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**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONTENT MARKETING AND USER
ENGAGEMENT IN ONLINE BRAND COMMUNITIES**

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction to the Research

Content marketing is a major trend in marketing at the moment. It is focused on creating free valuable content for the consumer for purposes such as increasing sales, saving on costs and gaining better customers who have more loyalty. (What is Content Marketing, 2018.) The Content Marketing Institute's 2018 survey on how businesses use content marketing implies that the recent trend seems to be especially focused on building audiences. In the 2012 survey, 68% of all respondents said both brand awareness and customer acquisition were their goals for content marketing (2012 Benchmarks, Budgets and Trends, 2012). However, in their 2018 survey, 89% of all respondents said they are focused on building audiences – which is an 18% year-over-year increase (2018 Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends – North America, 2018).

In the marketing professional field, the effects of traditional marketing practices are questioned. In addition, the media landscape is much more fragmented now, with the number of channels having increased dramatically in the social media age. (Wall & Spinuzzi, 2018.) Content marketing is considered an answer to these new challenges that marketers face.

Nonetheless, most of the existing knowledge of content marketing is based on research reports produced by commercial institutions instead of academic research (Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016). In addition, the advice and guide books written on content marketing particularly do not base their guidance on anything scientifically proven as most of them are based on the writers' own experiences. All in all, there is plenty of well-meaning advice, but all of it might not be useful for marketers.

Finally, the emerging focus on the audience building aspect of content marketing makes the research on the link between content marketing and user engagement relevant. There appears to be very little research on content marketing at the moment and user engagement has mostly been researched separately from content marketing itself (Thorsten Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004a; Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan, 2012). This literature review will look at how content marketing and user

engagement are interconnected and focus on how content influences engagement in online brand communities.

1.2 Research Gap

Most literature on user engagement at the moment focuses on building online communities. The research is very much from the perspectives of administrators of these communities. (Aksoy et al., 2013; Fournier & Lee, 2009; Gensler, Völckner, Liu-Thompkins, & Wiertz, 2013.) However, the relationship between online brand community engagement and content marketing has not been researched to a major extent as content marketing is a relatively new trend in marketing.

In 2014, Holliman and Rowley suggested that literature related to content marketing is dominated by works written by consultants and practitioners rather than researchers, and that research on the topic of content marketing is very limited. Their work is the first study exploring content marketing in the B2B context. (Holliman & Rowley, 2014a.) Most studies on content marketing have focused on value creation or on a specific outcome for the business practicing content marketing, including increasing sales or making something ‘go viral’ online (Pophal, 2015). Similarly, most literature on online communities and user engagement are focused on describing the phenomenon in a general sense of what happens in online communities and why people engage with each other and with brands online. A part of the research on brand communities touches on some aspects of what could be described as content marketing, however, there is no research focusing on how content marketing specifically influences engagement in online brand communities. Aksoy et al (2013), for example, calls for more research to identify the most important mechanisms for maintaining ongoing community-brand relationships in the online sphere.

Furthermore, Holliman and Rowley (2014) call for more research into digital content marketing and its different aspects. They also suggest using the theoretical frameworks of brand-community building and the notion of co-creation in order to create a more holistic approach to digital content marketing. This literature review attempts to answer some of these calls and investigate what answers content marketing may

provide to community-brand relationships and the building of engaging brand communities in the online sphere.

1.3 Research Questions

This paper will synthesize the literature of user engagement in online brand communities and content marketing. The subject will be viewed from the perspective of the marketer. In addition, this paper will give clear guidance to marketers on how to approach content marketing for the purposes of building engaging online brand communities. To summarize, the purpose of this study is to answer the following question:

What is the relationship between content marketing and user engagement in online brand communities?

1.4 Key Concepts

Content marketing is widely considered to be the creation of free content, the purpose of which is not to sell products or gain financial benefits directly (Pophal, 2015; Pulizzi, 2012; Wall & Spinuzzi, 2018). There is some variation in the definition used in earlier research and thus this paper will further define and conceptualize the term in section 3.1.1.

User engagement online describes the processes through which online users interact with each other, companies, brands and other entities in the online sphere (Malthouse, Haenlein, Skiera, Wege, & Zhang, 2013; Thorsten Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Vivek et al., 2012). This is a complex concept with multiple aspects which will be further discussed in section 3.1.2.

Online brand community describes online communities built around and/or managed by brands or companies (Aksoy et al., 2013; Fournier & Lee, 2009; Gensler et al., 2013; Muniz Jr. & O'Guinn, 2001). This paper will further expand this definition and link it to social media networks and in addition touch on offline brand communities in section 3.2.3.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Systematic Literature Review

The method used in this research is a systematic literature review. The purpose of a systematic literature review is to provide guidance for further research into a topic, provide a summary of the current literature on a topic and to bring to light and compare conflicting evidence (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). As mentioned earlier, there are many advice books on content marketing which are purely empirical – the information and guidance is based on the experiences of the writers in their professional work. A systematic literature review is able to provide a comprehensive, objective and reliable view of what works and what does not. As a systematic review should be used when there is uncertainty about the effectiveness of a policy or a service, the method is considered to be suitable for this study. (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006.) Through the methodology of a literature review, the purpose is to analyze the relationship between content marketing and engagement and also compare these findings to the claims of content marketing advice books. Through this both a theoretical model on the relationship will be created and content marketing guidelines will be provided for marketers.

As there is practically no scientific literature combining content marketing and brand-community management the aim of this paper is to gather a comprehensive picture of the current state of knowledge on this topic by creating a synthesis of well-established research of both brand communities and content marketing while also taking in account some newer information. In addition, this paper will provide an overview of the current knowledge and give guidance for marketers working with content marketing.

Lastly, it should be noted that traditional literature reviews may be biased in their views based on the literature chosen to synthesize. However, the process of a systematic literature review is built to prevent biases. (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006.) Thus the arguments presented in this paper should be considered as neutral as possible.

2.2 Purpose of the Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to identify what previous research has uncovered related to both content marketing and user engagement and how these results can be interpreted together as a whole in order to create an objective consolidation of the relationship of content marketing and user engagement in online brand communities. Former research on brand communities has mostly focused on specific online communities, such as Twitter, Facebook or different types of forums, by using the methods of empirical research without building a generalized view of the topic and combining the findings made on these different platforms. (Brodie, Ilic, Juric, & Hollebeek, 2013; Fournier & Lee, 2009; Gensler et al., 2013; Koh, Kim, Butler, & Bock, 2007; Muniz Jr. & O'Guinn, 2001.) In addition, content marketing has not been directly related to user engagement in past research. By bringing together the literature of these topics this paper aims to fill some of the empty space related to brand-community management in the context of content marketing. In addition, this paper will be looking at what questions are left unanswered and which parts require more research.

Using the theoretical framework, which includes defining the main terms discussed in this paper, this review will answer questions related to the main argument of this paper including what encourages online user engagement and what on the other hand decreases an online user's willingness to engage with content marketing specifically. Finally, this paper aims to provide practical guidance to marketers on how to use content marketing efficiently in order to build audiences online. Figure 1 describes the process of completing this literature review.

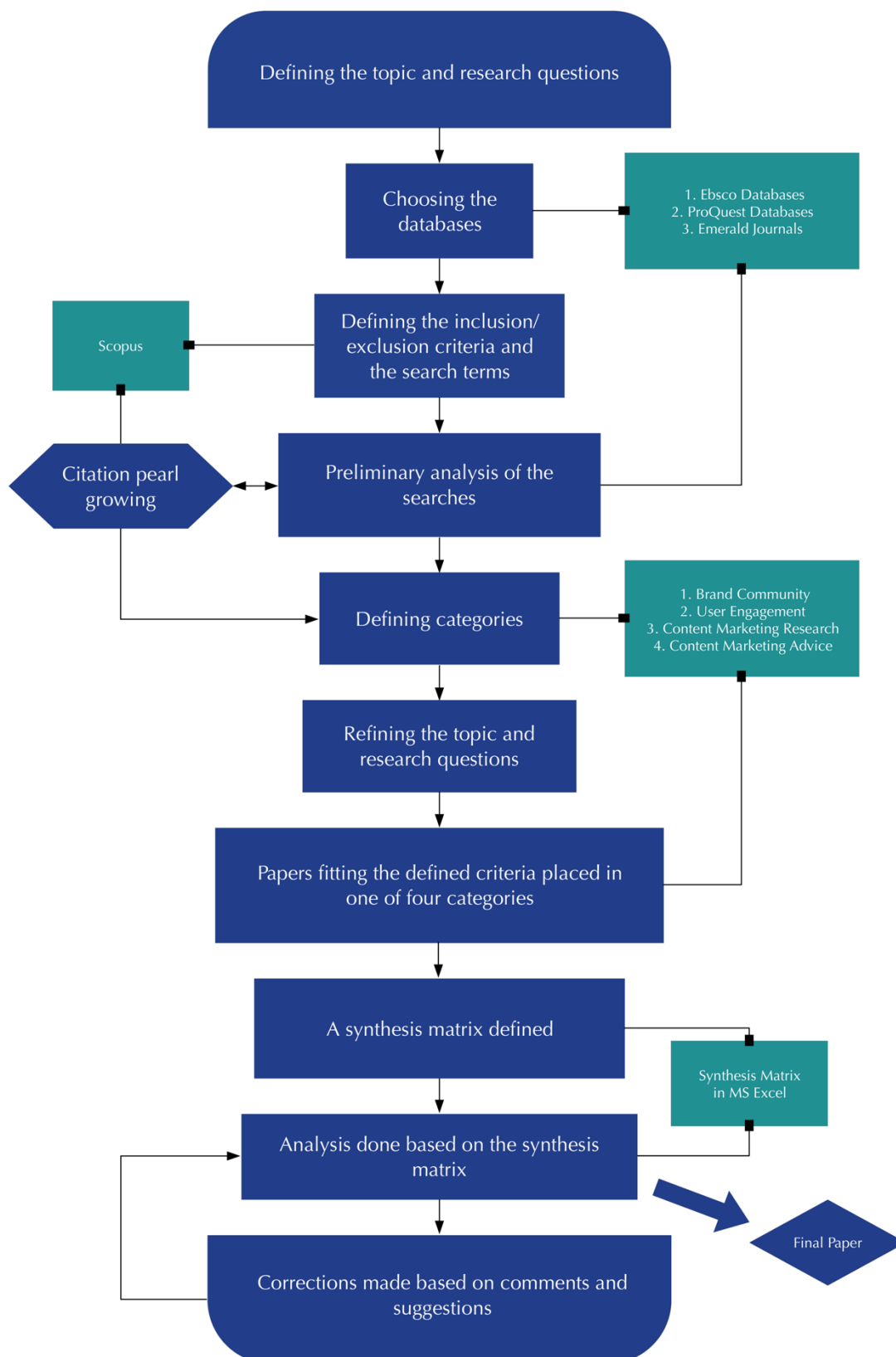


Figure 1. The writing process of the literature review.

2.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The search process was divided into four main categories: papers referring to brand community/virtual community, papers referring to user engagement, papers referring to content marketing and non-academic advice articles on content marketing. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were defined separately for these categories.

The defined inclusion criteria for the online brand community category suggests that no articles released before the advent of social media should be included. This is in part due to the fact that traditionally online communities used technologies that were text-based, which is not true of modern online communities such as social media sites, blogs and other websites. (Malinen, 2015.) However, later in the process of completing this literature review, one research paper released in 2001 (Muniz Jr. & O'Guinn, 2001) was included as it was deemed to be a key article for the definition of brand communities, thus broadening the timeline to 2001. Discounting this paper, all other articles were released after 2007.

For the user engagement category, the inclusion criteria states that articles have to be released after 2000, as it was deemed that online engagement was not the same in the 1990s as it is now. Earlier online engagement was much more text-based compared to the contemporary multimedia environment and even now it is constantly changing. Thus, it was considered insignificant to apply earlier theory into this research.

For the content marketing category, several inclusion criteria were defined. First of all, the papers have to be released after 2007 as major content marketing platforms such as Facebook (founded in 2004), Twitter (founded in 2006) and Youtube (founded in 2006) were considered not to have had a major impact on content marketing before that. Furthermore, the search results did not provide any academic articles written on content marketing before 2008. In addition, 'content marketing' had to specifically refer to content marketing as defined in this paper. Articles referring to 'content marketing' as 'the marketing of content online such as audio files, films etc.' were excluded. Furthermore, all papers having less than five citations on the Scopus citation database were rejected.

The inclusion criteria for non-academic content marketing papers is that the articles or books have to be written by known influencers in the field of content marketing. These include Joe Pulizzi, who is a major figure in professional content marketing and Lin Pophal, who has written multiple articles based on the Content Marketing Institute's surveys. The argument for choosing non-academic sources is the lack of content marketing research and the fact that this paper also looks to academically and critically assess the claims made by experts in the field. Citation criteria was not defined for this category. Table 1 lists the chosen literature and their Scopus database citation ratings.

Table 1. The list of literature chosen.

Brand community/Virtual community	Author	Scopus rating, cited by
1 Brand community. <i>Journal of Consumer Research</i> , 27(4), 412-432	(Muniz Jr. & O'Guinn, 2001)	1902
2 Encouraging participation in virtual communities. <i>Communications of the ACM</i> , 50(2), 69-73.	(Koh, Kim, Butler, & Bock, 2007)	242
3 Getting brand communities right. <i>Harvard Business Review</i> , 87(4)	(Fournier & Lee, 2009)	197
4 Managing brands and customer engagement in online brand communities. <i>Journal of Service Management</i> , 24 (3), 223-244. doi:10.1108/09564231311326978	(Aksoy et al., 2013)	122
5 Consumer engagement in a virtual brand community: An exploratory analysis. <i>Journal of Business Research</i> , 66(1), 105-114.	(Brodie, Ilic, Juric, & Hollebeek, 2013)	209
6 Managing brands in the social media environment doi:9443/10.1016/j.intmar.2013.09.004	(Gensler, Völckner, Liu-Thompkins, & Wiertz, 2013)	129
7 Malinen, S. (2015). Understanding user participation in online communities: A systematic literature review of empirical studies. <i>Computers in Human Behavior</i> , 46, 228-238.	(Malinen, 2015)	30
User Engagement		
Electronic word-of-mouth via consumer-opinion platforms: What motivates consumers to articulate themselves on the internet? <i>Journal of Interactive Marketing</i> (John Wiley & Sons), 18(1), 38-52.	(Thorsten Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004)	1351
2 Customer engagement: Exploring customer relationships beyond purchase. <i>Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice</i> , 20(2), 127-145.	(Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan, 2012)	209
3 Managing customer relationships in the social media era: Introducing the social CRM house. <i>Journal of Interactive Marketing</i> , 27 (4), 270-280.	(Malthouse, Haenlein, Skiera, Wege, & Zhang, 2013)	129
4 Evidence that user-generated content that produces engagement increases purchase behaviours. <i>Journal of Marketing Management</i> , 32(5-6), 427-444. doi:10.1080/0267257X.2016.1148066	(Malthouse, Calder, Kim, & Vandenbosch, 2016)	11
5 From social to sale: The effects of firm-generated content in social media on customer behavior. <i>Journal of Marketing</i> , 80(1), 7. Retrieved from https://oulu.finna.fi/PrimoRecord/pci.proquest1758519275	(Kumar, 2016)	42
Content Marketing Research		
1 Understanding digital content marketing. <i>Journal of Marketing Management</i> , 24 (5-6), 517-540.	(Rowley, 2008)	26
2 Business to business digital content marketing: Marketers' perceptions of best practice. <i>Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing</i> , 8(4), 269-293.	(Holliman & Rowley, 2014)	13
3 Factors influencing popularity of branded content in facebook fan pages. <i>European Management Journal</i> , 32 (6), 1001-1011.	(Sabate, Berbegal-Mirabent, Cañabate, & Lebherz, 2014)	52
4 The social media transformation process: Curating content into strategy. <i>Corporate Communications</i> , 20(3), 326-343	(Kilgour, Sasser, & Larke, 2015)	11
5 The art of selling-without-selling: Understanding the genre ecologies of content marketing. <i>Technical Communication Quarterly</i> , , 1-24. doi:10.1080/10572252.2018.1425483	(Wall & Spinuzzi, 2018)	0
6 Harnessing marketing automation for B2B content marketing. <i>Industrial Marketing Management</i> , 54, 164-175. doi:10.1016/j.indmarman.2015.07.002	(Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016)	8
Content Marketing Advice		
1 Pulizzi, J. (2012). The rise of storytelling as the new marketing. <i>Publishing Research Quarterly</i> , 28(2), 116-123.	(Pulizzi, 2012)	22
2 Putting the 'strategic' into strategic content marketing. <i>EContent</i> , 38 (9) Retrieved from https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-84958068569&partnerID=40&md5=d025827bb30ede343b5a478074d861b3	(Pophal, 2015)	0
3 How to create a content strategy. <i>EContent</i> , 39 (2) Retrieved from https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-84963527111&partnerID=40&md5=4f4093140a62e7fe01d9d3663724a90a	(Pophal, 2016)	0
4 The state of content marketing. <i>EContent</i> , 41 (1), 13-15. Retrieved from https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85040820385&partnerID=40&md5=9c06ff2ca7030d89625be3d3977c7dad	(Pophal, 2018)	0

2.4 Search and Keywords

The databases were chosen based on the subject guides for Economic Sciences and Business Studies of the library of the University of Oulu. The databases used were Ebsco Databases, ProQuest Databases and Emerald Journals. In addition, as Scopus

was used to review the relevance of the articles, it was also used as a search tool in itself. Pearl growing, where one article is used to find other articles, for example by analyzing reference lists, was used to collect more articles on the Scopus database based on core articles that were deemed to fit the inclusion/exclusion criteria.

Searches that were used to research the databases for articles related to content marketing included the phrase ‘content marketing’. The search ‘content AND marketing’, for example, was not used as it yielded huge amounts of results that were not considered relevant or related to the actual topic. The keywords used in finding out about user engagement and building online audiences included ‘user engagement’, ‘customer engagement’, ‘customer behavior’, ‘online community’ and ‘virtual community’. These were all used as there is a lack of distinction between the terms in practice.

The results of Ebsco Databases, ProQuest databases and Emerald Journals searches were then analyzed, the articles were placed in one of the four categories, and those articles deemed to fit the first exclusion/inclusion criteria were then evaluated for further relevance through Scopus.

In the end of the process, 22 papers, which fulfilled the individual inclusion/exclusion criteria of their respective categories were chosen – seven in the first, five in the second, six in the third and four in the fourth category.

2.5 Structure of the Study

The analysis section of this paper follows a structure which deals more directly with the main question of this paper: what is the relationship between content marketing and user engagement in online brand communities? In section 3.1, the three main terms discussed in this paper will be defined and conceptualized based on the literature surveyed. The terminology is changeable and vague to an extent in earlier research so this paper sees it fit to synthesize definitions for the terminology in order to continue further into answering the main question of this paper effectively and meaningfully. The questions related to the terminology defined in 3.1 are:

1. What is content marketing?
2. What constitutes engagement online?
3. What constitutes an online brand community?

In section 3.2, the value of engagement and its effects on the sustainability of online communities and for achieving the goals of marketers will be considered. Answering these sub-questions is important, because if there is no value to engagement, it means it is very likely there is a complete lack of a relationship between content marketing and engagement. Consequently, that would mean the main question this paper asks is not particularly meaningful for theoretical or managerial implications. However, this paper does expect, based on earlier reading and study, the literature review to yield positive results for these questions. The value of engagement will be considered in two different aspects:

1. Value for the sustainability of online brand communities.
2. Value for achieving the goals of marketers.

In section 3.3, factors motivating users to engage online will be analyzed. Through observing and finding the components of motivation this paper will continue to synthesize engagement motivation and online content in section 3.4 in order to answer the main question that this paper brings forth: what is the relationship between content marketing and user engagement in online brand communities?

Lastly, in section 4, the results will be discussed from both theoretical and managerial perspectives. In addition, the limitations of this literature review will be considered, and suggestion will be made for further research. Figure 2 visualizes the process outlined in this chapter.

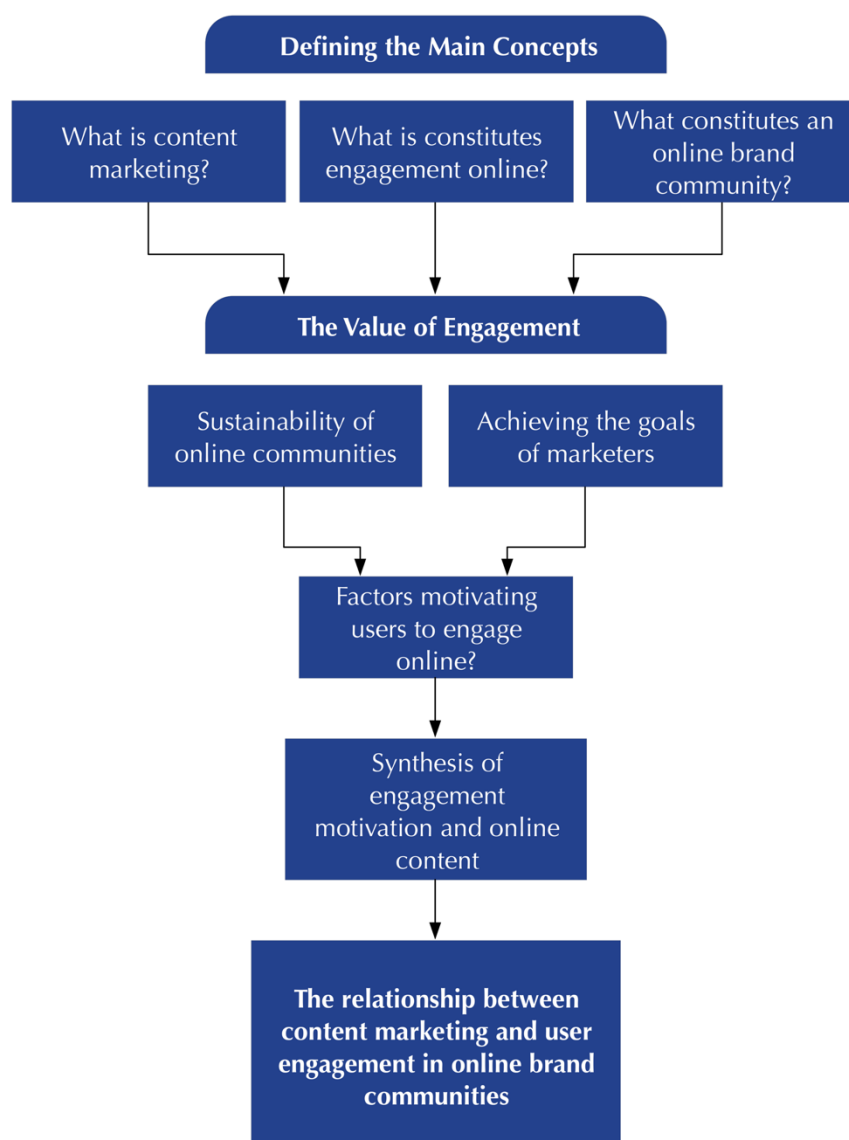


Figure 2. The structure of the literature review.

3 RESULTS OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Defining the Main Concepts

3.1.1 What Is Content Marketing?

There has not been a lot of prior academic research into content marketing and in part due to this the definition of content marketing varies from source to source. However, there are certain similarities and commonalities with the definitions used. The combination of these will be used in this paper to refer to content marketing.

First of all, Rose and Pulizzi (2011a, p. 116) define content marketing as ‘...the creation of valuable, relevant and compelling content by the brand itself on a consistent basis, used to generate a positive behavior from a customer or prospect of the brand’. Providing a further definition of content, Holliman and Rowley (2014) suggest that static web content forming pages should be included and all dynamic rich media content, such as videos, podcasts, user-generated content and interactive product selectors should be included in the definition.

Rose and Pulizzi (2011) also contrast content marketing with advertising, which is transmitted around the content of someone else. Due to this, advertising will not be considered a part of content marketing and not discussed in this paper. However, it should be noted that ads do have some relation to content marketing as they represent a brand community to outsiders as well as to members themselves (Muniz Jr. & O'Guinn, 2001). In addition, content marketing separates media companies and non-media companies: a media company creates content in order to directly profit off of it, whereas a non-media company creates content in order to indirectly profit off of it. Content referred to as ‘content marketing’ is not in itself intended to create profit, but instead attract and retain customers. (Rose & Pulizzi, 2011.) Additionally, content marketing is meant to communicate with external visitors instead of internally in the company (Wall & Spinuzzi, 2018). By looking at these definitions it should be concluded that content marketing is the creation of content, the purpose of which is not to sell products or make direct profit, but to communicate to customers, potential customers and other people outside the company among others. Holliman and Rowley

(2014) also suggest that content in itself is in the publishing world and that content marketing asks all companies engaging in it to be publishers.

This also acknowledges the fact that many companies create and have created content for a very long time, but content marketing refers specifically to ‘a repeatable strategic process’, which has been mostly missing from organizations’ strategies (Rose & Pulizzi, 2011b). All in all, content marketing is not creating content sporadically in arbitrary channels, but a strategic process of creating content in specifically chosen channels in order to reach certain defined goals.

There are also many different views on what the goals of content marketing are or should be. For example, according to Silverman (2012, p. 14) the purpose of content marketing is specifically to ‘draw in leads and supplement brand credibility’. For example, the goal might be lead conversion and nurturing, customer conversion, customer service, customer upsell or creating passionate subscribers, or a mix of these (Rose & Pulizzi, 2011). However, many of these aspects are outside the scope of this paper which focuses specifically on the relationship of content marketing and online user engagement in online brand communities. Finally, it should also be noted that content marketing has been used in the past to refer to the marketing of digital content as commodity, which is also referred to as the digital goods business (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). This definition will not be used or included in this paper.

3.1.2 What Constitutes Engagement Online?

Online user engagement can be seen as having multiple attributes. Brodie et al (2013) argue that previously, despite the use of the words ‘engagement’ and ‘engage’ in marketing literature, researchers had not paid much attention to the theoretical development of these concepts in relation to online brand communities and there is a lack of distinction between ‘engagement’ and ‘participation’ or ‘involvement’ (Brodie et al., 2013). Due to this lack of distinction, this paper chooses to use ‘engagement’ to refer to the subject matter.

In addition, Brodie et al (2013, p. 106) define consumer engagement as having ‘specific interactive experiences between consumers and the brand, and/or other

members of the community'. This interaction also involves some degree of cognitive, emotional and/or behavioral dimensions (Brodie et al., 2013). According to Malinen (2015), previous research has identified two types of groups related to online participation: active members and passive members. Active members are those who post online and contribute to communities and passive members are those who consume the content without contributing to the communities. However, we should not only count the active members as being members of a community as passive members too might have strong cognitive, emotional or behavioral dimensions in their relationship with the community. All in all, both viewing and posting (active and passive) activities are key in online communities (Koh et al., 2007).

In addition, the aspect of a deeper dimension in the relationship presents itself in terms of companies and their customers, as it is suggested that customer engagement requires an individual to have a relationship with a company that is deeper than just making purchases (Vivek et al., 2012). Through this analysis we may define online user engagement as comprising both passive and active activities independent of each other. However, for the activity to be considered engagement it should include a level of deeper engagement in an online brand community. This leads us to consider what constitutes an online brand community.

3.1.3 What Constitutes an Online Brand Community?

First of all, online brand communities should be distinguished from offline brand communities. Unlike an offline brand community, an online brand community is non-geographically bound, the members of which come together online based on shared interests or goals (Brodie et al., 2013; Koh et al., 2007; Muniz Jr. & O'Guinn, 2001). Muniz Jr et al (2001) also define three aspects of online brand communities:

1. There exists shared knowing or belonging.
2. There exists presence of shared rituals and traditions.
3. There exists a sense of moral responsibility.

These three aspects are referenced in newer brand community literature too. (Aksoy et al., 2013; Brodie et al., 2013). However, Aksoy et al (2013) identify additional key dimensions that shape online brand communities:

1. *Brand orientation*: the focus of the community can be on the brand itself or a wider interest. Compare: Harley-Davidson bikes versus biking in general.
2. *Internet use*: online brand communities can exist only online or both online and offline.
3. *Funding and governance*: the community can be either funded and governed solely by the brand or the community or the funding and governance can be shared by the parties.

However, offline communities should not be forsaken as most people still live most of their life offline and this leads to offline interaction playing an important role in fostering online community connections too (Fournier & Lee, 2009). In addition, many older communities have started as offline communities (such as the Harvey Davidson brand community) and developed into online communities later. Many communities now may start as online communities and members might form offline communities later after interacting online first. (Aksoy et al., 2013.)

Thus, the connection between offline and online community interaction may still be an important part and it may be helpful to connect offline and online interactions in order to create more successful communities (Koh et al., 2007). However, online brand communities still exhibit radically new forms of customer/firm interaction compared to offline communities (Brodie et al., 2013). Thus, we cannot assume that the features of offline communities all apply to online communities. Due to this offline communities will not be considered in this paper to a major extent.

Lastly, online brand communities should be compared to social media networks. There are many similarities between social media networks and brand communities in that they offer similar possibilities for many-to-many interactions. However, membership of brand communities seems to be more stable as members are more attached to the brand whilst in social media networks consumers come in contact with brands on a more casual and non-committed basis. The line between brand and consumer social

networks and communities is blurring and both are now often co-present, and a brand may even be considered just another individual in a person's social network. (Gensler et al., 2013.)

3.2 The Value of Engagement

In this part, engagement and the value of engagement will be considered. As mentioned earlier, answering the questions of value is essential for the main question of this paper – ‘What is the relationship between content marketing and user engagement in online brand communities?’ – to be relevant. This chapter will look at what factors support engagement in online brand communities and what value this engagement holds to marketers.

3.2.1 Sustainability of Online Communities

Firstly, members of brand communities do tend to feel a connection to the brand, but the connection to other members of the community tends to be much stronger (Muniz Jr. & O'Guinn, 2001). Engagement has also been shown to increase member loyalty and satisfaction with the community (Malinen, 2015). On the other hand, a lack of social presence creates communication weakness in the community and virtual communities that are not properly stimulated are likely not to be sustainable (Koh et al., 2007). Furthermore, according to Malinen (2015) the lack of user activity is one of the most cited reasons for the failure of online communities. Thus, continuous encouragement in brand communities should also be one of the objectives of content marketing in order to sustain a community.

3.2.2 Achieving the Goals of Marketers

So, what is the value of sustained engagement in brand communities to marketers? A number of valuable features have been observed in engaged brand communities. First of all, a strong brand community has been observed to increase customer loyalty, lower marketing costs, authenticate brand meanings and generate feelings of empowerment (Brodie et al., 2013; Fournier & Lee, 2009). In addition, actively engaged users are likely to have strong brand loyalty and customer advocacy and higher levels of

satisfaction, commitment and trust toward the brand. These individuals are also less likely to embrace competing products or adopt new products. (Aksoy et al., 2013; Brodie et al., 2013.) Purchase behavior has also been observed to increase with high engagement (Malthouse et al., 2013).

Another valuable feature is that members of brand communities tend to take on some of the responsibilities of the company, for example, in educating, sharing information, providing assistance and co-creating value for themselves and other members of the community (Brodie et al., 2013; Muniz Jr. & O'Guinn, 2001). Problem solving support is an often-cited positive effect (Malinen, 2015; Muniz Jr. & O'Guinn, 2001; Thorsten Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004b).

This co-creation aspect is also important as brand meaning is created collectively, not purely by the company itself (Gensler et al., 2013). Consumer generated brand stories can add meaning to the companies own brand stories and co-create additional value that stretches beyond the existing brand identity and value proposition (Aksoy et al., 2013; Gensler et al., 2013).

Engagement has also been observed to increase word-of-mouth activity and engaged individuals are likely to recommend the brand to others, and be advocates for it (Brodie et al., 2013; Vivek et al., 2012). In addition, word-of-mouth referrals have a longer carryover effect than traditional marketing activities (Gensler et al., 2013). This is important as consumers are much less likely to listen to traditional advertising messages nowadays (Malthouse et al., 2013). Customer word-of-mouth is also likely to be perceived as having higher credibility than the direct messages of companies (Kilgour, Sasser, & Larke, 2015). Lastly, when members spread and share content and marketing messages, value is added to it as it is likely more people will become brand advocates who can in turn influence other people (Sabate, Berbegal-Mirabent, Cañabate, & Lebherz, 2014). This can lead to an exponential increase in the amount of people in the community. This is presented in figure 3.

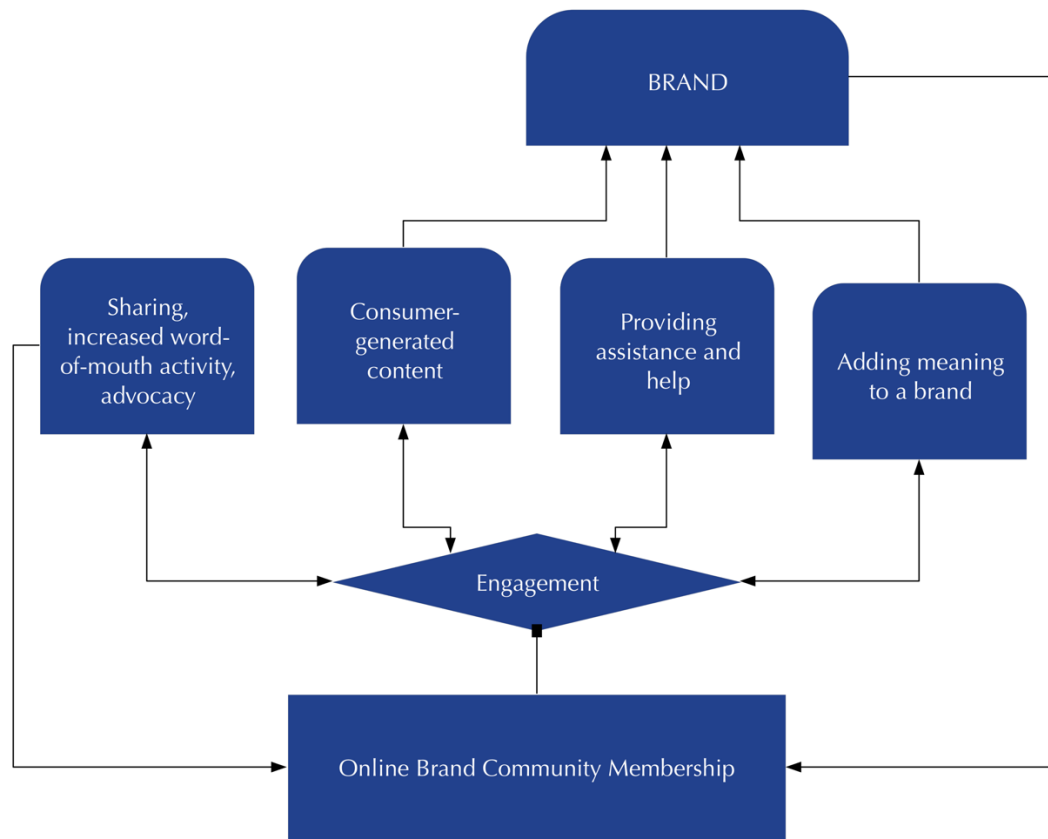


Figure 3. The value of engagement.

There are also downsides to engagement that should be considered. Fournier and Lee (2009) argue that company control of an online brand community is only an illusion. Just as members can be advocates for a brand they can also spread negative word-of-mouth about a company (Malthouse et al., 2013). This negative word-of-mouth activity can, for instance, be a show of force against a company (Thorsten Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). In addition, just as consumers may add new positive meanings to companies' brand stories, they can also add meanings to the brand stories that the company itself does not desire (Gensler et al., 2013). All in all, companies will have to manage and balance the positive and negative effects. However, it seems the positive effects far outweigh the negative ones.

3.3 Factors Motivating Users to Engage Online

In this section, this paper will move towards answering the main question by using the analysis that has been built so far. Two further questions that will be considered are

what motivates users to engage in online brand communities and what the relationship of engagement motivation is to online content specifically in the sphere of content marketing defined earlier. This section will especially concentrate on how content marketing can influence engagement motivation.

First of all, it has been observed that on online forums and social media, factors that affect posting (active participation) and viewing (passive participation) are motivated by different elements (Koh et al., 2007; Malinen, 2015). In addition, different kind of content motivates users on different platforms (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). For example, on Wikipedia it has been noted that people are motivated by altruism and ideology whilst in creative communities related to, for example, music and photography, people are motivated by the opportunity to present their skills and gain feedback on their own work (Malinen, 2015). Also, tech-savvy individuals and people who are more prone and used to using social networks tend to be more influenced by online communities and thus engage more in the communities. These tech-savvy individuals tend to have greater motivation to socialize online and use the internet for entertainment purposes, and thus they are more likely to become members of companies' online brand communities. (Kumar, Bezawada, Rishika, Janakiraman, & Kannan, 2016.) Due to this it is essential to understand different users and their specific motives to distribute messages on specific platforms (Kilgour et al., 2015).

However, there are multiple features that have been noticed as connecting most platforms and most types of engagement. In its essence, engagement is motivated by a belief in the benefits of engaging in activities (Brodie et al., 2013). As it was noted earlier, users tend to be more interested in the social links that come from the communities they take part in than the brands themselves. Due to this, a lot of engagement is based on the communication and the relationship with the other members of the community, helping other members, joint-activities, supporting the community members' activities and creating value for other members. (Aksoy et al., 2013.) This is further supported by the observations of Brodie et al (2013) that those members who contribute the most do it out of commitment to the community. However, it should be noted that in large communities the connection that members are likely to feel to each other is not as strong as in small groups (Aksoy et al., 2013). Uninteresting people and content are important reasons why people leave online

communities. All in all, building relationships can be an important factor to many people to be members of online communities. (Malinen, 2015.)

Malthouse et al (2016a) note that experiences that connect personal goals to the brand and its values create high engagement. This is also discussed by Aksoy et al (2013). Malthouse et al (2016a) have identified three drivers that create engagement:

1. Brand-related drivers: identifying with brands and their symbolic value.
 - For example, Apple, Nike and Harley-Davidson have strong symbolic meanings.
2. Social-drivers: seeking assistance and help from other members.
 - For example, on Ebay people share knowledge about fraudulent bidders, spot price trends and give advice on auction listing tactics.
3. Functional drivers: information-based support.
 - For example, which products to buy and which services to use. Also avoiding uncertainty and monetary incentives are involved.

Concerning brand-related drivers, a community can assert one's personal identity. Brands can build a community around a health campaign and make people identify more with the cause than the brand. (Aksoy et al., 2013.) Furthermore, social drivers and functional drivers are strongly connected to the aspects of what the value of engagement is to marketers. (This was discussed in 3.4.) It seems that not only do social-drivers and functional drivers provide value to marketers, but they also are an important reason why people engage with online brand communities. Thus, these drivers create more engagement in online communities and more value to marketers at the same time. However, fun and entertainment should be considered important motivators too (Gensler et al., 2013; Malinen, 2015). If fun could be implemented into the activities that are a part of the drivers, there may be even stronger effects.

In addition to these, Koh et al (2007) have observed four stimulation drivers:

1. Leader involvement: leaders who promote collaboration and trust increase user participation.
2. Offline interaction increases participation online.

3. Benefits need to surpass the cost of membership: i.e. there needs to be content that is perceived as being valuable or useful.
4. User-friendly interfaces and system reliability increase community participation.

Many of these stimulation drivers have been observed in other researches too. Thorsten Hennig-Thurau et al (2004) mention the identification of a social benefit and social integration that is gained from participating in the community. They also include a concept of approval utility that is gained from other users' approval of the user's participation. This might include, for example, rewarding points or likes for contributions and featuring a rankings list in the community. This may increase a user's likelihood to participate. In addition, explaining to members the value of their contribution may increase the amount of contribution. Furthermore, new members who receive feedback and whose questions are answered in the communities are more likely to stay in them. Lastly, a large number of connections to the community decreases the chance that members will leave the community. (Malinen, 2015.) All in all, it seems participation is a give-and-take relationship. Encouraging internal engagement in the community between its members and rewarding users for their participation will lead to higher levels of engagement across the community and further value to marketers.

Another important feature that Muniz et al (2001) have observed is oppositional brand loyalty. This means that members of a certain community are connected by opposing a competing brand in unity. The competing brand could be seen as a common enemy to the community. Examples given include how Mac users oppose Microsoft users and how Saab drivers oppose Volvo drivers. (Muniz et al., 2001.)

Related to the platforms, anonymity has been observed to increase participation, but also negativity in postings. Thus, pseudonyms may be desirable as they increase contributions compared to using real names, but they reduce the amount of negativity compared to anonymity. (Malinen, 2015.) Lastly, it should be noted that users are more likely to engage with messages of brand advocates or influencers instead of with the company's direct messages (Kilgour et al., 2015).

3.4 Synthesis of Engagement Motivation and Online Content

After investigating the factors related to engagement motivation, it should finally be considered what kind of content has a positive effect on these observed features in order to discover which factors related to content maximize engagement in online communities. First of all, Rowley (2008) notes that digital content is always contextual, and that value is determined by how the content is used or experienced by the user. Just as different kinds of factors influence engagement on different platforms, different kind of content also motivates users on different platforms (Holliman & Rowley, 2014b).

Fournier and Lee (2009) summarize their view on brand communities in that the community should always serve its members and not the business. According to their research, content should reflect this way of thinking in order to be effective. Aksoy et al (2013) agree with this view in that firms tend to put corporate interest ahead of the needs of the community and this has a negative effect on the success of their community. The different needs of different groups of people should be considered and thus there should be high levels of segmentation to optimize the content strategy so that specific segments consume specifically targeted content (Kilgour et al., 2015). In his advice article Pulizzi (2012) notes that successful companies have had great results targeting niche categories of people and that a lot of companies fail because they target audiences that are too large. The research by Kilgour et al (2015) supports this. In addition, Kumar (2016) notes that customizing social media posts, emails and other kinds of content on the web to target the specific customer increases response rates. In addition, personalized introduction messages, for example, that emphasize social interaction increase participation (Malinen, 2015). The research of Kilgour et al (2015) further supports that users are more likely to react to individualized messages. This evidence suggests that creating targeted content is much more effective than creating content for broad audiences. To summarize, it seems content created for mass audiences will not be helpful in creating engaging online brand communities.

All of this supports the notion that companies need to know their audience well. Different audiences react differently and use different channels and styles of communication (Pophal, 2015). Sabate et al (2014) mention that content is a driver

that stimulates interaction and thus brands should publish content that addresses their specific customers' motivations. In addition, content should not be thought of as being individual, separate objects, but rather networks made out of different pieces. Every part of the network should support the other parts of it, and the expectations that the content network creates for users should not be broken. If content at one point in the network breaks the expectations of the user, they might leave the community. (Wall & Spinuzzi, 2018.) However, content should vary with the platform used, but still follow a common ground in the network (Holliman & Rowley, 2014).

If a company does not know what kind of content their community values, they might end up creating content that is considered spam. This can cause a member to leave the community and opt out of further messages. A way to handle this is to collect a lot of in-bound messages and create value for the individual customers beyond mass advertising. (Malthouse et al., 2013.) This is supported by the findings of Brodie et al (2013) that suggest online communities only listen to the messages of marketers who contribute to the benefits of the community. All in all, it is not enough to segment communities, but it is also required to know specifically what a segment is interested in and what they value.

There is some generalized evidence of the type of content that users are more likely to react to positively in most communities and segments. First of all, positive content is shared more often than negative content. Also, content that induces strong emotions that are either positive or negative are shared more often than content that arouses only mild emotions. (Gensler et al., 2013.) In addition, images and videos have been shown to have a positive effect on engagement and to significantly increase brand popularity. However, images were noted to have a stronger effect than videos. (Sabate et al., 2014.) Pophal (2018) also notes that content is increasingly focused on images on all stages of the consumer experience. It should be noted that this might depend on platforms and the effects might change with further developments of technology.

Increasing trust is also an important aspect. According to the interviews in the studies of Holliman and Rowley (2014), market research and reports have been cited as the most important content that increases consumer trust in a brand. It should be noted that it is likely these findings are also very dependent on the platform, the type of

community and time that they were done. Thus, it is likely these findings cannot be applied to all platforms and to all situations. All in all, Holliman and Rowley (2014) note that the content should use the same language as the people in the community use. This might increase the likelihood of positive effects in most situations. In addition, trust and credibility have been shown to increase when the brand and sales pitch is removed entirely from the content (Pulizzi, 2012).

A factor that has been mentioned in this paper is consumer-generated content. Facilitating and motivating users to co-create content is more effective than just showing users content (Vivek et al., 2012). Allowing users to share and embellish or expand companies' content allows them to enhance their self-esteem (Kilgour et al., 2015). Stories that include provoking incidents, experiences, outcomes or evaluations and summaries of person-to-person and/or person-to-brand relationships have been shown to add to the power of consumer generated brand stories. Companies can also influence users in what kind of stories they tell by providing them with 'raw material' such as visuals, logos and videos to create their own content. In addition, choosing which platform to use influences the results of user generated content. For example, Twitter and Facebook have been identified as being effective channels to converse with consumers and evolve the brand stories by co-creating. Youtube and similar video services on the other hand are not as good for this as consumers are less interested in branded content there. (Gensler et al., 2013.)

Gensler et al (2013) note that at the time of their research there was little information on what kind of social media channels should be used under certain conditions. Based on this literature review, it seems there still is lack of specific information related to this. However, Malthouse et al (2016b) note that if a company organizes user generated content contests, the contests should be designed so that it encourages participants to elaborate on how the brand helps them achieve specific personal goals instead of contests that require minimal cognitive effort as those have been shown not to produce much elaboration or thought processing. Figure 4 describes the relationship between content marketing and user engagement outlined in this chapter and relates it to the value of engagement described in chapter 3.2.

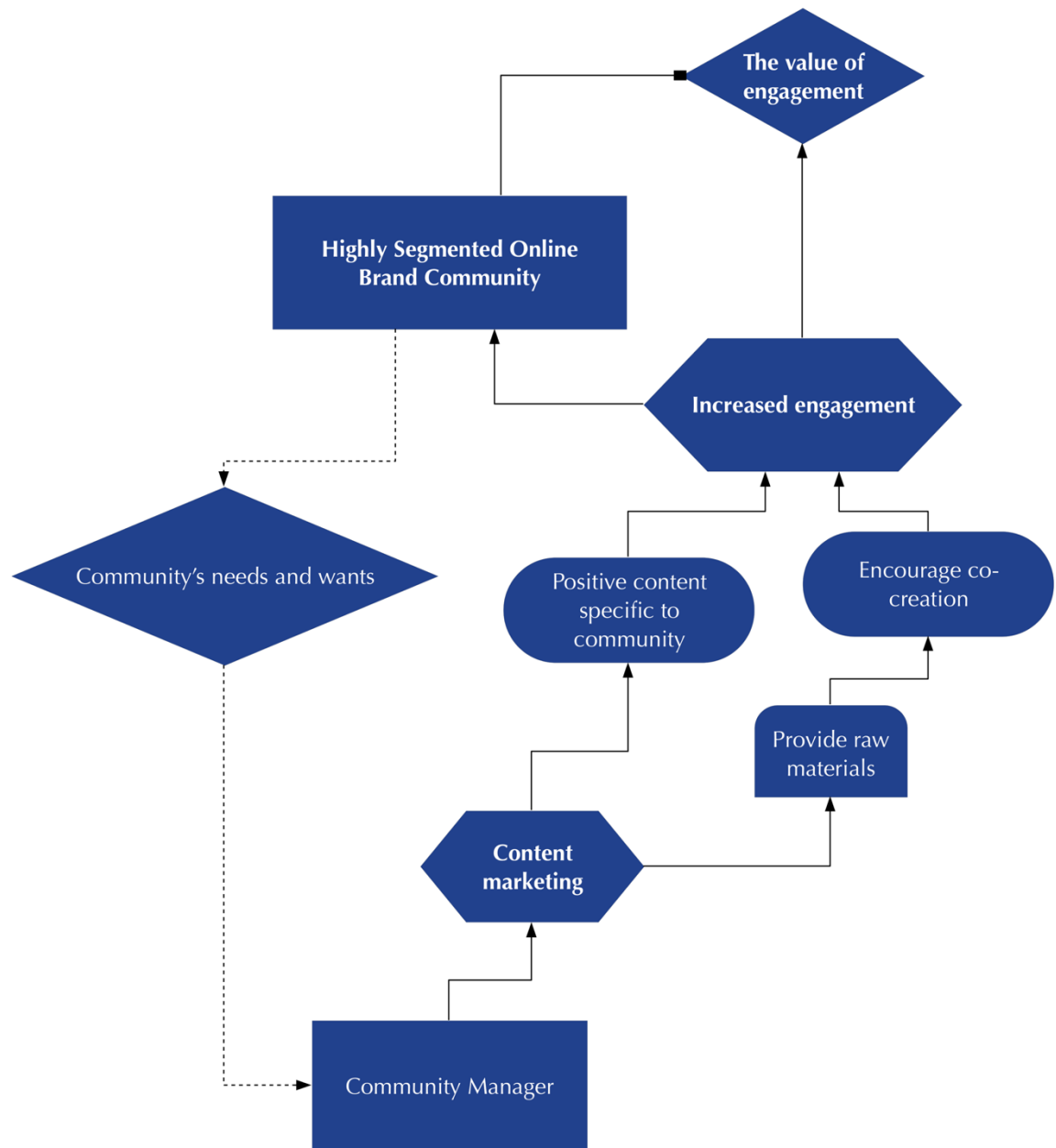


Figure 4. The relationship between content marketing and engagement.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Theoretical Implications

The question this paper has asked is: what is the relationship between content marketing and online brand engagement? By investigating the value of engagement, the factors motivating engagement and the relationship between these factors and content, the synthesis outlined in this literature review has uncovered many connections between the two. First of all, according to the literature reviewed, content can influence online brand community engagement in both positive and negative ways. It can either motivate users to engage more and thus increase the positive value of engagement to both the brand community and to marketers or it can decrease the willingness to engage and lead to negative effects as severe as the breaking down of the online brand community.

According to the literature reviewed, there is evidence, that positive content and content evoking strong emotions increases engagement (Gensler et al., 2013). However, due to the heterogeneousness of online brand communities, it is also likely impossible, based on these findings, to generalize what, for instance, comprises positive content. Content that is considered positive in one online brand community might be considered negative in another community and vice versa. Due to the heterogeneousness of online brand communities the relationship between content marketing and user engagement varies from community to community.

This heterogeneousness of brand communities is one of the main findings of this literature review. Thus, it should be summarized that the effects of content marketing on online brand communities are not only platform dependent, but also community dependent. This means that the individual findings of earlier research are very hard, if not impossible, to generalize. Content that has been shown to increase engagement on a certain platform, such as Facebook, may not have the same effect on Youtube or Instagram. In addition, if the inner mechanisms of the platforms, such as algorithms or other factors influencing what content is shown or featured, are altered, the effects that of certain content might change too.

However, multimedia material and co-creation have been seen as increasing engagement on most platforms (Vivek et al., 2012; Sabate et al., 2014). According to the literature reviewed co-creation has a much stronger effect on user engagement than content created solely by the community manager. Many of the findings outlined in this review should be considered accurate of the relationship between content marketing and user engagement in the specific platform or online community the empirical research has been performed in. The description by Rowley (2008), that digital content is always contextual and that its value is determined by how it is used or experienced, still holds.

The contribution of this paper into the research of the domain of content marketing and user engagement in online brand communities comes from the synthesis of the separate pieces of empirical researches. This paper has combined the results of these individual studies and thus discovered both discrepancies and similarities between studies performed in varying brand communities and on varying online platforms. As a literature review is able to compare the results of individual empirical studies and through this contributes to the knowledge of the subjects in general, the new point of view that has been created in this paper challenges the possible potential to generalize empirical findings discovered on dissimilar platforms and in varying communities. According to this literature review the generalization of individual empirical findings concerning online brand communities should be open to skepticism as findings observed in relation to each other have revealed conflicting evidence. However, this literature review has also found similarities between the studies reviewed and created generalized models explaining the relationship between content marketing and user engagement in online brand communities to the extent which it is deemed possible. A similar synthesis of content marketing and user engagement in online brand communities using the method of literature review has not been created earlier.

4.2 Managerial Implications

One of the most important aspects this literature review has proven for marketers is that segmentation and knowing the community or audience that they are trying to motivate to engage is extremely important. Content marketers should not create content that is targeted at broad audiences, but rather highly segmented pieces of

content that have been individualized as much as possible to the specific community (Kilgour et al., 2015; Fournier and Lee, 2009; Aksoy et al., 2013).

Content marketers should also consider the effects of the platforms they use and be open to the fact that the ever-changing landscape of online networks and platforms demands them to constantly educate themselves about the “dos and don’t’s” of the services they use, and track the results they get with their content marketing and change their ways of working if the results are not what they desired.

Pophal (2016) emphasizes a need for a well-documented strategy in his advice article for content marketers. He lists six steps for content marketers to follow:

1. The goals and objectives of the content should be defined clearly.
2. Who is the audience that the content is trying to influence?
3. What is important to your audience, AIOs: activities, interests and opinions?
4. What is your position in comparison to your competitors?
5. How will the results be measured?
6. Document each step carefully.

Based on this literature review these steps are also extremely helpful for using content marketing to increase engagement in online brand communities. Content marketers may, for example, find the information that positive content is shared more often and that images and videos increase engagement helpful, but it is not possible to build a working content marketing strategy just based on these selective points.

What is considered positive content may differ depending on the community in question. Due to this, it is absolutely vital that content marketers use resources available to them to find out what members of their communities value and like, and have a dialogue with them. Differentiating one’s online community from others is also important and this means telling a different story than others tell, and not barely telling the same story better (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). An online community needs to provide value to its members that they are not able to get from other communities and content is a major factor in doing this. Finally, as companies and brands appear more

and more like other individuals in peoples' social medias and online networks, it is important for companies to start acting like ones too.

4.3 Evaluation of the Literature Review

Even though systematic literature reviews attempt to fix some of the problems that traditional literature reviews have, there are still multiple limitations that should be considered. This review can be classified as a social science review and the limitations related to them apply to this review too. These include the populations, interventions, contexts and other variables which may lead to a variation in the results. The literature chosen might contain studies which use very different types of methods, participants and contexts. This heterogeneity can lead to unreliability. (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006.) According to Petticrew and Roberts (2006) heterogeneity can be avoided by using very precise inclusion and exclusion criteria. However, this study uses very broad criteria and multiple categories. Due to this, the limitation applies to this paper as the studies reviewed are very heterogeneous with different methods and different participants. Also, especially concerning the topic of this paper, the literature reviewed researches different platforms and different kinds of communities. As a consequence, there is variation between the findings and thus the results are difficult to generalize. It is very likely this is a result of the chosen studies and this could be considered a limitation as a more homogeneous pool of studies, for example concerning platforms, could have resulted in more specific findings.

Publication bias is also an important limitation. It means that only statistically significant findings are published (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). The effect of publication bias on this review is possible, but publication bias would likely not affect the results of this review to a major extent. It is possible that publication bias might make the results, especially concerning the connection between content and online brand community engagement, less strong than it appears in the literature reviewed in this paper. For example, if papers with less significant results were included, the connection might have been less strong in some situations, platforms and contexts. All the mentioned limitations should be considered when evaluating the results of this review.

4.4 Limitations and Future Research

Just as Kilgour et al (2015) mention in their research, a lot of the research on online communities and social media is exploratory in nature, so the findings would require further validation. They add that whilst the underlying premises of these findings may remain valid, the platforms used in the researches may change with a fast pace and thus affect the relative importance of the variables. New technology and devices are likely to affect this too. (Kilgour et al., 2015.) This point applies to most research articles reviewed in this paper and due to this it could be said that there are not many results that can be applied to all situations and platforms. In addition, there is no guarantee that the same results will apply in five or ten years.

This paper suggests that there should be more research into different content marketing platforms individually, in order to discover what kind of content works best on each platform. In addition, it should be analyzed if the findings can be generalized and applied to communities on other platforms. This also applies to the results outlined in this literature review. On the other hand, as the online environment changes and evolves at an incredible pace it might be important to focus on findings that are able to be generalized, because platforms come and go and even a policy change on, for instance, Facebook might make certain specific results void in the future. Due to this, it might be important to view online brand community membership and management from sociological and psychological points of view and through the methodologies that they provide.

Lastly, an important topic for future research is the personification of brands. As mentioned earlier, people interact with brands on social media networks and in brand communities increasingly like they interact with any real person. As brands are increasingly personified and users expect brands to act like any other person in their social media sphere, it would be important to observe the effects and implications of this on the relationship between content marketing and online user engagement.

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