




Presenting a Content Marketing Process Model in the Iranian Banking Industry (Case Study: Bank Mellat)

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aims to identify the critical components and strategies that can enhance the effectiveness of content marketing efforts, thereby improving market share and customer engagement.

Methodology: This study adopts a qualitative research approach, utilizing grounded theory to construct a process model for content marketing. It involves semi-structured interviews with a purposively selected group of 15 experts, including academic scholars and banking industry professionals, to ensure a deep understanding of the subject matter. The data analysis proceeded through open, axial, and selective coding, leading to the identification of main categories, axial categories, and concepts.

Findings: The research identifies several main categories critical for the successful implementation of content marketing in the banking sector. These include business understanding and planning, creation of a content management and strategy unit, setting content marketing goals, understanding audiences, identifying audience needs, determining content idea and theme, content production management, content publication management, managing expectations and customer experience, and feedback collection and process improvement. Each category encompasses various sub-categories and concepts, outlining a detailed framework for effective content marketing strategies.

Conclusion: The study concludes that a structured approach to content marketing, encompassing a thorough understanding of business objectives, audience needs, and the strategic planning of content creation and distribution, is crucial for enhancing the banking industry's market share and customer satisfaction. The proposed model offers a comprehensive guideline for banks to refine their content marketing efforts, suggesting that a focus on audience engagement, content relevancy, and continuous improvement based on feedback can significantly impact marketing success. The findings imply that adopting this model can help banks achieve a competitive edge through targeted, effective content marketing strategies.

Keywords: Content Marketing, Banking Industry, Indigenous Model, Process Model

1 Introduction

The banking industry is considered one of the most significant parts of any economy, and banks can be regarded as among the most crucial institutions in any country's financial market. With increased competition in traditional activities, the complexity of transactions, and the expansion of financial markets, the activities of commercial and specialized banks are taking on broader dimensions every day. Banks continually strive to allocate a larger market demand share to themselves by implementing policies that meet market demand and diversifying their services (Akdogan & Özşuca, 2019; Rahmani-nejad et al., 2014).

Over the years, marketing has changed dramatically due to various new technologies. For instance, traditional customer services have been replaced with social media management. These new channels for marketing and changing consumer behavior naturally require marketing professionals to develop new marketing methods (Arora & Sanni, 2019; Olanrewaju et al., 2020). Along with the growth of information and communication technology, a new form of marketing known as content marketing was introduced (Arora & Sanni, 2019; Bagheri et al., 2023), focusing on attracting and retaining customers by creating and distributing valuable content. The focus of this type of marketing is to change the audience's behavior and convert them into loyal customers through valuable content creation and awareness (Cavazos-Arroyo & Puente-Diaz, 2019; Ferreira da Silva & Moro, 2021).

Customers know what they are looking for and the path to assurance; thus, the best action is to produce content they enjoy. In this case, sensory, perceptual, and cognitive experience affects the behavioral and communicative experience of banking customers. Behavioral and communicative experience influences the improvement of customers' banking system experience, leading to loyalty, trust, and satisfaction (Talaneh & Sarboland, 2017). The key point is that if customers receive constant and valuable information from the company, they ultimately reward the company with their purchase and loyalty (Chen et al., 2023; Vakil et al., 2022).

Companies can use content marketing as a tool for educating, informing, and entertaining audiences and potential individuals to promote profitable actions that lead to sales leads (Bu et al., 2021; Hollebeek & Macky, 2019; Müller & Christandl, 2019). Researchers demonstrated how content value increases the audience's motivation to share

content (Bamm et al., 2018; Bonamigo et al., 2022). Furthermore, many examined how competency-based value and content assets can affect customers' buying behavior. Given these numerous benefits, it's no surprise that content marketing has become so popular (Bu et al., 2021; Soule et al., 2019).

Given the increased competition in the banking industry, banks need to offer distinct services to their customers compared to competitors to remain in the competitive scene. Nowadays, leading banks attempt to increase their profitability by satisfying important factors for customers in the best possible way; however, many banks have neglected their content marketing practices. Content marketing has been widely welcomed worldwide and is among the most popular methods in Iran (Mohammadkazemi et al., 2022). The output of implementing an effective content marketing program in the banking industry includes customer satisfaction, increased investment, increased deposits, and attracting new customers (Mohammadkazemi et al., 2022; Yeganegi & Ebrahimi, 2022).

In the competitive conditions dominating the business environment, gaining a larger market share is very challenging. Therefore, banks, considering the position that content marketing has found in the world of marketing and business, must prioritize increasing their market share with a focus on content marketing. Thus, given the novelty of this field, the aim of this research is to identify the components of content marketing and its relation to marketing in the Iranian banking industry to present a process model for better understanding and implementation.

2 Methods and Materials

This research is applied as it focuses on finding solutions to immediate problems with a practical nature, hence having a practical aspect, with the researcher being involved in the application of the results. In terms of research philosophy, this study follows the interpretative paradigm. This paradigm has an inductive approach (from specific to general) and seeks to understand the phenomenon from an internal perspective. This research is qualitative and aims at designing a model. In the qualitative phase, grounded theory will be used to generate a process model for content marketing in the banking industry. Considering the exploratory nature of qualitative research, semi-structured interviews were used in this study.

The research population includes academic experts (university professors and faculty members in the fields of

business management, marketing management, management) and operational experts (bank managers in marketing and public relations, marketing specialists, public relations specialists) with at least a master's degree and a minimum of 5 years of work experience in the related field. A total of 15 individuals were selected as interviewees based on the principle of saturation and purposively. Among the interviewees, 7 were executive experts, 6 were academic experts and faculty members, and 2 were both executive and academic experts. Among them, 9 held doctoral degrees, and 6 held master's degrees.

The interview results were evaluated using the qualitative content analysis method. Data analysis was systematically and continuously carried out in three stages: open, axial, and selective coding. The interview texts were read and reviewed

several times. Data were divided into sentences and paragraphs consistent with the original meaning and read several times. A unique code was assigned for each meaning unit, and codes with semantic proximity were categorized into one group. The detailed analysis of qualitative data was performed using MAXQDA software.

3 Findings and Results

In the open coding stage, out of 533 initially identified codes, 188 concepts were identified, and through axial coding, 41 categories were established, eventually leading to 10 main categories. The final indicators extracted from the interview texts are presented in [Table 1](#).

Table 1

Identified Concepts, Axial Categories, and Main Categories

Main Category	Axial Categories	Concepts
Business Understanding and Planning	Business Strategy	Having a strategy, defining a vision, defining a mission
	Planning and Operational Plan	Planning based on strategy, having an operational plan, tactical planning, goal-based planning
	Business Area Research	Research on market size and needs, understanding competitors and existing competition in the market, gaining deep insights into the market and customers, research on the target market
Creation of a Management and Strategy Unit for Content Production	Understanding Competitive Advantages	Recognizing competitive advantages, determining differentiation based on the organization's purpose
	Need for Diverse and Related Specializations	Various specializations involved in producing content, related specialties in different areas (marketing, public relations, information technology, etc.)
	Recruitment of Specialists and Team Building	Need for specialized individuals for content production, selection and recruitment of specialists in relevant fields, creating a content production team and paying attention to its structure, employing internal or recruiting external forces, developing specialist manpower
Setting Content Marketing Goals	Creating Coordination Between Specialties and Units	The necessity of creating coordination among different specialties, the need for a centralized unit to direct the entire content production process, preventing parallel work by different units, identifying executive team members and assigning responsibilities
	Specificity of Content Marketing Goals	Targeted content production, content production based on business strategy, aligning content marketing goals with organizational goals, aligning content production components with marketing and brand goals
	Prioritization of Content Marketing Goals	The necessity of prioritizing goals in content production, prioritizing content marketing goals based on strategy and business objectives, prioritizing content marketing goals based on marketing objectives
Understanding Audiences	Production of Personalized Content	Targeted delivery of content and messages, targeted content production based on customer information, content production about the industry and customer activities, content production for audience groups, content production for specific audiences
	Personality and Lifestyle of Audiences	Understanding demographic and geographic characteristics of audiences, understanding the personality, preferences, and tastes of audiences, paying attention to the income characteristics of audiences, understanding the spending behavior of audiences, knowing about the life stage of audiences, content production according to the lifestyle of audiences
	Culture and Behavioral Patterns of Audiences	Aligning produced content with societal culture, understanding the cultural patterns of audiences, understanding social classes and their specific culture

Identifying Audience Needs	Personal Information of Audiences	Creating a comprehensive database of information and personal characteristics of audiences, developing audience profiles, targeted delivery of content based on audience profiles
	Segmentation of Audiences	Paying attention to common characteristics of audiences, content production based on customer classification, segmenting audiences based on common characteristics
	Understanding the Need and Reasons for Customer Visits	Identifying the concerns and issues of audiences, content production aimed at solving customers' problems, content production centered around the needs of audiences, awareness of the reasons for customers' visits
	Paying Attention to Hidden Needs of Audiences	Hidden consumer needs can be an important goal of content marketing, revealing hidden consumer needs with appropriate content
	Paying Attention to Future Needs of Audiences	Content production based on a forward-looking perspective, presenting content before product introduction, understanding audiences and presenting content and information about their future activities and industry
	Creating Need in Audiences	Using content marketing to create new needs, increasing the stimulating power of consumer need by produced content
Determining Content Idea and Theme	Prioritizing the Needs of Audiences	Content production for needs and based on their priority, differing levels of customer satisfaction based on different needs, varying expectations of audiences based on each need
	Ideation and Theme Determination	Ideation is one of the most important stages in content production, conducting brainstorming sessions, the ideation process should be open and unstructured, ideation can be done by organization members or outsourced, evaluating performance and ideas of successful brands in content production, ideation based on understanding customers and their needs, ideation based on different audience groups, the necessity of producing content different and special compared to competitors
	Recording, Screening, and Classifying Ideas and Themes	Collecting and recording different ideas, filtering ideas and selecting appropriate ones, summarizing and integrating different ideas and themes, classifying ideas, prioritizing ideas
Content Production Management	Determining Content Format and Style	Selecting content format and style based on idea and theme, attractiveness of content format and style, selecting content format and style suitable for audience access, determining format and style of content based on audience groups, considering the type of product in selecting content format and style
	Literature and Key Terms	Using suitable literature and words, paying attention to key terms frequently searched by audiences, using specific literature in presenting content
	Content Production Calendar	The necessity of drafting a content production plan, continuous and planned content production, producing content at specific intervals and sending to audiences, drafting a production calendar for each of the media, drafting a content production calendar based on the sales portfolio
	Management of Intrinsic and Formal Elements	Producing quality and useful content, content production in storytelling format, producing engaging content, content production in line with social responsibilities, stunning design, paying attention to visual identity (color and shape) in content production, adhering to psychology principles of sound and music, using appropriate format and style, having consistency, producing distinct content, producing simple and understandable content, indirect mention of product and service, not causing inconvenience to audiences, producing short content with low volume, high persuasiveness of content, creatively referring customers to the sales network in produced content
	Increasing Information and Awareness of Audiences	Providing useful information to customers, producing and publishing informative content for products, creating and strengthening trust through appropriate content production, updating audience awareness of old products and services, subtly increasing audience awareness level, content production to increase audience awareness of banking industry services, providing correct information indirectly and creating knowledge in audiences
	Content Production in Line with Branding	Increasing brand awareness through content production, indirectly introducing the brand and its products and services, appropriately linking occasions and events to brand values, promoting business and brand, ensuring content matches the essence and personality of the brand, defining and standardizing content production within the branding framework, brand development, content marketing in line with brand identity, enhancing brand position with distinct content production
Content Publication Management	Marketing Programs	Content production at different stages of the marketing funnel, using STP stages, content production based on stages of the product life cycle, considering the effect of content at each stage of audience behavior, content production in different phases along with product improvement
	Content Publication Calendar	Selecting the appropriate time for content publication, publishing content on occasions, publishing content at specific time intervals, having a publication calendar saves time, timely republishing of past content, specifying the time intervals for publishing a content, publishing content based on events and occurrences, a specific publication calendar for each of the media, the importance of timely content publication
	Publishing in Appropriate Media	Selecting the suitable channel for sharing and distributing content, paying attention to changes in media habits of audiences, importance of costs and budget in media selection, selecting media based

		on audience knowledge and content nature, selecting media based on content format and style, selecting media based on target audience groups
	Attention to Channels Accessible by Audiences	Recognizing media accessible to audiences, identifying specialized channels used by professions and different groups, identifying channels used by audiences, targeted media selection based on channels used by target audiences
	Social Networks and Virtual Spaces	The importance of using virtual spaces and social networks, social networks can deliver messages with the least cost and shortest time, paying attention to mobile-based media, increasing the level of interaction with audiences through social networks
	Publication in Specialized Media	Using specialized media for companies and industries, using specialized media for specific professions, publishing content in specialized media for different social groups
Managing Expectations and Customer Experience	Creating Satisfaction and Loyalty	The value of produced content for the audience, matching the customer experience with the expectations created in the customer by produced content
	Attention to Expectations and Its Compatibility with Service Quality	Compatibility of content quality with the quality of service and product provided, creating and strengthening trust with content production compatible with service and product
	Appropriate Training of Forces at Sales Points	The importance of training sales network personnel, training sales forces to align services with audience expectations, training personnel at sales points to optimally present the product to customers
	Interaction with Customers at Sales Points	Making customer relationships with the business enjoyable, proper interaction with customers at connection points and the sales network, maintaining and creating valuable and long-term relationships through content production, the importance of increasing interaction with customers through content production along the marketing funnel and converting it into a cylinder, guiding and appropriately responding to audiences
	Change and Positive Reinforcement of Consumer Behavior	Creating a positive attitude in audiences towards the banking industry through content production, converting consumption intent into purchase behavior, positively reinforcing consumer purchase behavior, changing audience behavior and performance to a profitable behavior for the company, producing engaging content to attract audiences and strengthen their purchase intention
Feedback Collection and Process Improvement	Feedback Collection	Determining methods for feedback collection, simplifying the feedback collection process from audiences, increasing our communication level with audiences through social networks and creating two-way interaction, listening to audiences, using marketing technology and tools for customer support teams, increasing brand credibility with feedback collection, following up on customer suggestions and complaints, showing the value of each customer's feedback, presenting customer feedback correctly
	Content Analysis	Careful examination of audience feedback, content analysis methods, identifying customer issues and problems, calculating changes in sales after content publication to evaluate effectiveness, evaluating content based on the number of critiques, analyzing feedbacks based on the content production goal
	Improvement of Content Production Process	Reviewing guidelines and processes for content production, using identified issues and problems as clues for content production, reviewing content goals and strategies, correcting and improving the content production process

To draw the research model, the first step is determining the internal relationships of content marketing indicators in the banking industry. Based on this, the relationship between

the axial categories and the main categories was outlined [Figure 1](#).

Figure 1

Most Important Factors



4 Discussion and Conclusion

In recent years, the widespread use of content and content marketing has been observed in the Iranian banking industry. The expansion of technology and the reduction of content production and distribution costs have made this strategy a focus of serious attention. Content marketing is not just a firm push towards using modern technology, but it emphasizes a change in attitude towards the use of media and communication tools.

The importance of the content marketing domain and the absence of an appropriate model prompted us to take an effective step in improving the banking industry by presenting a process model. The model presented in this

research shows an important aspect of the needs of the banking industry that itself requires marketing cognitive quality. The presented framework demonstrates how banks can enhance their market share in areas such as depositors, investors, and borrowers by relying on updated technology, investing in appropriate content production, and innovative marketing strategies.

The absence of a stable framework in the content marketing process, the dependency of most existing models on the creators' experience, the presentation of different steps and stages according to researchers' viewpoints, the linearity of most existing models, ignoring the structure of the content production unit and specialist forces, not considering customer expectation and experience

management, and overlooking marketing programs and understanding audience needs are challenges mentioned in current approaches to content marketing.

According to the presented model, the content marketing process begins with "business understanding and planning," encompassing three key components. "Business strategy" indicates that the business's strategy, vision, and mission must be clear so that we can set and implement content marketing goals and programs. "Planning and determining the operational plan" highlights the need for planning to execute strategies in an operational plan with appropriate tactics. "Business area research" is a component that refers to market needs, market size, and existing competitions. "Understanding the company's advantages" emphasizes recognizing our differentiation from competitors and considering our competitive advantage over other organizations.

The main category of "creating a strategic management and content production unit" includes three key components: "the need for diverse and related specializations," indicating that content production involves various specialties in different areas, "recruitment of specialists and team building," suggesting we need a unified team with appropriately selected and recruited individuals with relevant expertise, and "creating coordination between specialties and units," showing the necessity of a centralized unit to direct the content production, publication, and follow-up process, and prevent parallel work in the organization.

The third main category, "setting content marketing goals," has two sub-categories: "specificity of content marketing goals," showing that content marketing goals should support business objectives and promote business growth, and "prioritization of content marketing goals," indicating that content marketing goals should be prioritized based on marketing objectives and expected outcomes.

The main category of "understanding audiences" encompasses five key components: "production of personalized content," which is about targeted content delivery based on audience personas, "personality and lifestyle of audiences," considering the personality and lifestyle of audiences in content production, "culture and behavioral patterns of audiences," highlighting the importance of matching produced content with societal behavioral patterns and culture, "personal information of audiences," emphasizing the importance of audience information and its aggregation, and "segmentation of audiences," stating that it is essential to segment customers

based on their information to produce and create content for target groups.

The main category of "determining audience needs" includes indicators like "understanding the need and reasons for customers' visits," indicating the importance of recognizing customers' needs and reasons for visiting the bank and producing content based on those needs and solving their problems, "paying attention to hidden needs of audiences," suggesting that addressing audiences' hidden needs can be an important goal of content marketing as suitable content can reveal these needs, "paying attention to future needs of audiences," highlighting the importance of producing content with a future-oriented perspective, "creating need in audiences," meaning using content marketing to stimulate and create need in audiences, and "prioritizing needs of audiences," indicating that individuals have expectations based on their needs and customer satisfaction levels vary for each need, thus content production should be based on prioritizing these needs after identifying them.

The main category of "determining content idea and theme" includes six key components: "ideation and theme determination," stating that an idea plays a primary role in any content production project as content should be different and unique for greater appeal, thus ideation with the participation of various individuals and brainstorming techniques is very suitable, "recording, screening, and classifying ideas and themes," mentioning that collected themes and ideas should be classified and prioritized for appropriate planning and scheduling of their production, "determining content format and style," stating that the content format and style are determined based on ideas, characteristics of target audiences, and their access ways, "literature and key terms," referring to the use of suitable literature and precise selection of key terms.

The main category of "content production management" includes five sub-categories: "content production calendar," which refers to having a calendar for continuously and systematically producing content, "management of intrinsic and formal elements," emphasizing the importance of producing high-quality, valuable, reliable, orderly, entertaining content with high shareability, "increasing information and awareness of audiences," indicating that content production and publication aim to increase audiences' information and awareness of banking industry services, "content production in line with branding," focuses on the alignment between produced content and brand indicators and their mutual effects, "marketing programs,"

refers to content production based on the product lifecycle, marketing funnel, and other marketing programs.

"Content publication management" encompasses five key components: "content publication calendar," having a calendar and scheduled plan for publishing content at the right time and media, "publishing in appropriate media," identifying and selecting suitable channels and media for sharing and publishing content, "attention to channels accessible by audiences," identifying channels used by target audiences and channels used by various professions and specialized groups, "social networks and virtual spaces," targeting content sharing on social networks and virtual spaces and creating two-way interactions with audiences, "publication in specialized media," emphasizing the importance of using specialized media for specific customers and utilizing magazines, brochures, and specialized exhibitions.

The main category of "managing expectations and customer experience" includes five key components: "creating satisfaction and loyalty," stating that the desired quality of content and providing suitable products and services increase customer satisfaction and loyalty, "attention to expectations and the quality of service compatibility with them," stating that expectations created for customers in produced content should be compatible with the product and service offered at sales points, "appropriate training of forces at sales points," referring to training sales network employees on the content they support, "interaction with customers at sales points," achieving continuous interaction and commerce with audiences in the sales network through targeted and well-crafted content that solves their problems and answers their questions, "change and positive reinforcement of consumer behavior," indicating that content production aims to positively strengthen consumer purchase behavior and turn it into a habit.

The main category of "feedback collection and process improvement" includes three key components: "interaction with audiences and feedback collection," creating two-way interaction with audiences, following up on their suggestions and criticisms, and examining their reactions to the produced content, "content analysis," referring to evaluating produced content using content analysis methods, "improving content production process," stating that feedback and evaluation results can lead to improvements in the content production process.

Based on the results, it is suggested that since the content production process encompasses various specializations and

various components also affect its effectiveness, after comprehensively understanding the business and its objectives, efforts should be made to establish a content production unit to direct the content marketing domain; also, content marketing objectives should be set based on organizational goals and strategies as well as the branding domain. Managing expectations and customer experience is a very important component because it encompasses the compatibility of the service and product offered with the produced content and also the necessity of training forces to support the produced content. Therefore, it is recommended to prioritize content success and achieving customer satisfaction and loyalty. To advance marketing programs, it is suggested that content production be based on the product lifecycle, marketing funnel, and other marketing programs in the content production process.

Considering the generalizability of the presented model, it is suggested to be utilized in other businesses as well; it is also recommended to conduct a quantitative study through distributing questionnaires and surveys among banking industry managers based on the findings of this model to determine the impact of the suggested model.

Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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