

AI-Enabled Chatbots, Content Marketing, Customer Engagement, and Brand Loyalty: A Systematic Literature Review and Integrated Framework

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Abstract

This study provides a systematic literature review of research on content marketing, customer engagement, brand loyalty, and the emerging role of AI-enabled chatbots in digital marketing communication. Drawing on uses and gratifications (U&G) theory, this paper synthesizes fragmented literature and develops an integrated conceptual framework explaining how content marketing influences customer engagement and brand loyalty in AI-mediated environments. The study identifies key research gaps, including the limited application of U&G theory to chatbot interactions and the lack of integrated models incorporating AI-driven communication technologies. A conceptual framework is proposed in which customer engagement acts as a central mechanism linking content marketing and brand loyalty, while chatbots function as both mediators and moderators of this relationship. The study contributes to theory by extending U&G into AI-enabled communication contexts and offering a unified perspective on digital consumer engagement.

Keywords: AI, Chatbot, U&G Theory, Brand Loyalty

Introduction

The rapid evolution of digital media has fundamentally transformed how brands communicate with consumers. Social media platforms, mobile technologies, and data-driven tools have enabled firms to shift from one-way promotional messaging to interactive and continuous engagement with their audiences. In this context, content marketing has emerged as a dominant strategic approach, emphasizing the creation and dissemination of

valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain customers. Rather than focusing on direct persuasion, content marketing aims to build long-term relationships by fostering meaningful interactions between brands and consumers.

At the same time, customer engagement has become a central concept in marketing research and practice. Engagement reflects consumers' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral investment in brand interactions, particularly within social media environments. Prior studies have consistently shown that higher levels of customer engagement contribute to favorable outcomes such as brand trust, brand love, and ultimately brand loyalty. As a result, a growing body of literature has examined the mechanisms through which content marketing stimulates engagement and how engagement, in turn, drives loyalty-related outcomes.

Despite these advances, the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI)—particularly AI-enabled chatbots—has introduced a new layer of complexity to digital marketing communication. Chatbots are increasingly deployed by firms as interactive agents that simulate human conversation, providing real-time responses, personalized recommendations, and continuous customer support. Unlike traditional social media content, chatbot interactions are inherently dialogic, adaptive, and user-driven, which may fundamentally reshape how consumers experience brand communication.

However, existing research remains fragmented in understanding the role of chatbots within the broader content marketing–engagement–loyalty framework. First, while the uses and gratifications (U&G) theory has been widely applied to explain consumers' motivations for engaging with social media content, its application to chatbot-mediated interactions is still limited. In particular, there is a lack of clarity regarding what types of gratifications (e.g., informational, entertainment, social, or relational) are obtained through chatbot use and how these gratifications influence customer engagement and satisfaction.

Second, prior studies have predominantly examined content marketing and customer engagement in static or semi-interactive environments (e.g., posts, videos, or brand pages), with limited attention to dynamic, conversational interfaces. As a result, the interactive mechanisms through which chatbots facilitate or enhance engagement remain underexplored. It is unclear whether chatbots function merely as service tools or whether they act as active drivers of engagement by co-creating value with users.

Third, although customer engagement is widely recognized as a key antecedent of brand loyalty, the integration of AI-enabled communication technologies into this relationship has not been systematically reviewed. In particular, issues such as perceived privacy risk, user satisfaction, and continued usage intention in chatbot interactions have been discussed in isolation, without being incorporated into a comprehensive theoretical framework linking content marketing to loyalty outcomes.

To address these gaps, this study conducts a systematic literature review of research on content marketing, customer engagement, and brand loyalty, with a particular focus on the emerging role of AI-enabled chatbots in digital marketing communication. Drawing on the uses and gratifications (U&G) theory, this paper aims to integrate fragmented research

streams and develop a holistic understanding of how different forms of content and interaction mechanisms influence consumer responses.

This study makes three main contributions. First, it synthesizes and organizes the existing literature on content marketing, customer engagement, and brand loyalty, providing a structured overview of key constructs and relationships in digital marketing contexts. Second, it extends the application of U&G theory by examining its relevance in chatbot-mediated interactions, identifying key dimensions of gratifications obtained through AI-enabled communication. Third, it proposes an integrated conceptual framework that incorporates chatbots into the content marketing–engagement–loyalty pathway, highlighting their potential role as both mediators and moderators in shaping consumer behavior.

By bridging the gap between traditional content marketing research and emerging AI-driven communication technologies, this study offers both theoretical insights and practical implications for marketers seeking to enhance customer engagement and build long-term brand loyalty in the digital era.

Methodology

This study adopts a systematic literature review approach to synthesize existing research on content marketing, customer engagement, brand loyalty, and the emerging role of AI-enabled chatbots. A structured and transparent review process was employed to ensure the rigor, replicability, and comprehensiveness of the analysis.

Data sources and search strategy

Relevant literature was identified through major academic databases, including Web of Science (SSCI), Scopus, and ScienceDirect. These databases were selected due to their extensive coverage of high-quality journals in marketing, business, and information systems. The search process was conducted using combinations of the following keywords: “content marketing,” “customer engagement,” “brand loyalty,” “chatbots,” “artificial intelligence,” “social media marketing,” “online engagement,” and “uses and gratifications.” Boolean operators (AND, OR) were applied to refine the search and ensure comprehensive coverage of relevant studies.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

To ensure relevance and quality, the following inclusion criteria were applied:

- Peer-reviewed journal articles
- Publications in English
- Studies focusing on digital marketing, social media, or AI-enabled communication
- Research addressing at least one of the core constructs: content marketing, customer engagement, brand loyalty, or chatbots

Exclusion criteria included:

- Conference papers, book chapters, and non-peer-reviewed sources
- Studies unrelated to marketing or consumer behavior contexts
- Articles lacking empirical or theoretical relevance to the research framework

Screening and selection process

The initial search yielded a broad pool of articles. After removing duplicates, titles and abstracts were screened to assess relevance. Full-text reviews were then conducted to ensure alignment with the study objectives. Following this process, a final sample of articles was selected for in-depth analysis.

Analytical approach

A thematic analysis was employed to systematically organize and interpret the selected literature. The analysis focused on identifying recurring themes, theoretical foundations, key constructs, and relationships among variables.

Specifically, the reviewed studies were categorized into four major themes:

1. Content marketing and its dimensions
2. Customer engagement and its drivers
3. The relationship between engagement and brand loyalty
4. The role of AI-enabled chatbots in marketing communication

By integrating these themes, this study develops a comprehensive framework that captures the evolving dynamics of digital marketing in the AI era. Figure 2 presents the PRISMA flow diagram of the article selection process.

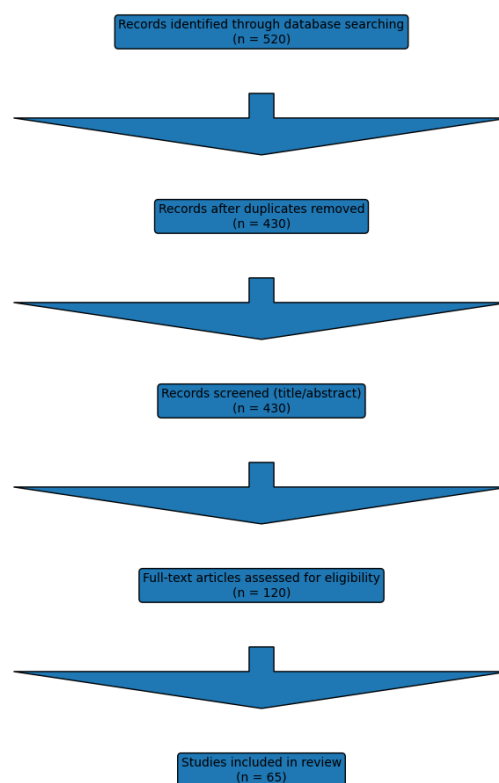


Figure 2. PRISMA flow diagram of the literature selection process.

Literature Review

To enhance methodological rigor, the review process was guided by PRISMA principles, ensuring transparency, traceability, and replicability of article selection and screening procedures. This structured approach strengthens the validity of the synthesized findings and reduces selection bias commonly associated with narrative reviews. Table 1 summarizes the key studies reviewed in this research.

Table 1

Summary of Key Literature on Content Marketing, Customer Engagement, and AI-enabled Chatbots

| Author(s) | Research Context | Methodology | Key Focus | Key Findings | Relevance to This Study |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|---|--|
| Hollebeek et al. (2014) | Online brand communities | Conceptual / empirical | Customer engagement | Engagement is multidimensional (cognitive, emotional, behavioral) | Provides foundation for engagement construct |
| Brodie et al. (2011) | Service-dominant logic | Conceptual | Engagement processes | Engagement drives value co-creation | Supports engagement as central mechanism |
| Dessart et al. (2015) | Social media | Qualitative | Engagement dimensions | Identifies interactive and experiential engagement forms | Extends engagement beyond transactional view |
| Ashley & Tuten (2015) | Social media marketing | Content analysis | Content strategies | Interactive and entertaining content increase engagement | Supports content → engagement link |
| Lou & Yuan (2019) | Digital content marketing | Survey | Content value | Informational and entertainment value drive engagement | Aligns with U&G perspective |
| Dolan et al. (2016) | Social media | Empirical | Content types | Emotional content increases engagement intensity | Supports emotional pathway |
| Vivek et al. (2012) | Consumer-brand relationships | Conceptual | Engagement-loyalty | Engagement leads to loyalty outcomes | Supports mediation role |
| Bowden (2009) | Service relationships | Conceptual | Engagement process | Engagement evolves over time | Highlights dynamic nature of engagement |
| van Doorn et al. (2010) | Customer behavior | Conceptual | Engagement behaviors | Engagement includes non-transactional behaviors | Supports behavioral dimension |
| Araujo (2018) | AI chatbots | Experimental | Human-AI interaction | Chatbots influence perceived communication quality | Supports chatbot communication role |
| Chung et al. (2020) | AI service | Survey | Chatbot usage | Perceived usefulness drives satisfaction | Supports chatbot → satisfaction link |
| Luo et al. (2019) | Customer service chatbot | Field study | AI vs human agents | Chatbots improve efficiency but may reduce emotional trust | Introduces tension in AI interactions |
| Gnewuch et al. (2017) | Human-computer interaction | Conceptual | Chatbot design | Anthropomorphism affects engagement | Supports emotional dimension |
| Xu et al. (2020) | AI interaction | Empirical | Privacy concerns | Privacy risk reduces trust and adoption | Supports moderating effect |
| Sundar & Limperos (2013) | Media theory | Conceptual | U&G extension | New media affordances reshape gratifications | Supports extending U&G to AI |

| Author(s) | Research Context | Methodology | Key Focus | Key Findings | Relevance to This Study |
|-------------------|------------------|-------------|---------------|--|---|
| Whang & Im (2021) | AI marketing | Empirical | AI engagement | AI interactions enhance personalization and engagement | Supports chatbot and as engagement driver |

Theoretical foundation: Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theory

The uses and gratifications (U&G) theory provides a foundational lens for understanding why and how consumers engage with media and brand-related content. Originating from communication research, U&G theory posits that individuals actively select media channels to satisfy specific cognitive, emotional, and social needs.

In the context of digital marketing, U&G theory has been widely applied to explain consumer interactions with social media platforms. Prior studies have identified key gratification dimensions, including informational value, entertainment, social interaction, and self-expression. These dimensions are particularly relevant in explaining why consumers engage with brand-generated content in online environments.

However, while U&G theory has been extensively used in social media research, its application to AI-enabled communication—particularly chatbots—remains limited. Unlike traditional media, chatbot interactions are dynamic, personalized, and conversational, suggesting that the nature of gratifications obtained may differ significantly. This highlights the need to extend U&G theory into AI-driven contexts.

Content marketing and customer engagement

Content marketing has evolved from a peripheral communication tactic to a central strategy in digital marketing. It emphasizes delivering valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain target audiences. Unlike traditional advertising, content marketing focuses on building relationships rather than driving immediate transactions.

Existing research suggests that the effectiveness of content marketing largely depends on its ability to stimulate customer engagement. Content can be broadly categorized into functional (informational) and emotional (entertaining or experiential) types, both of which play distinct roles in influencing consumer responses.

Functional content provides useful information that supports decision-making, while emotional content enhances enjoyment and fosters affective connections. Additionally, interactive content—such as polls, discussions, and user-generated features—can further enhance engagement by encouraging active participation.

Empirical studies indicate that content characteristics, including vividness, interactivity, and relevance, significantly influence engagement behaviors such as liking, sharing, and commenting. These findings suggest that content marketing serves as a key antecedent of customer engagement in digital environments.

Customer engagement and brand loyalty

Customer engagement has been widely conceptualized as a multidimensional construct encompassing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components. It reflects the depth of a consumer's interaction with a brand beyond mere transactional relationships.

A substantial body of literature has established a positive relationship between customer engagement and brand loyalty. Engaged consumers are more likely to develop stronger emotional bonds with brands, exhibit higher levels of trust, and demonstrate repeat purchase intentions.

Moreover, engagement has been identified as a mediating mechanism linking marketing activities to loyalty outcomes. In particular, both consumer-brand interactions and consumer-consumer interactions within brand communities contribute to the formation of brand loyalty.

However, despite the general consensus on the importance of engagement, the specific pathways through which engagement translates into loyalty remain underexplored, particularly in technologically mediated environments.

The emerging role of AI-enabled chatbots

With the advancement of artificial intelligence, chatbots have become an increasingly important tool in digital marketing communication. They enable real-time, personalized, and scalable interactions between brands and consumers, thereby transforming traditional communication models.

Existing research on chatbots has primarily focused on their functional roles, such as customer service efficiency and information delivery. However, recent studies suggest that chatbots may also play a more strategic role in shaping customer experiences and engagement.

From a U&G perspective, chatbot interactions can fulfill multiple user needs, including information seeking, convenience, entertainment, and social interaction. At the same time, concerns such as privacy risk and data security may negatively influence user satisfaction and trust.

Importantly, current literature lacks a systematic understanding of how chatbot-mediated interactions influence customer engagement and subsequent loyalty outcomes. It remains unclear whether chatbots act merely as service facilitators or as active drivers of engagement by co-creating value with consumers.

Toward an integrated framework

Based on the reviewed literature, a conceptual pattern emerges in which content marketing influences customer engagement, which in turn drives brand loyalty. However, the integration of AI-enabled chatbots into this framework remains insufficiently explored.

This study proposes that chatbots may play a dual role within this mechanism. First, they can act as mediators by directly shaping the interaction experience and influencing engagement levels. Second, they may function as moderators by enhancing or weakening the effectiveness of content marketing efforts.

By incorporating chatbots into the content marketing–engagement–loyalty pathway, this study advances a more comprehensive understanding of digital marketing communication in the AI era.

Overall, the existing literature provides valuable insights into the relationships among content marketing, customer engagement, and brand loyalty, as well as the emerging role of AI-enabled chatbots. However, the findings remain fragmented across different research streams.

As shown in Table 1, prior studies have primarily focused on examining these constructs in isolation, with limited integration of content strategies, engagement mechanisms, and AI-driven interaction technologies. In particular, while content marketing and engagement have been extensively studied, the role of chatbot-mediated communication in shaping these relationships remains underexplored.

This fragmentation highlights the need for a more integrated perspective, which is addressed in the following section by identifying key research gaps and proposing a unified conceptual framework.

Research Gaps

Despite the growing body of literature on content marketing, customer engagement, and brand loyalty, several critical gaps remain in the existing research.

First, the application of the uses and gratifications (U&G) theory in AI-mediated environments is still underdeveloped. While U&G has been widely used to explain user motivations in social media contexts, its extension to chatbot interactions remains limited. In particular, there is insufficient understanding of the types of gratifications obtained through chatbot use and how these differ from traditional media or social platforms.

Second, the relationship between content marketing and customer engagement has been extensively studied; however, existing research primarily focuses on static or semi-interactive content formats. The role of dynamic, conversational interfaces—such as chatbots—in shaping engagement processes has not been systematically examined. This limits our understanding of how interactive technologies transform the effectiveness of content strategies.

Third, although customer engagement is widely recognized as a key driver of brand loyalty, the underlying mechanisms linking engagement to loyalty outcomes remain fragmented. Prior studies have identified cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions of engagement, but their combined effects and relative importance in different technological contexts are still unclear.

Fourth, the role of AI-enabled chatbots in influencing customer satisfaction, trust, and continued usage intention has been explored in isolation, rather than being integrated into a broader marketing communication framework. In particular, factors such as perceived privacy risk and data security concerns introduce additional complexity that has not been adequately incorporated into existing models.

Finally, methodological limitations persist in current research. Many studies rely on traditional analytical approaches and limited datasets, which may not fully capture the complexity of digital interactions in the era of big data and AI. There is a need for more advanced analytical methods and integrative frameworks to better understand consumer behavior in technology-mediated environments.

Addressing these gaps requires a more holistic perspective that integrates content marketing, customer engagement, and AI-enabled communication within a unified theoretical framework.

Conceptual Framework

Based on the synthesis of the reviewed literature, this study proposes an integrated conceptual framework that links content marketing, customer engagement, and brand loyalty, while incorporating the role of AI-enabled chatbots.

At the core of the framework is the proposition that content marketing serves as a primary driver of customer engagement. Different types of content—functional, emotional, and interactive—stimulate consumers' cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses, thereby fostering deeper engagement with the brand.

Customer engagement, in turn, acts as a key mechanism through which marketing efforts translate into brand loyalty. Engaged consumers are more likely to develop positive attitudes toward the brand, build emotional connections, and exhibit repeat purchase intentions.

The proposed framework further introduces AI-enabled chatbots as a critical element that reshapes this relationship. Specifically, chatbots are conceptualized as playing a dual role: First, chatbots function as mediators by directly influencing the interaction experience between brands and consumers. Through personalized, real-time, and conversational communication, chatbots can enhance user satisfaction and strengthen engagement.

Second, chatbots act as moderators by affecting the strength and direction of the relationship between content marketing and customer engagement. For example, chatbot-enabled interactions may amplify the effectiveness of interactive content, while issues such as perceived privacy risk may weaken consumer responses.

In addition, the framework incorporates key psychological and contextual factors, including user satisfaction, perceived value, and perceived privacy risk, which influence the effectiveness of chatbot-mediated interactions.

Overall, the proposed framework extends existing research by integrating AI-enabled communication technologies into the traditional content marketing–engagement–loyalty pathway, offering a more comprehensive understanding of consumer behavior in digital environments.

Future empirical research can test this framework by examining the mediating and moderating roles of chatbots, as well as the interplay between different dimensions of engagement and loyalty outcomes.

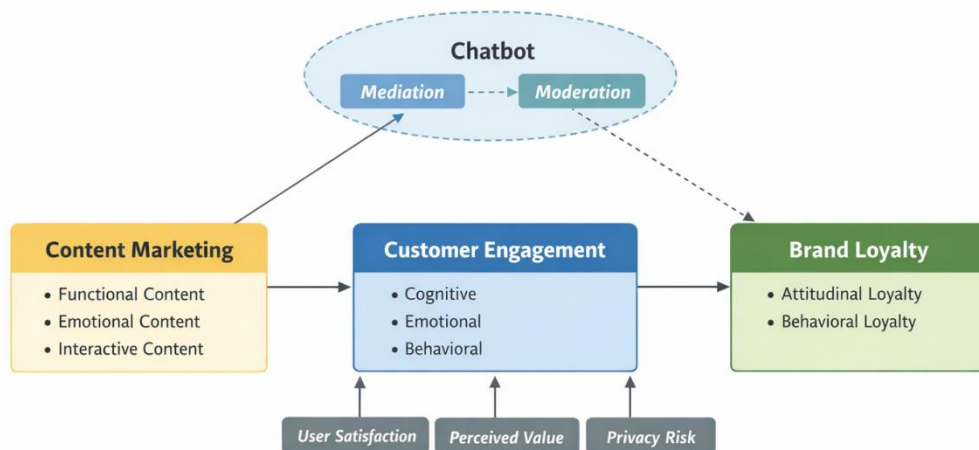


Figure 1. Integrated Framework of Content Marketing, Chatbots, and Brand Loyalty

Figure Caption

Figure 1. Proposed conceptual framework of content marketing, customer engagement, and AI-enabled chatbot-mediated brand loyalty.

The proposed framework is not merely descriptive but theorizes a multi-layered digital interaction system in which marketing content, AI-enabled communication technologies, and consumer psychological states interact dynamically.

In contrast to traditional linear models, the framework emphasizes conditional and bidirectional effects, particularly the moderating and mediating role of chatbots in shaping engagement processes. This reflects a shift from static marketing communication models to adaptive, system-based interaction models driven by artificial intelligence.

Theoretical Contributions

This study makes three key theoretical contributions that advance the understanding of digital marketing in AI-enabled environments.

First, this study extends the uses and gratifications (U&G) theory beyond its traditional application in social media and digital content environments by incorporating AI-enabled conversational agents. Unlike passive media consumption or static content interaction, chatbot-mediated communication represents an active, adaptive, and co-creative form of user–brand interaction. This study therefore reconceptualizes gratification as an evolving, interaction-based construct rather than a static motivation outcome.

Second, this study challenges the implicit linear assumption in existing marketing literature that content marketing directly and uniformly leads to customer engagement. By integrating AI-enabled chatbots into the content–engagement pathway, this study demonstrates that engagement is not only content-driven but also structurally mediated and conditionally shaped by intelligent conversational systems. In this sense, chatbots are theorized not merely

as service tools but as engagement infrastructures that actively shape consumer cognitive and emotional processing.

Third, this study integrates previously fragmented research streams—content marketing, customer engagement, brand loyalty, and AI-driven communication—into a unified conceptual framework. In doing so, it advances a multi-layered understanding of digital consumer behavior in which engagement operates as a central mechanism linking marketing stimuli to loyalty outcomes, while being simultaneously shaped by technological affordances and psychological constraints such as perceived value, satisfaction, and privacy risk.

Conclusion

This study provides a systematic review of the literature on content marketing, customer engagement, and brand loyalty, with a particular focus on the emerging role of AI-enabled chatbots in digital marketing communication.

The findings highlight that content marketing plays a crucial role in stimulating customer engagement, which in turn serves as a key driver of brand loyalty. However, the increasing adoption of AI technologies—especially chatbots—has introduced new dynamics that are not fully captured by existing theoretical frameworks.

By integrating the uses and gratifications (U&G) theory with research on AI-enabled communication, this study offers a novel perspective on how consumers interact with brands in technology-mediated environments. The proposed conceptual framework emphasizes the dual role of chatbots as both mediators and moderators in the content marketing–engagement–loyalty relationship.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the literature by extending U&G theory into the context of conversational AI and by bridging previously fragmented research streams. From a managerial perspective, the findings suggest that firms should move beyond viewing chatbots as mere service tools and instead leverage them as strategic assets to enhance customer engagement and build long-term brand loyalty.

Despite these contributions, this study is not without limitations. As a literature review, its conclusions are constrained by the scope and quality of existing research. Future studies should employ empirical methods to validate the proposed framework and explore the impact of emerging technologies in different industry and cultural contexts.

In conclusion, as digital marketing continues to evolve in the era of artificial intelligence, understanding the interplay between content, engagement, and technology will be essential for both researchers and practitioners seeking to create sustainable competitive advantage.

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