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Modeling Interactive Content Marketing: The Role of Digital Content in Influencing Consumer Buying Decisions in Iraq

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to design an interactive content marketing model with an emphasis on its role in shaping the purchasing decisions of digital consumers in Iraq. In terms of purpose, this research is applicable, and in terms of execution, it is qualitative; the adopted strategy is exploratory, and the method utilized is thematic analysis. The research population consists of 21 faculty members and experts in the field of digital and interactive marketing in Iraq, selected based on purposive sampling and the data saturation technique. The data collection tool is semi-structured in-depth interviews. For data analysis, thematic analysis and MAXQDA software were employed. The findings of the thematic network analysis revealed 6 organizing themes, 14 basic themes, and 58 primary codes as the components and categories of interactive content marketing with an emphasis on its role in shaping digital consumers' purchasing decisions. The (organizing) themes were presented in 6 dimensions: strategic factors, consumer factors, brand factors, consumer value-creation attitude, content personalization strategy, and responsiveness and feedback. The results indicated that interactive content marketing, as an emerging and effective strategy, plays a significant and influential role in shaping and strengthening the purchasing decisions of digital consumers.

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

In the current digital age, social networks have become one of the primary hubs for interaction, communication, and information exchange between businesses and consumers (Zamani et al., 2022). These platforms are not only used as a base for marketing and advertising but have fundamentally transformed the nature of marketing communications through their interactive capabilities (Bazi et al., 2020). Meanwhile, the concept of "Interactive Content Marketing" has emerged as a novel and effective strategy, capturing the attention of researchers and marketing professionals. Unlike traditional methods that were largely based on one-way message dissemination, this type of marketing emphasizes creating a two-way dialogue, encouraging active audience participation, and crafting personalized experiences.

On the other hand, the consumer purchasing decision process, especially in the digital context, has undergone significant transformations (Lou & Xie, 2021). Today, digital consumers go through complex stages of information searching, option comparison, evaluating other users' opinions, and interacting with brands in online spaces—particularly social networks—before taking action to buy. This process is not a simple linear sequence but rather a cyclical and dynamic path where the customer moves repeatedly between stages of awareness, consideration, evaluation, and action (Chang et al., 2025). This necessitates a deeper understanding of the factors influencing the formation of these decisions.

Despite the increasing importance of interaction in virtual space, few studies have specifically examined the role of "interactive content" in shaping purchasing decisions within the context of developing markets like Iraq (Bianchi & Andrews, 2023). One of the concepts that marketers currently focus on regarding consumer consumption behavior is the creation of pleasant experiences and their impact on consumer behavior. Creating diverse experiences as a vital element in marketing strategies can create value and lead to a competitive advantage (Holliman & Rowley, 2024).

The process of online shopping involves purchasing goods directly from the seller without intermediaries, which can be defined as the activity of buying and selling goods via the internet. Online shopping transactions provide customers with a variety of products and services, allowing them to compare these products with those of other intermediaries and select the best option (Daroch et al., 2021). In the Middle East region, and specifically in Iraq, the rapid expansion of internet penetration and smartphone usage has led to the emergence of a massive population of digital consumers who perform a significant portion of their daily activities—including searching for product information, interacting with brands, and shopping—through social networks.

The Iraqi market, with its young and tech-savvy population, provides a dynamic environment for studying digital phenomena. Specific socio-cultural characteristics of this market, including the importance of word-of-mouth communication, trust in personal recommendations, and the strong role of family and community in decision-making, have made the potential of social networks and interactive content in influencing consumer behavior highly significant in this country (We Are Social & Hootsuite, 2024). Therefore, the present study seeks to answer the following scientific question: What is the interactive content marketing model with an emphasis on its role in shaping the purchasing decisions of digital consumers in Iraq?

Theoretical Framework

Interactive Marketing

Interactive marketing is an innovative form of marketing in which audiences can engage and communicate with your content. In this approach, a brand provides a relevant and appropriate response based on the specific actions and movements of each customer and audience member. This method allows brands to act more creatively and tell more compelling stories, thereby attracting a larger audience. Unlike outbound marketing methods, interactive marketing creates an environment where customers and the brand can engage in a two-way dialogue (Lufkin, 2024).

Zhu et al. (2026) investigated the design of a content marketing process model aimed at strengthening customer purchase intention. The results of this research indicated that to achieve modern marketing based on social media—characterized by two-way interactive dialogues and feedback reception (a many-to-many communication system)—organizations should prioritize these elements in their information dissemination, advertising, and health tourism marketing programs.

Ahmadi alinoudehi et al. (2026) analyzed the dimensions and components of digital transformation management based on Artificial Intelligence (AI). The results of their study indicated that AI-based digital transformation management is designed within four overarching categories: "contextual requirements," "digital infrastructure," "digital transformation management process," and "organizational capital." These include 12 organizing categories: "ethical requirements," "cultural requirements," "organizational requirements," "hard digital infrastructure," "soft digital infrastructure," "digital transformation management process," "digital transformation planning," "prototyping," "learning," "human capital," "process capital," "structural capital," and "social capital," comprising a total of 73 basic categories.

Methodology

In terms of objective, this research is applicable, and regarding its execution, it is qualitative. The adopted strategy is exploratory, and the chosen method is thematic analysis. The research population consists of 21 faculty members and experts in the field of digital and interactive marketing in Iraq, selected through purposive sampling utilizing the data saturation technique. The data collection instrument employed is semi-structured in-depth interviews.

Research Findings

Data analysis was conducted through the thematic analysis method and MAXQDA software. The findings from the thematic network analysis identified 6 organizing themes, 14 basic themes, and 58 primary codes as the components and categories of interactive content marketing, emphasizing its role in shaping the purchasing decisions of digital consumers. The organizing themes were categorized into six dimensions: strategic factors, consumer factors, brand factors, consumer value-creation attitude, content personalization strategy, and responsiveness and feedback. The results demonstrated that interactive content marketing, as an emerging and effective strategy, plays a vital and influential role in shaping and reinforcing the purchasing decisions of digital consumers.

Conclusion

The present study was conducted with the aim of designing an interactive content marketing model, emphasizing its role in shaping the purchasing decisions of digital consumers in Iraq. The results obtained from these findings are consistent with the research of Zhu et al. (2026), Ahmadi Alinoudehi et al. (2026), Jalalzadeh et al. (2025), Abolhasani Abrghan & Dadash

Karimi (2025), Bagher Mosavi & Fadai (2024), Shakeri (2024), and Zamani et al. (2022). Notably, Zhu et al. (2026) demonstrated that to achieve modern marketing based on social media—characterized by two-way interactive dialogues and feedback reception (a many-to-many communication system)—organizations must prioritize these elements in their information dissemination, advertising, and health tourism marketing programs.

Based on the research results, it is suggested that to reach the optimal state of marketing and customer loyalty, organizations should involve their employees across various fields and departments. The company should supervise and participate in business operations and the mapping of employees' professional futures, while simultaneously pursuing competitive excellence in its programs.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no financial or non-financial, personal, professional, or institutional conflicts of interest relevant to this work.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

AI Use Statement

The authors declare that no generative artificial intelligence (AI) or AI-assisted technologies were used in the preparation, writing, or editing of this manuscript.

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Ethics Approval

All procedures performed in this study were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the responsible institutional and national research committee.