (1974). A Verbal Measure of Information Rate for Studies in Environmental Psychology. *Environment and Behavior*, 6, 233 - 252.
- McMillan, S.J., Hwang, J., & Lee, G. (2003). Effects Of Structural And Perceptual Factors On Attitudes Toward The Website. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 43, 400 - 409.
- Mao, Y., Lai, Y., Luo, Y., Liu, S., Du, Y., Zhou, J., Ma, J., Bonaiuto, F., & Bonaiuto, M. (2020). Apple or Huawei: Understanding Flow, Brand Image, Brand Identity, Brand Personality and Purchase Intention of Smartphone. *Sustainability*.
- Pulizzi, J., & Barrett, N. (2009). Get Content Get Customers: Turn Prospects into Buyers with Content Marketing. *Amacom*, 3(12):23-46.
- Setiawan, E.B., Kartini, D., Afiff, F., and Rufaidah, P. (2016). Impact of Price Fairness on Brand Image and Purchase Intention for Low Cost Car in Indonesia. *International Journal of Economics, Commerce and Management*, IV (9),300-308.
- Zuk R. (2009). Thought Leadership on the Social Web: Six Traits that Draw People to Your Ideas. *Public Relations Tactics*,16 (08): 7.
- Gao, D. (2019). Research on the Influence of Social Media Content Marketing on Consumers' Brand Purchase Willingness. (Master's Thesis, Zhejiang Gongshang University). [In Chinese, 高丹利. (2019). 微信公众号内容

营销对消费者购买意愿的影响研究 (硕士学位论文, 浙江工商大学.)]

- Jin, L. (2006). A Brand Equity Driving Model Based on Brand Personality and Brand Identification. *Journal of Beijing Technology and Business University (Social Science Edition)*, (01),38-43. [In Chinese, 金立印. (2006). 基于品牌个性及品牌认同的品牌资产驱动模型研究. 北京工商大学学报(社会科学版) (01), 38-43.]
- Li, X., Chen, N., & Zhang, X. (2017). The Influence Mechanism of Virtual Brand Community's Perceived Value on Purchase Intention of New Product - Based on the Double Mediation of Group Identity and Brand Identity. *Chinese Business and Market*, (02):93-100. [In Chinese, 李先国, 陈宁颀 & 张新圣. (2017). 虚拟品牌社区感知价值对新产品购买意愿的影响机制—基于群体认同和品牌认同的双中介视角. 中国流通经济(02),93-100.]
- Pu, B., Zheng, L., & Zhang, L. (2022). Influence of the Service Quality of Booth Sales Personnel on General Audiences' Purchase Intention: The Mediating Role of Enjoyable Experience. *Tourism forum*, (06),25-37. [In Chinese, 蒲波, 郑丽娟 & 张璐. (2022). 展台销售人员服务质量对普通观众购买意愿的影响研究: 愉悦体验的中介作用. 旅游论坛 (06), 25-37.]
- Qin, S., & Wang, P. (2022). Analysis of the Influence of Short Video Content Marketing on Consumers' Purchase Intention - Take Short Video of Clothing Evaluation as an Example. *Journal of Commercial Economics*, (17), 98-102. [In Chinese, 覃素香 & 王鹏飞. (2022). 短视频内容营销对消费者购买意愿的影响分析—以服装测评类短视频为例. 商业经济研究(17), 98-102.]
- Sha, Z., Jiang, Y., & Wen, F. (2010). An Empirical Study: Effects of the Experiences of the Virtual Brand Community on the Brand Identification of the Community Members. *Management Review*, (12),79-88. [In Chinese, 沙振权, 蒋雨薇 & 温飞.(2010).虚拟品牌社区体验对社区成员品牌认同影响的实证研究. 管理评论(12),79-88.]
- Sun, T. (2016). The Effect of Content Marketing on Consumers' Purchase Intentions. (Master's Thesis, Harbin Institute of Technology). [In Chinese, 孙天旭. (2016). 内容营销对消费者购买意愿的影响研究 (硕士学位论文, 哈尔滨工业大学).]
- Tang, J. (2020). Brand Identity and Consumer Purchase Decision: The Mediating Role of Brand Loyalty and Satisfaction. *Journal of Commercial Economics*, (13), 60-62. [In Chinese, 唐娟. (2020). 品牌认同与消费者购买决策:品牌忠诚与满意度的中介作用. 商业经济研究 (13), 60-62.]
- Wang, J., & Jiang, R. (2010). The Research on the Influence of Brand Community Identity for Brand Loyalty. *Journal of Nanjing University of Finance and Economics*, (02),72-80. [In Chinese, 王军 & 江若尘. (2010). 品牌社群认同对品牌忠诚的影响研究. 南京财经大学学报 (02), 72-80.]
- Wei, J., Wang, L., & Liu, Y. (2020). Study on the Influence Factors of Short Video on Users' Book Purchase Intention. *China Publishing Journal*, (06), 8-14. [In Chinese, 魏静秋, 王翎子 & 刘彦玥. (2020). 短视频对用户图书购买意愿影响因素研究. 中国出版(06), 8-14.]
- Yang, L. (2014). The Effect of Content Marketing through "We Media" on Customers' Online Interaction Propensity. (Master's Thesis, Xiamen University.) [In Chinese, 杨力. (2014). 自媒体环境中商家内容营销对顾客网络互动意愿的影响研究 (硕士学位论文, 厦门大学).]
- Yu, L., & Sun, M. (2016). Review of the Researches on Consumer Anxiety, Nostalgia Consumption, and Purchase Intention. *Technoeconomics & Management Research*, (03),69-74. [In Chinese, 俞林 & 孙明贵. (2016). 消费者焦虑、怀旧消费与购买意愿研究综述. 技术经济与管理研究 (03), 69-74.]
- Yan, X. (2019). Research on the Effect of Content Marketing on Consumers' Brand Loyalty. (Master's Thesis, South China University of Technology. [In Chinese, 颜璇. (2019). 内容营销对消费者品牌忠诚的影响研究 (硕士学位论文, 华南理工大学).]
- Zhou, Y., & Chen, J. (2013). Content Marketing in the Social Media Age: Definition Analysis and Research Prospects. *Foreign Economics & Management*, 35 (06),61-72. [In Chinese, 周懿瑾 & 陈嘉卉. (2013). 社会化媒体时代的内容营销:概念初探与研究展望. 外国经济与管理 (06), 61-72.]



This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Licence (CC-BY) 4.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>, which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.