

SEARCH PECULIARITIES OF EDUCATIONAL CONTENT IN CONTEXT OF REMOTE WORK

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Abstract. Last decades showed that there is a huge shift in the way how marketing professionals and scientists understand digital marketing activities. The focus moved from proper selection of communication channel or other measures to more holistic approaches such as inbound marketing, which unifies the range of marketing tactics like content marketing, marketing on social media, search marketing etc. The content became one of the core elements of digital value proposition (OVP) along with the product. The pandemic of COVID-19 have changed the behavior of people in their everyday life both in the context of entertainment and work. Teleworking has become a norm and revealed a range of issues faced by those who work from home. They are on their own with adoption of new and in some cases never used before technologies and obviously need for effective support in form of accessible and usable content which in turn creates a lot of uncertainties for companies operating in the field. Decisions related to the form of content the search channel became relevant as never before. Paper aims to investigate trends and changes of the educational content consumption preferences among the users in the face of COVID-19. In order to investigate needs and preferences of consumers in terms of educational content related to teleworking software consumption, a survey method and descriptive statistics were employed. Home-based workers of various profiles were interviewed and specific trends of needs for software and educational content as well as forms and search channels of the content were revealed. The study shows that during the COVID-19 and the remote work determined by it, a need for communicational technologies, and software increased which caused in turn increased need for educational content related to usage of those technologies. Consumers are intended to look for such a content using mainly search engines then video streaming services, websites of software producers and then forums. The most preferred form of content – video and combined text and images.

Keywords: consumer behaviour, inbound marketing, content marketing.

JEL Classification: M31, O33.

Introduction

ICT development enabled new type interaction, and one of the critical changes experienced by traditional marketing was driven by the rise of digital marketing, where a set of tools that can be used in different ways in order to reach the target audience is growing all the time. The electronic market is growing all the time as well: the number of Internet users at the end of June 2019 was over more than 4,5 billion users in all world (Internet World Statistic, 2019). Every day Google counts more than 5,9 billion searches while the number of websites is almost reaching 1.74 billion (Internet Live Stats, 2019a, 2019b).

The changes which were brought by COVID-9 revealed the importance of online activities (leisure, studies,

and work) and necessity of new teaching and studying ways. This rise the question of importance of tools which are most acceptable and suitable for consumers.

Nowadays, consumers are involved in various activities online. The use of information and communication technologies in daily life became a common thing, however users and companies was not ready for such dramatic shift to online activities. Previously, average internet user spent approximately 6 hours per day (Kemp, 2018). During COVID-19 pandemic this amount increased a lot. Various innovative solutions, new technologies and tools for fulfilling user needs and expectations are created. Keeping in mind that employees who in their working activities have to increase their qualification, knowledge and skills all the time experience issues related to

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gaining of proper materials, there is a need to understand the preferences of such employees. Thus the question of how users search for educational content in context of remote work, what triggers, aspects, or tools are most acceptable and can attract attention.

The aim of the article is to investigate trends and changes of the educational content consumption preferences among the users in the face of COVID-19 and reveal the most relevant content search channels and forms of content, as well as to shape the directions of the further researches. For investigation literature review, structured questioner and descriptive statistics were employed.

1. Digital content, search and consumption channel: theoretical background

Describing the behaviour of the consumers while searching and consuming the educational content the inbound strategy should be considered since the educational content is the one that is intended to be searched by the consumers itself. The educational content is seen as part of content marketing which in turn is part of broader concept called inbound marketing.

The development of high-quality targeted content plays a key role in inbound marketing (Bezhovski, 2015), and many authors consider content marketing to be a key element of inbound marketing (Chaffey & Smith, 2017; Dakouan et al., 2019; Opreana & Vinerean, 2015; Patrutiu-Baltes, 2016), which determines the need for special attention to content marketing when modeling the traffic of online visitors in the context of inbound marketing.

Despite the growing interest in content marketing as a modern marketing tool, research in this area is not abundant (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019; Müller & Christandl, 2019; Sabaitytė et al., 2019; Wall & Spinuzzi, 2018). A small piece of academic literature recognizes content marketing as an empirically tested concept with some exceptions (Mansour & Barandas, 2017). Even the concept does not escape scientific discussion and is analyzed and refined by a number of authors (Davidavičienė et al., 2021; Patrutiu Baltes, 2015; Plessis, 2015; Vinerean, 2017; Westermann et al., 2019; Kee & Yazdanifard, 2015).

One of the first definitions of content marketing is that it is the creation and distribution of educational and / or compelling content, in a variety of formats, to attract and retain customers (Pulizzi & Barret, 2008). The authors clearly identify the purpose and processes of the content, but the overly specific purpose of the content is a shortcoming, as it may limit organizations' perceptions and flexibility in content creation.

Some authors attribute an element of narrative to content marketing: content marketing is a strategic storytelling technique that seeks to change the behavior of inactive consumers through unhindered, engaging brand conversations in lived media (Plessis, 2015). Kee and Yazdanifard (2015) argue that content marketing is

“history marketing” and argue that content marketing is about informing and persuading an audience to use good content to increase awareness or change the audience's brand perception

“Content marketing is a marketing and business process designed to create and distribute relevant and valuable content in order to attract, acquire and engage a clearly defined and understandable target audience to drive profitable customer action” (Pulizzi, 2012).

Content marketing is the process of creating and delivering content (i.e., text messages, images, videos, animation) to target customers in ways that add value and engage them with the company (Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016).

Digital content marketing is the creation and distribution of relevant, valuable, brand-related content to existing or future customers on digital platforms to develop their favorable brand engagement, trust, and communication (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019).

In summary, the concept of content marketing is variable and tends to vary depending on the research context e.g. There are differences between research on content marketing, where content is treated as a product, and research on content marketing, where its purpose is to promote other products, or to develop brand relations with consumers through content. It can be seen that the predominant aspects in defining content marketing are the creation and delivery of content for the purpose of engaging, retaining, and building a relationship with an organization or brand.

The characteristics of the content are also emphasized: valuable, relevant or consistent, less frequently mentioned purpose of the content: educational content, compelling content. Content delivery channels are often not detailed in the definitions, as is the form or content format of the content. The discussion also develops in the context of the content creator. Some authors argue that only content created by an organization should be considered in the context of content marketing. The integration of user-generated content, which some authors (Human et al., 2018) attribute to content marketing, also poses some challenges.

Defining digital content, i.e. assessing the purpose of the content, cannot be avoided either. for whom or for what purpose it is designed or to meet the content-related needs of users. According to the purpose, the content can be divided into: (1) educational, (2) informational, (3) entertaining (de Aguilera-Moyano et al., 2015).

Chaffey and Smith (2017) presents inbound marketing as a complex system of activities, channels, tools, and flows in which all activities, from brand content development to marketing observation, social listening, and engagement, focus on generating traffic to the so-called content hub, the role of which can be assigned to both the website and the e-mail. Blog for both portal. It is clear that the driving force in the system is the content that, through channels such as social media and search engines, generates traffic to the content hub (website, blog,

and portal) through search marketing and social media marketing processes. The channels of content distribution could be revealed from tactical activities of inbound marketing which are search marketing and marketing in social media (Chaffey & Smith, 2017). Other researchers present different tactical activities of inbound marketing – e.g. Opreana and Vinerean (2015) suggest that tactical activities are content marketing, social media marketing, SEO, brand focused marketing communication. Dakouan et al. (2019) argue that inbound marketing contains content marketing, social media marketing and search engine optimization (SEO). So in the light of what has been said above the channels of search and consumption of the educational content in the context of this research are – company’s website, social media and search engines.

In assessing consumers behaviour while looking for a certain content the format of the content could be important as well. Vinerean (2017) distinguishes tactical content marketing solutions, which are: blog entries, e-books, templates, infographics, videos, podcasts, guides, kits, advice sheets and checklists, webinars, white papers, case studies, surveys / research results, user - generated content. The author also emphasizes that, in addition to the measures listed, the basic forms of content, such as static image (images), dynamic image (video), text and sound, should also be mentioned. The content of Patrutiu Baltes (2015), in the context of content marketing, takes the following forms: consumer magazines, print or online newsletters, digital content, websites or microsites, white papers, webcasts or webinars, podcasts, video portals or series, personal road shows, round tables, interactive online events, e-mail. According to Mansour and Barandas (2017), content marketing tactical decisions consist of website content, email, blog posts, email newsletters, infographics, social media chats, podcasts, video and visual content, webinars, email books and downloadable white papers. Because of the variety and complexity of the content formats in this research the basic formats will be used in order to understand consumer’s preferences towards educational content in terms of formats.

2. Research methodology and data

The aim of the research is to identify the needs for the educational content related to usage of IT affected by the distant work as well as the trends and preferences for content form and channel.

This is an exploratory study, so only methods of descriptive statistics were used. In order to collect data, the survey method was employed. The questionnaire was prepared and spread amongst the working citizens of Lithuania. Responders between 18–60 years old were interviewed. The research took place from March 2020 to July 2020.

The questionnaire was composed of 12 questions divided into three groups: 1) questions related to personal information of responders (age, gender, education));

2) questions related to respondent’s peculiarities of work (work experience, type of organization, nature of work); 3) questions related to need of the educational content related to usage of IT. Questions were articulated as follows:

1. What additional IT tools did you start using remotely?
2. Have you face the challenges of working remotely using new IT tools for work?
3. If you had to search for training content to solve teleworking challenges (related to the use of IT), what format of training content did you prefer?
4. Where did you look for educational content?

166 responders have participated in the survey. The structure of the age of responders matches characteristics of target audience of working citizens and is sorted by size as follows: 18–20, 21–30, 50–60, 31–40, 41–50 years old (see Figure 1).

The structure of the gender of respondents (see Figure 2) is divided to 72.1% female and 27.9% male which makes complicated to compare the results of the research in terms of gender.

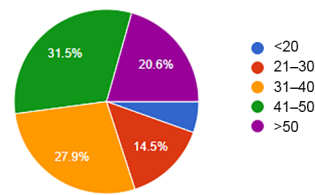


Figure 1. The age group of responders (created by authors)

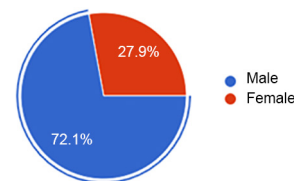


Figure 2. The gender of respondents (created by authors)

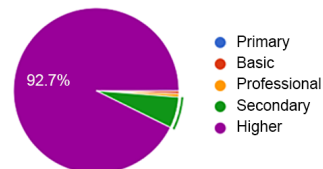


Figure 3. Education of the respondents (created by authors)

Most of the responders have high education – almost 93%. The percentage of other levels of education is insignificant (see Figure 3).

3. Research results and discussion

In assessing need for content driving situation only 22.6% of respondents answered that they haven’t started using new technologies during the pandemic because of

remote work (see Figure 4). The rest of the respondents noted that remote work has caused usage of new software. The structure is as followed – 75.5% of respondents were forced to start using distant communication measures such as Zoom or MS Teams. 5.8% started to use project management systems, 11.6% document management systems, distant learning solutions (e.g. Moodle, Google classes) 19.4%, remote cooperation solutions (e.g. one drive, Zotero, Google Docs) 21.3%. So the conclusion is that remote work forced by COVID-19 pandemic definitely had an impact on usage new for the employee's measures of work, which could lead to facing of the new uncertainties and challenges. Those challenges of using never before used software are closely related to need of learning for example new functionalities. 40% of responders mentioned that they encountered such kind of problems. Only 17% of those answered they never looked for educational content in order to solve the issues they faced. The form of the content preferred by consumers varies but certain trends can be traced. The visual content apparently predominates (see Figure 5). 38.7% and 33.9% of respondents prefer educational content in forms of video and text mixed with images respectively. Only 9.7% prefer text and none of the respondents prefer sound as form of educational content. Such trends can be explained by the fact that functional peculiarities of the software are much easier explained when using visual materials than describing by text or speech. Regarding the content search channels (see Figure 6) Google clearly is the most important one, 84% would look for the educational content using it. None of the respondents has even mention other search engines. The second in line

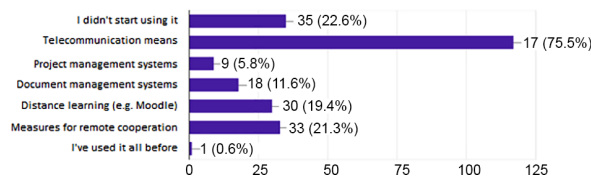


Figure 4. The usage of IT tools (created by authors)

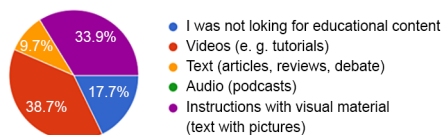


Figure 5. The form of educational content preferred by the respondents (created by authors)

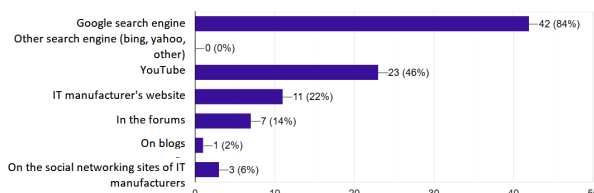


Figure 6. Educational content search channels preferred by the responders (created by authors)

is YouTube (46%) and there is no surprise about that keeping in mind most preferred form of such a content. Only 22% of respondents would go to software producer's website. Forums, blogs and software producer's social media account as a channel for content search was chosen by 14%, 2% and 6% respectively.

In summary, it could be said that changes in consumer's routine can trigger the need of educational content. Especially the changes that are never met before. The pandemic of COVID-19 have forced employees do use software and communication tools that are quite new for them. Which have led to increased need of educational activities. The distribution of proportions in the research sample shows that certain patterns and models could be traced in the behavior of consumers while seeking relevant content and this shapes future research directions.

As a limitation of this research: the statistical significance of the differences in choices of digital content forms and search channels should be evaluated in the future, the deeper research should be conducted and an enhanced variety of different purposes of the content should be involved as well. Such kind of research and new knowledge would be a catalyst for new solutions that will empower businesses to fulfil the needs of consumers in terms of content marketing and increase business performance in general.

Conclusions

Last decades showed that there is a huge shift in the way how marketing professionals and scientists understand digital marketing activities. The focus moved from proper selection of communication channel or other measures to more holistic approaches such as inbound marketing, which unifies the range of marketing tactics like content marketing, marketing on social media, search marketing etc. The content became one of the core elements of digital value proposition (OVP) along with the product. The pandemic of COVID-19 have changed the behaviour of people in their everyday life both in the context of entertainment and work. Teleworking has become a norm and revealed a range of issues faced by those who work from home. They are on they own with adoption of new and in some cases never used before technologies and obviously need for effective support in form of accessible and usable content which in turn creates a lot of uncertainties for companies operating in the field.

The literature analysis showed that the creation and distribution of content is considered to be the most important activities of content marketing which in turn is the part of bigger holistic approach so called inbound marketing. And the main aim of those activities are engaging, retaining, and building a relationship with an organization or brand.

The educational content is only a part of possible purposes of the content. There is more that should be adopted by companies to fulfil the informational needs of the consumers – entertaining and information contents.

The forms and formats of the content varies from the very basic – text, image, video, sound to more complex formats integrating the content and the media, like podcasts, infographics etc. The inbound marketing system dictates possible distribution channels for the content, which come from the tactical activities. The main channels are content hub of the company, social medias, search engines.

The empirical research showed that the certain patterns in the consumers search and consumption of the educational content could be traced which means that deeper and more detailed researches could reveal models of consumer behaviour of seeking certain type of content starting from the possible triggers of content need till the consumption of the content.

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