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The Relationship between Content Marketing and Customer Delight: The Moderating Role of Authentic Marketing A Survey Study of Zain Iraq Telecommunications Customers' Sample Opinions



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ABSTRACT: This study aims to explore the relationship between content marketing and customer delight in a communications context, focusing on the moderating effect of authentic marketing. Data were collected through a questionnaire directed to 245 lecturers at the University of Kufa as subscribes of Zain Iraq Telecommunications Company. Data were analyzed using AMOS V.24 advanced statistical analysis software. The results of the study showed that there is a positive, statistically significant relationship between content marketing and customer happiness. The results also showed that authentic marketing has an important role in moderating this relationship, as it acts as an interactive variable between the two variables.

KEYWORDS: Content Marketing, Customer Delight, Authentic Marketing, and Zain Iraq Subscribes.

INTRODUCTION

In the fast-paced world of marketing, building strong relationships with customers has become critical. It is no longer enough to provide a good product or service, but rather we must delve deeper into understanding the needs, desires and emotions of customers. This is where content marketing comes into play, which offers a unique opportunity to connect with customers in a personal and engaging way. But, what makes this content truly impactful? What role does authentic marketing play in this equation? This is what I will try to answer in this study, as well as explore the close relationship between content marketing and customer delight, focusing on the pivotal role that authentic marketing plays in strengthening this relationship.

Content marketing it is a marketing strategy aimed at attracting and retaining potential customers and encouraging them to take a specific action (such as a purchase or subscription to a newsletter) by creating and publishing content that is valuable, engaging and relevant to your target audience. Instead of directly promoting a product or service, content marketing focuses on providing useful and interesting information to the audience, which helps build a relationship of trust between the brand and customers (Lou & Xie, 2020). On the other hand, authentic marketing is a marketing approach that relies on transparency and credibility in dealing with customers, and building a relationship based on mutual trust. Instead of exaggerating the benefits of products or services or using false promises to attract customers, authentic marketing focuses on providing accurate and factual information about the product or service, listening to customers' opinions and meeting their needs (Esmaeili et al., 2020). Customer delight is a deep positive emotional state that a customer feels toward a product, service, or brand. This state goes beyond mere satisfaction, as it means that the customer feels very happy and enthusiastic about his experience with the company (Weinstein, 2024). Therefore, it is a goal that all successful companies strive for. By creating positive experiences and exceeding customer expectations, companies can build strong relationships with their customers and achieve sustainable growth (Barnes & Krallman, 2019).

The relationship between content marketing and customer delight is complementary and reciprocal. By providing valuable and useful content, brands can build customers' trust and improve their experience, leading to increased loyalty and brand loyalty. In contrast, customer delight contributes to the success of content marketing by increasing engagement and loyalty and building a positive reputation. In addition, the relationship between authentic marketing and customer delight is complementary and mutual. By applying the principles of authentic marketing, companies can build customer trust and improve their experience,

leading to increased customer loyalty and loyalty to the brand. In contrast, customer delight contributes to the success of authentic marketing by increasing engagement and building a positive reputation.

In the rapidly changing world of digital marketing, building strong and sustainable relationships with customers has become crucial. With the increasing awareness of consumers and the diversity of their choices, it is no longer enough to provide highquality products and services, but rather it has become necessary to provide distinct and rewarding customer experiences (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). In this context, content marketing stands out as a powerful tool for building these relationships, as it provides a platform to connect with customers in a personal and engaging way (Weber, 2019).

However, despite the importance of content marketing, many previous studies have focused more on its effect on brand awareness and search engine optimization, while largely ignoring its effect on the emotions and feelings felt by customers. This leads to a knowledge gap about the precise relationship between content marketing and customer delight, which goes beyond mere satisfaction to include feeling happy and excited about the brand Campagna et al. (2022); Hardany & Najoan (2023); Weinstein (2024).

This study aims to fill this gap by exploring the interactive relationship between content marketing and customer delight, with a particular focus on the pivotal role that authentic marketing plays in enhancing this relationship. By analyzing previous literature and conducting a field study on a sample of consumers for the telecommunications company Zain Iraq.

CONTENT MARKETING CONCEPT

Since the digital world has moved to the forefront of the scene, the rules of the game in the world of marketing have changed. What was effective before no longer attracts attention in the same way. In a time of amplified information and multiple choices, the consumer has become more intelligent and selective. This is where content marketing comes in as a savior, offering the consumer real value rather than just empty hype (Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016).

"In a world of intense competition, attracting attention and forming strong relationships with customers has become extremely important. Have you ever wondered how to achieve this without resorting to traditional marketing methods? The answer lies in content marketing, this smart strategy that places valuable content at the heart of the marketing process, which helps build a strong brand and attract loyal customers (Pulizzi, 2012).

Content marketing is a marketing strategy that aims to attract potential customers and convert them into actual customers by creating and publishing valuable, useful and engaging content. Instead of directly promoting products or services, content marketing focuses on meeting customers' needs and providing solutions to their problems, which increases brand trust and encourages purchases. Content marketing includes a variety of genres such as blog articles, videos, infographics, podcasts, and e-books (Hollebeek & Macky 2019). Content goes through a life cycle that begins with planning and ends with measurement, and aims to achieve goals such as increasing brand awareness, building customer relationships, improving search engines, and increasing sales. To achieve success in content marketing, many factors must be considered such as the relevance of the content to the target audience, its credibility, value, emotion, and appeal. Content marketing is a long-term investment aimed at building a strong relationship with customers. By providing valuable and useful content, you can achieve tangible results for the organization's work (Hardany & Najoan, 2023).

To make the most of content marketing, businesses must adopt a data-driven approach. By tracking and analyzing content performance, businesses can determine what's working and what's not and adjust their strategies accordingly. Data analysis tools such as Google Analytics and social media provide valuable insights into audience behavior and interaction with content. This data can be used to improve the quality of content and tailor it to a specific audience, leading to increased engagement and customer conversion (Bakshi et al., 2014).

Studies show that the majority of consumers prefer to search for information on their own before making a purchasing decision. This means that high-quality content plays a crucial role in the decision-making process. Content marketing is the best strategy to exploit this opportunity, as it allows you to provide the information customers need at the right time and in the right place (Lou & Xie, 2020).

The rules of the game in the world of marketing have changed radically. In the past, traditional advertising was the dominant way to promote products and services. But as technology improves and consumer awareness increases, consumers have become smarter and less responsive to direct advertising. Here comes the role of content marketing as an effective alternative, as it focuses on meeting consumer needs and providing real value to them (Hardany & Najoan, 2023).

Content marketing is more than just writing articles and publishing them online. It is an integrated ecosystem that includes a variety of tools and technologies that work together to achieve marketing goals. Dimensions of content marketing include visual

content marketing, audio content marketing, content marketing on social media platforms, and search engine optimization. By understanding and using these dimensions effectively, companies can build a strong brand, engage with their target audience, and achieve tangible results (Damir & Hasnaa, 2020).

THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTENT MARKETING

Every company strives to grow and expand, but achieving this goal requires more than just a good product. Content marketing represents a fundamental pillar of any successful marketing strategy, as it enables companies to communicate with their target audience in a deeper and more influential way, and build a relationship built on trust and respect. The importance of content marketing can be explained as follows: (Bazi et al., 2023)

- **1. Building trust and loyalty:** Content marketing contributes to building a strong relationship with customers by providing valuable and reliable information, which increases their trust in and loyalty to the brand.
- 2. Increase brand awareness: Good content helps increase brand awareness and make it more popular among the target audience.
- 3. Attract new customers: High-quality content attracts new customers by satisfying their needs and providing solutions to their problems.
- 4. Search engine optimization: Highly featured content helps improve a website's ranking in search results, which increases website traffic.
- 5. Increase Sales: Content marketing contributes to increasing sales in the long term by building strong relationships with customers and turning them into brand advocates.

DIMENSIONS OF CONTENT MARKETING

The world of marketing has evolved significantly in recent years, and content marketing has become one of the most important tools that marketers use to reach their target audience. But, what are the different content marketing dimensions that marketers should study and apply? How can we take advantage of these dimensions to make the most of marketing strategies? To achieve success in content marketing, the following dimensions must be taken into account: (Abd El-Aal, 2023)

- 1. Relevance of content:
- a. Determine the target audience: Know the needs and preferences of the target audience to provide content that meets their expectations.
- **b.** Customize content: Adapting content to suit each distribution channel and audience segment.
- 2. Content credibility:
- a. Accurate information: Provide accurate and reliable information.
- b. Of experience: Highlighting expertise and competencies in the field.
- c. Transparency: Building a relationship based on trust and transparency.
- 3. Content value:
- a. Solutions: Providing solutions to customer problems.
- b. Benefit: Providing useful and valuable information.
- c. Education: Teach customers something new.
- 4. Emotion of content:
- a. Stories: Using stories to deliver messages effectively.
- b. Emotions: Evoking positive emotions in the audience.
- c. Personal communication: Use simple and natural language.
- 5. Attractive content:
- a. Attractive design: Use attractive, visual designs.
- **b.** Innovation: Providing innovative and different content.
- c. Marketing: Promote content through appropriate channels.

AUTHENTIC MARKETING CONCEPT

In today's world, where consumers are increasingly aware of their rights and their behavior is constantly changing, building trust with customers is more important than ever. Authentic marketing provides the ideal solution to these challenges. It is more than just a promotional method, but rather an investment in building long-term relationships based on mutual respect and solid trust (Marks & Prinsloo, 2015).

Authentic marketing emerged as a marketing approach that relies on transparency and credibility in dealing with customers. Instead of exaggerating features or making unrealistic promises, authentic marketing aims to build a relationship built on mutual trust between brand and customer. In a world of intense competition, building trust with customers has become crucial. The information is presented frankly and accurately, without exaggeration or misleading. It is a social contract between the brand and its audience, based on mutual respect and solid trust (Weber, 2019).

With the development of technology and increased consumer awareness, the rules of the game in the world of marketing have changed. It is no longer enough to provide a good product, but rather it has become necessary to build a deep relationship with customers based on trust and authentic. Authentic marketing responds to this change in consumer behavior, focusing on providing real value to customers rather than simply selling products (Bruhn et al., 2012). So authentic marketing is not just an ethical approach, it is a smart investment in the future of your business. Building a strong reputation based on trust leads to increased customer loyalty, improved brand image, and increased sales in the long term. Authentic marketing is an investment in building a long-term relationship with customers (Esmaeili et al., 2020).

In today's world, where consumers are increasingly aware of their rights and their behavior is constantly changing, building trust with customers is more important than ever. Many studies have shown that approximately of consumers prefer companies that are transparent and authentic in their dealings (Södergren, 2021). Authentic marketing provides the ideal solution to these challenges. It is more than just a promotional method, but rather an investment in building long-term relationships based on mutual respect and solid trust. Imagine you are searching for a new product, and you find two products that are very similar in terms of price and features (Nicholas, 2009). What would make you choose one product over another? Trust may be the deciding factor in your decision. Authentic marketing is what builds this trust and makes customers feel safe when dealing with your brand (Weber, 2019).

Based on the above, it is clear that authentic marketing is not just an option, but rather a necessity in today's world. It's the best investment in your brand's future. Building a trust-based relationship with customers is the key to long-term success (Morhart et al., 2015). It is a marketing approach that relies on building a relationship based on trust and transparency with customers, by providing accurate and reliable information about products and services, adhering to promises, listening to customers' opinions, and focusing on providing real value that meets their needs. In other words, it is the art of communicating with customers in an authentic and direct way, which contributes to building a positive brand reputation and increasing customer loyalty in the long term (Campagna et al., 2022).

THE IMPORTANCE OF AUTHENTIC MARKETING

The importance of authentic marketing is represented by the following:

- **a.** Building confidence: Customers value transparency and authentic, and this builds strong trust between the brand and the customer (Esmaeili et al., 2020).
- b. Increase loyalty: Loyal customers are more likely to shop your brand again and again (Campagna et al., 2022).
- c. Improve reputation: Good marketing helps build a positive reputation for your brand (Morhart et al., 2015).
- d. Increase Sales: In the long run, authentic marketing leads to increased sales (Moulard et al., 2016).

DIMENSIONS OF AUTHENTIC MARKETING

Despite the challenges, some potential dimensions for measuring authentic marketing can be identified, which include: (Tran & Keng, 2018)

- 1. Virtue Connection: It means linking a company's products or services to its customers' core values. When customers feel like a company shares the same values and principles, they feel a stronger connection to the brand.
- 2. Realism: It means providing honest and realistic information about the product or service, without exaggeration or misleading. Customers value transparency and honesty, and this helps them make informed purchasing decisions.
- 3. Aesthetic aspect: It means paying attention to the aesthetic aspect in product design and packaging, as well as in marketing materials. Attractive design attracts attention and enhances a positive first impression of the product.
- 4. **Control:** It means giving customers the feeling that they are in control of the purchasing experience. This can be achieved by providing diverse options, simplifying the purchasing process, and providing excellent customer service.
- 5. **Originality:** It means providing a unique and innovative product or service, different from what competitors offer. Authenticity attracts attention and makes the brand memorable.

CUSTOMER DELIGHT CONCEPT

In the highly competitive world of business, simply offering a good product or service is no longer enough to succeed. Customers are looking for exceptional experiences that exceed their expectations. This is where "customer delight" comes into play, that positive emotional state that makes the customer feel deeply connected to the brand and become its ambassador (Souca, 2014).

The relationship between a company and a customer goes beyond a mere business transaction. Customer delight is an essential building block for building strong and sustainable relationships based on trust and mutual loyalty. When a customer feels joy, he becomes more than just a customer, but rather a partner in the company's success. The relationship between a company and a customer goes beyond a mere business transaction. Customer delight is an essential building block for building strong and sustainable relationships based on trust and mutual loyalty (Weinstein, 2024). When a customer feels joy, he becomes more than just a customer, but rather a partner in the company's success. Therefore, customer delight is a deep positive emotional state that a customer feels about a particular product, service, or experience. This state goes beyond mere satisfaction with the product or service, but reaches a higher level of admiration and emotional loyalty to the brand or organization. Therefore, it is a goal that all successful companies strive for, as it is the key to building strong relationships with customers and achieving sustainable growth. It also represents more than just customer satisfaction, as it is a deep positive emotional state that the customer feels about the product, service or experience he receives. This situation has a significant effect on the success of any business, and translates into tangible benefits for the company (Shoukat & Ramkissoon, 2022).

Based on the above, customer delight is a state that goes beyond mere satisfaction, as it leaves a lasting impression in the customer's memory and prompts him to share his positive experience with others, which enhances his loyalty to the brand. Many factors contribute to achieving customer delight, such as product quality, customer experience, effective communication, and customer-oriented organizational culture. Achieving customer delight has many benefits for the company, as it increases revenues, reduces costs, improves brand image, and increases employee productivity. Despite the challenges businesses may face, investing in customer delight is a long-term investment in business success (Barnes et al., 2020).

Based on the above, it is clear that customer delight is that moment when the customer feels that he is more than just a number, and that the company truly cares about him. It is a feeling of satisfaction with the product or service, appreciation for the efforts made to meet one's needs, and confidence that the company will continue to provide an excellent experience (Naik, 2016).

THE IMPORTANCE OF CUSTOMER DELIGHT

Customer delight is a long-term investment in the success of your business. By focusing on meeting customer needs and providing positive experiences, you can build a strong, loyal customer base that contributes to the growth and success of your business. Customer delight can be explained as follows: Magnini et al. (2011); Shoukat & Ramkissoon (2022)

- 1. Increase loyalty: Happy customers are more loyal to the brand, and are more likely to shop again.
- 2. Positive word of mouth marketing: Happy customers spread their positive experiences with others, which contributes to increasing brand awareness and attracting new customers.
- 3. Increase profits: Happy customers spend more money, and are more willing to try new products and services from the same brand.
- 4. Improve brand reputation: Customer delight contributes to building a positive brand reputation, making it more attractive to investors and employees.

DIMENSIONS OF CUSTOMER DELIGHT

Customer delight is the result of a combination of several factors, and understanding these dimensions helps companies achieve customer satisfaction and loyalty, and thus achieve long-term success. The dimensions of customer delight can be explained as follows: (Kwong & Yau, 2002)

- 1. Justice: Refers to treating the customer fairly by providing continuous improvements and valuing their loyalty.
- 2. Esteem: It refers to making the customer feel important by providing personalized services and giving him the freedom to make decisions.
- **3. Security:** Refers to a feeling of security and comfort when dealing with a company, whether through ensuring quality or providing guarantees.
- 4. Trust: Refers to building a relationship based on trust by keeping promises and taking complaints seriously.

5. Variety: Refers to providing a new and innovative experience to customers by offering diverse products and services.

METHODOLOGY

Study Population and Sample

The study population consisted of all lecturers at the University of Kufa who subscribed to the services of the Iraqi Zain Telecommunications Company. The study sample was determined by distributing 324 questionnaires, of which 268 questionnaires were retrieved. After excluding incomplete questionnaires, the size of the valid sample for statistical analysis was 245 questionnaires, representing 91% of the number of questionnaires retrieved.

Measurement

The researcher adopted a Abd El-Aal (2023) scale to measure the content marketing variable, which consists of 39 items. The Tran & Keng (2018) scale, which consists of 18 items, was also adopted to measure the authentic marketing variable. As for the customer delight variable, the researcher adopted the Kwong & Yau (2002) scale, which consists of a 25 items.

Developing hypotheses and study framework

According to Campagna et al. (2022); Hardany & Najoan (2023); Weinstein (2024), the study confirms a strong correlation between content marketing and customer delight, with attractive marketing significantly enhancing customer satisfaction as shown in Figure 1. However, this relationship is greatly affected by the extent of the originality of this content and its alignment with the company's values and brand identity. Authentic marketing acts as a link between content marketing and customer delight, as it increases the effect of content on delight. This is because customers trust more authentic content that reflects the company's true values, which encourages them to build a deeper relationship with the brand. Therefore, combining content marketing with authentic marketing is an effective strategy for building customer loyalty and achieving long-term success. Therefore, the hypotheses of this study can be formulated as follows:

H1: Content marketing has a significant and positive effect on customer delight.

H1a: Relevance of content has a significant and positive effect on customer delight.

H1b: Content credibility has a significant and positive effect on customer delight.

H1c: Content value has a significant and positive effect on customer delight.

H1d: Emotion of content has a significant and positive effect on customer delight.

H1e: Attractive of content has a significant and positive effect on customer delight.

H2: Authentic marketing positively moderates the relationship between content marketing and customer delight.

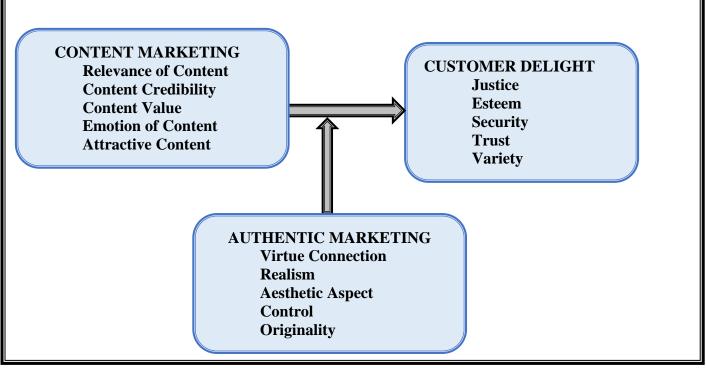


Figure 1 Framework of the Study

DATA ANALYSIS AND DESICCATION

1. Descriptive Statistics of the Variables

Descriptive statistics describe the mean, standard error, and standard deviation of variables. The researcher can give an idea of the participant's response to the questionnaire items (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Descriptive statistics can be seen using SPSS V.29 for each variable as follows:

a. Descriptive Statistics of the Content Marketing

Table 1 provides a summary of the mean, standard error, standard deviation, and variance for content marketing. The frequency distribution of the five dimensions is shown with mean (**3.057**), standard error (**0.079**), and standard deviation (**1.143**). As a result, the sample data is statistically significant to achieve the objectives of the current research. Moreover, these results indicate that the company tends to be more sensitive to content marketing.

Dimensions	Mean		Std. Deviation
	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic
RC	3.000	0.079	1.142
СС	3.024	0.078	1.132
CV	2.995	0.079	1.144
EC	3.114	0.077	1.120
AC	3.152	0.081	1.177
Average	3.057	0.079	1.143

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of the Content Marketing (n=245)

b. Descriptive Statistics of the Authentic Marketing

Table 2 provides a summary of the mean, standard error, standard deviation, and variance for authentic marketing. The frequency distribution of the five dimensions is shown with mean (**2.964**), standard error (**0.078**), and standard deviation (**1.126**). As a result, the sample data is statistically significant to achieve the objectives of the current research. Moreover, these results indicate that the company tends to be more sensitive to authentic marketing.

Dimensions	Mean		Std. Deviation		
	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic		
VC	2.957	0.078	1.131		
R	2.915	0.083	1.212		
AA	2.967	0.075	1.088		
С	2.991	0.074	1.073		
0	2.991	0.077	1.125		
Average	2.964	0.078	1.126		

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of the Authentic Marketing (n=245)

c. Descriptive Statistics of the Customer Delight

Table 3 provides a summary of the mean, standard error, standard deviation, and variance for customer delight. The frequency distribution of the five dimensions is shown with mean (**3.251**), standard error (**0.079**), and standard deviation (**1.144**). As a result, the sample data is statistically significant to achieve the objectives of the current research. Moreover, these results indicate that the company tends to be more sensitive to customer delight.

Dimensions	Mean		Std. Deviation
	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic
1	2.853	0.084	1.216
E	3.142	0.077	1.125
S	3.355	0.076	1.105
Т	3.403	0.081	1.177
V	3.502	0.076	1.097
Average	3.251	0.079	1.144

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of the Customer Delight (n=245)

1. Hypotheses Testing Using Structural Equation Model (SEM)

Structural equation modeling (SEM) is a multivariate analysis technique used to examine the direct and indirect effect between variables. This is achieved by estimating multiple correlated regression equations at the same time (Ellis & Webster, 1998, p. 150). The subsequent structural equation model, created using AMOS V.29, is as follows:

a. Structural Equation Model of Independent Variable Effect on Dependent Variable

This study examined the effect of content marketing on customer delight using exogenous models and relevant fit indices. The acceptable model fit (GFI = 0.954, RMSEA = 0.047). While the chi-square index was significant (χ^2 = 49.502, df = 34, χ^2 /df = 1.456), the residuals were used in the final structural equation model (SEM), as shown in Figure 2.

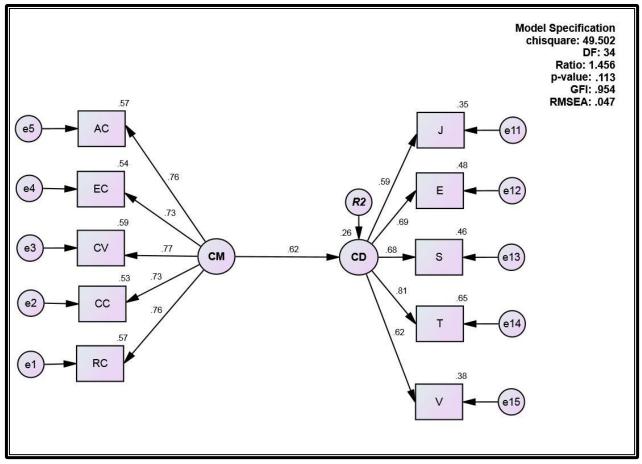


Figure 2: Path Effect of Independent Variable on Dependent Variable

Figure 2 shows a positive and significant effect of content marketing and customer delight, with a path effect of 0.62 use of (H1). Additionally, Figure 3 indicates acceptable model fit (GFI = 0.941, CFI = 0.984, RMSEA = 0.025). While the chi-square index was significant (χ^2 = 272.675, df = 219, χ^2 /df = 1.245), the figure reveals five statistically significant path effect.

Likening these results to the hypotheses, a standardized path effect of 0.76 indicates a relevance of content has a significant and positive effect on customer delight use of (H1a). Likewise, a standardized path effect of 0.73 indicates a content credibility has a significant and positive effect on customer delight use of (H1b). The path between content value and customer delight was .77, indicating a content value has a significant and positive effect on customer delight use of (H1c). The path between emotion of content and positive customer delight was .73, indicating an emotion of content has a significant and positive effect on customer delight use of (H1d). Finally, a standardized path effect of 0.76 refers to an attractive of content has a significant and positive effect on customer delight use of (H1e).

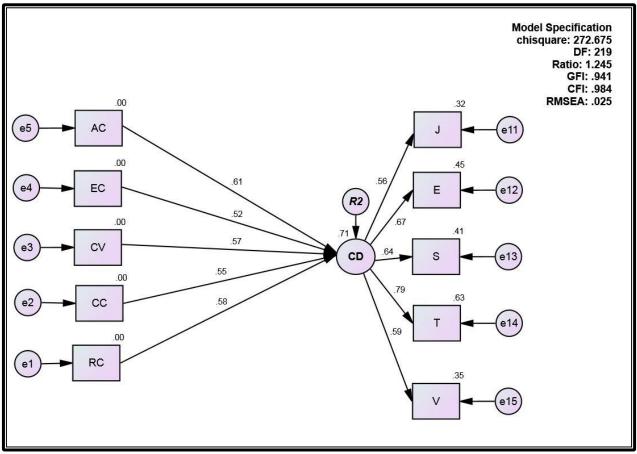


Figure 3: Path Effect of Independent Variable Dimensions on Dependent Variable

b. Structural Equation Model of Moderating Effect on the Relationship between Variables

Figure 4 shows acceptable model fit indices (GFI = .937, CFI = .986, RMSEA = .023). Additionally, the chi-square value was significant (χ^2 = 318.059, df = 264, χ^2 /df = 1.205), and the results in Figure 4 support the existence of a significant interaction effect. This conclusion is based on the analysis of factor loadings, error variances, and the coefficient value of the interaction variable (.80). Additionally, the increase in R² from .62 in the direct effect model to .58 in the interactive effect model provides strong evidence for this interaction. Thus, authentic marketing significantly moderates the relationship between content marketing and customer delight use of (H2).

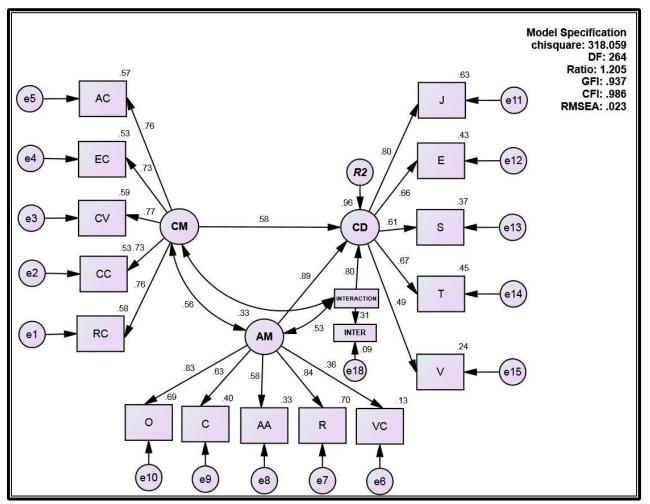


Figure 4 : Path Effect of Moderator Variable between Independent Variable Dimensions and Dependent Variable

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study confirm the existence of a positive, statistically significant relationship between content marketing and customer delight in the context of communications, as good and interactive content contributes significantly to enhancing customer experience and increasing their satisfaction. The study also showed that authentic marketing plays an important role in modifying this relationship, as it acts as an interactive variable between the two main variables. This effect is explained by the fact that authentic marketing lends credibility to marketing content, which increases customer confidence in the brand, and thus enhances customer delight. Therefore, striking a balance between engaging and original content is crucial to enhancing customer delight. The study could be replicated on a larger, more diverse sample of clients to generalize the findings to a wider population. As well as studying the effect of factors such as age, gender, education, and income on the relationship between content marketing and customer delight, and the interactive effect of authentic marketing. In addition to the possibility of measuring the financial effect of content marketing and authentic marketing on the company's performance, such as increasing sales or improving the return on investment. Finally, studying the effect of different social media platforms on the effectiveness of content marketing and authentic marketing, and measuring customer interaction on these platforms.

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