

Effects of Content Marketing Strategy on Customer-Based Brand Equity of Hotels in South-South Nigeria

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Abstract

The study examined the effect of content marketing strategy on customer-based brand equity of hotels in South-South Nigeria. Deductive research method and a cross-sectional survey research design were used for the study. The Cochran formula was used to determine the sample size of 384 respondents for the study. The study used frequency analyses, Pearson correlation coefficient analysis, and multiple linear regression analysis. Findings showed that content marketing strategy is a significant predictor of customer-based brand equity, explaining 64% of the variability in customer-based brand equity of hotels in South-South Nigeria. The study concluded that the dimensions of content marketing strategy have significant positive effect on customer-based brand equity except for brand transparency. The study recommended amongst others that hotels should be open to sharing information about their operations, such as staffing levels, amenities, and safety protocols. This will help build trust with customers and show that they are committed to their safety and well-being. The study's findings could have significant implications for the hotel industry, as they could provide insights into how hotels can use content marketing strategy to differentiate themselves from competitors and build brand awareness. The study established an improved model of content marketing strategy in the hotel industry.

Keywords: *Content Marketing Strategy, Customer-Based Brand Equity, Information Quality, Brand Storytelling, Electronic Word-of-Mouth*

1. Introduction

In today's business environment, customer based brand equity is essential and a vital component of every successful company's marketing mix. Given that relevant communication plays the most essential function in attracting attention and building all the factors of brand equity, content marketing is the leading and unavoidable strategy for building customer based brand equity of hotels. Marketing has developed over

time, moving away from traditional methods such as pricing, advertising, and distribution and towards relational concepts such as interactions, consumer trust, risk, and commitment (Baines & Fill, 2016). The transition to a digital society has driven businesses to find new ways to meet the requirements of customers and other stakeholders, resulting in the creation of a content marketing strategy. Traditional marketing is dwindling, especially as more companies adopt a digital strategy. This laid the foundation for content marketing, an innovative strategy for targeting clearly defined audiences by concentrating on generating and delivering meaningful, relevant, and consistent information in order to encourage profitable customer action. The content created is the consistent information that enables individuals to determine the worth of a product and whether or not they should devote the necessary time and financial resources to purchase it. Content marketing strategy focuses on a specific target demographic during its discovery phase.

The hospitality industry has been impacted by technological advancements and increasing internet use. The majority of today's hotel customers use the internet to search for and evaluate hotel services before making their final decisions. Most hotel guests, in fact, utilise the internet before, during, and after their trips. As the number of online travellers grows, the Internet has been exploited as a marketing tool in the hospitality business. Due to the high density of competition in the hotel business and the possibility of substitution, tourism demand has an elastic structure (Simsek&Dincel, 2019).The rapid advancement of technology, as well as the convenience with which customers may access the internet from anywhere using their cellphones, has piqued their interest in digital messages. Consumers are always cautious about the information contained in digital content, and they do verify the information sources before making any decisions (Pektas& Hassan, 2020). It is possible to develop and sustain consumer trust with a content marketing approach that demonstrates a deeper grasp of the customer (Doyle, 2019). Content marketing strategy will not work until trust is developed, resulting in sufficient progress in trust-building initiatives (Bilog, 2017; Newman, 2014). Marketing managers' ensures that the brand information is authentic and transparent enough to foster trust (Kee&Yazdanifard, 2015). As a result, brand transparency is thought to affect consumer trust when it comes to content marketing.

Today's business environment necessitates a refined strategy, an active presence in both the physical and virtual markets. Consumers expect a high level of consistency from organisations in terms of fundamental principles and focus. Content marketing strategy is a new means of catching consumers' attention in a way that is desired by them, and it is viewed as a potent tool for building customer based brand equity. Customer-based brand equity can be enhanced when firms provide quality information about their services, create brand storytelling, adopt brand transparency, enable electronic word of mouth, and participate in social media communication. Information quality is concerned with increasing the value of a firm's information assets while avoiding risk, as well as ensuring that the information created by the business adds value to the consumers who utilise them. Many companies use brand storytelling to express their mission and to create a community around their product. Customer loyalty, brand awareness, and sales can all be improved by using brand storytelling in this way. On the other hand, brand transparency is how a company demonstrates to internal and external stakeholders that it is open, honest, and accessible. This allows buyers and other stakeholders to better understand the core values of the product. E-WOM is a vital channel of information for customers making decisions (Mellinas&Reino, 2019). The beauty of this tool is that it allows any consumer to participate, as anyone may share an experience online and write a product review for other people to read (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). These resources provide information to present, past, and prospective users of a product or service. Companies gain from E-WOM because it makes customer identification easier. Customers' expectations of brand connection have changed in the digital era, thanks to the backing of many social media platforms (Killian & McManus, 2015). The content published on social media has become a fundamental technique and plays a significant role in customer contact by forming it in an appealing style to maintain the customers' connection to the brands (Syakirah, et al., 2016). Businesses have utilised social media to broadcast brand-related content and to inspire customers' perceptions and attitudes about brands (Ibrahim,

et al., 2020). Content marketing on social media, on the other hand, allows firms to become more visible, earn consumer trust, and raise brand awareness (Du Plessis, 2015).

When it comes to content marketing, customers distinguish between two types of benefits: hedonic and utilitarian. The hedonic one relates to the message's entertaining aspect, which is inherently gratifying and enjoyable, whereas the utilitarian one provides cognitive benefits and is more rationally appealing to clients (Izogo&Mpinganjira, 2020). Consumers now have more options, which leads to less satisfaction, and top management now has more options, which leads to less value. As a result, the value creation process is transitioning from being centred on the company and product to being centred on the customer. Furthermore, businesses are recognising the challenges of fully comprehending their customers' desires and expectations. The majority of studies on content marketing strategy focused on the tourism industry in an international context, but the outcomes that could be attained by investigating the potential effects of content marketing strategy on customer-based brand equity of hotels, particularly in developing nations like Nigeria, may be quite different due to differences in the quality of hotel amenities, technological advancements and customer awareness. As a result, it was necessary to add to the body of knowledge by studying content marketing strategy in the context of hotels.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Traditional marketing tactics are losing their effectiveness in the age of contemporary digital media. Information is an important company resource. The quality of this resource can have a positive or negative impact on the organisation's social and/or economic outcomes. In any sector, a lack of quality information can lead to misinterpretations of conditions and significant repercussions. In today's marketing world, brands cannot afford to be just another faceless organisation. They need a compelling story that sells themselves and allows them to connect with their target audience. While most brands recognise the importance of telling a story, many fail to do so effectively. Most customers want to engage with good brand stories, but if the tale a company is trying to tell is not memorable, it will be difficult to establish a long-term relationship. If the audience doesn't seem particularly engaged or enthusiastic, it is likely that a lack of consistency in the brand narrative is at least partly to blame. The target audience does not feel a sense of unity or belonging as a result of the brand messaging. Furthermore, lack of transparency can have severe effects and damage a brand's reputation permanently. It may seem prudent to sacrifice integrity for a short time, but the long-term effects can be disastrous. Customers nowadays are more likely to examine other people's opinions rather than relying solely on advertisements. E-WoM can have critical influence on customer purchasing decisions, but this can have both positive and negative consequences. Sometimes a company cannot determine who is behind the information given. When a buyer complains to others about a bad experience they had with the brand, a firm is likely to be unaware of this unless the dissatisfied customer informs the company. Negative social media information can undermine trust in a brand in minutes, whether it originates from hackers, disgruntled consumers, or is just a reaction to anything a firm posts. Even posts made by anonymous consumers can cause a lot of damage if they are picked up by other users.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to examine the effect of content marketing strategy on customer-based brand equity of hotels in South-South Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

1. determine the effects of information quality on customer-based brand equity of hotels in South-South Nigeria.
2. determine the effects of brand storytelling on customer-based brand equity of hotels in South-South Nigeria.
3. ascertain the effects of brand transparency on customer-based brand equity of hotels in South-South Nigeria.

4. evaluate the effects of electronic word of mouth on customer-based brand equity of hotels in South-South Nigeria.
5. determine the effects of social media on customer-based brand equity of hotels in South-South Nigeria.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Content Marketing Strategy

Content refers to the information that buyers find useful before making a purchase. In publishing, art, and communication, content is information and experiences tailored to a specific end user or audience. Content must be conveyed in some way, either by speech, writing, or another means. Companies use the Internet as an easy way to distribute their promotional contents. Content is what the user comes to read, learn about, see, or interact with in order to influence and guide the brand into the consciousness of potential consumers and prospects (Halvorson & Rach, 2012; Wuebben, 2012). Users seek out content to read, watch, learn from, and experience. Content is critical information displayed on a website, application, or other available digital communication channels from a business standpoint (Halvorson & Rach 2012).

Content is seen as a product message, and content marketing (CM) is closely related to the marketing mix's promotion component (Steck, 2016). CM conveys the narrative of a specific brand; it does so with the aim of fostering long-term buying behaviour, credibility, and connections rather than conducting direct customer sales (Gagnon, 2014; Naidoo & Hollebeek, 2016). Combining the ideas of content and marketing led to the realisation that the value it offers to its potential customers, which can take different forms, such as creating awareness or amusement, determines its usefulness (Calder, et al 2009; Denning, 2016). Content marketing creates three times as many sales while costing 62% less than traditional marketing strategies (Bicks 2016). By providing opportunities for brand-related education, amusement, or greater convenience, such as time savings, CMS can make it easier to obtain the data that is most important to buyers' specific needs and result in increased value (Lieb 2011). In order to provide customers with excellent content, Patruti-Baltes (2016) claimed that content marketing strategies leverage digital channels. Customers value the content provided through these digital channels and it is this content that will assist businesses in attracting, converting, and retaining customers.

The main goals of CM are to promote long-lasting consumer-brand relationships, increase brand loyalty, and intensify brand consciousness (Naidoo & Hollebeek, 2016). Companies that employ content marketing as a strategy produce, disseminate, and share timely content to increase customer engagement during the decision-making stages of their purchases and persuade them to take a profitable action. Steimle (2014) asserted that content marketing is a strategy for appealing to and finding new customers that includes producing and disseminating useful, pertinent, and consistent content with the intention of eliciting profitable consumer action. The objective of content marketing is to provide the customer base with relevant and reliable content in order to promote profitable buyer behaviour. In order to persuade individuals to participate in buying behaviours and build a relationship between customers and firms, content marketing involves sharing information about company brands (Ahmadet al., 2016). Pulizzi (2012) stated that content marketing is a sort of strategy that focuses on providing high-quality information to suit target customers' needs and increase awareness of products and services among consumers. Additionally, content marketing emphasises shared communications with target customers to strengthen the emotional connection with the company (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Jefferson & Tanton, 2015). The creation of good content is vital to the success of marketing campaigns and the planning process. Pažeraitė & Repovienė (2016) asserted that content-based marketing aspects are influenced not only by the user's perspective and the type of business, but also by the technology utilised. Several characteristics of high-quality contents are mentioned by the authors (Abel, 2014; Gagnon, 2014; Schuinani et al., 2014). These characteristics can be viewed as individual content

marketing pieces. Relevance, informativeness, reliability, value, uniqueness, emotions, and intellect are seven traits that should be incorporated in high-quality information. Therefore, the study defined content marketing strategy as the consistent creation of valuable, captivating, and transparent brand information by a company through brand storytelling, electronic word of mouth, and social media in a digital domain in order to inform and influence customers buying decisions.

Table 1 Characteristics that set content marketing apart from traditional marketing

Traditional Marketing	Content Marketing
In the creation of content, one-sided communication is common (Outbound)	In the creation of content, there is a two-way communication with the consumer (Inbound)
The content is completely prepared to sell the product.	The contents are being created in order to educate the customer.
A large target audience	Specified target demographics
Short-term strategies are used.	Long-term strategies are employed.
Strategies are expensive.	Strategies are usually low cost
Does not make advantage of modern technology	Dedicated to technology

Source: Bilge (2016:128).

2.2 Dimensions of Content Marketing Strategy

2.2.1 Information Quality

Information quality entails the degree to which brand information is accurate, reliable, relevant, timely, complete, and easy to understand. The level to which a brand message is convincing to an audience is referred to as information quality (Hua & Wang, 2014). Suitability, accuracy, fresh perspective, worth, distinctiveness, feelings, and intellect are seven characteristics of high-quality digital content (Pažėraitė, & Repovienė, 2016). Information quality was previously examined in terms of correctness, completeness, consistency, simplicity of understanding, personalization, relevance, security, and timeliness in previous research (Petter et al., 2012). Researchers such as Abel (2014) Gagnon (2014), and Schuinanii, et al (2014) asserted that information should be relevant, informative, reliable, valued, distinctive, and intelligent in order to pique customer attention and lead to good actions. In the literature, content relevance is defined as the utility of information to a buyer (Abel, 2014; Lin et al., 2014). The correctness of information is defined by reliability, whereas the adequacy of information is decided by completeness (Chasser & Wolfe, 2010). Lin et al. (2014) asserted that content reliability is also a critical component in assessing the value of communication. Ausra & Ruta (2016) added that content development should be based on functional and emotional values. In the competitive internet arena, companies that use content exclusivity can win the struggle for customers' attention.

2.2.2 Brand Storytelling

Brand storytelling is a marketing technique that involves telling a creative story to connect a company with its customers. Brand storytelling is the approach of establishing an emotional connection between a company and its audience via an emotional narrative, with an emphasis on fostering compassion by relating the company's values to those of the audience. Additionally, narrative is an effective way to convey a brand's holistic perspective because it engages and offers relationships (Thier & Russin, 2018). Using a storyline to connect the brand to buyers, with the aim of linking what the firm stands for to the values they share with their customers, is brand storytelling (Loyal, 2018). Storytelling, elicits emotional responses and

connections from buyers, allowing them to ease their guard and be more easily convinced (Biesenbach, 2018).

2.2.3 Brand Transparency

Brand transparency in terms of external engagements describes the ways in which a business conveys its authenticity and integrity. It is one of the strategies for winning the trust and loyalty of a market segment. Brand transparency applies primarily to an organisation's proactive efforts to be truthful. Being transparent with customers involves owning who they are as a brand and standing behind everything they do as a company. It is about being proud of not just what a firm does, but also how they do it. Transparency does not imply disclosing every last detail of the organisation, including statistics. Irrespective of the sort of business, there are certain pieces of information firms should never make public, whether for reasons of privacy and security or to prevent competitors from exploiting it against the firm. As customers demand greater product transparency, businesses are more likely to engage in a variety of communication activities in order to capitalise on customers who appear to be loyal to enterprises that meet their needs (Moser, et al 2012). Transparency has a lot of repercussions in terms of information disclosure and honesty to customers, so the firm uses it to build trust (The Hartman Group, 2015). Furthermore, today's technological culture fosters a desire for openness, where information is readily available, and an expectation for open source is growing.

2.2.4 Electronic Word-of-Mouth (E-WOM)

Electronic Word-of-Mouth entails the sharing of opinions, experiences, and recommendations about a product or service through electronic means, such as online review platforms, blogs, and forums. E-WOM gives every customer a voice and enables them to connect with others from a range of socioeconomic and geographic contexts to discuss their product or service experiences (Zhang et al 2018). E-WOM is becoming increasingly important for businesses as consumers rely more on online reviews and recommendations when making purchasing decisions.

2.2.5 Social Media

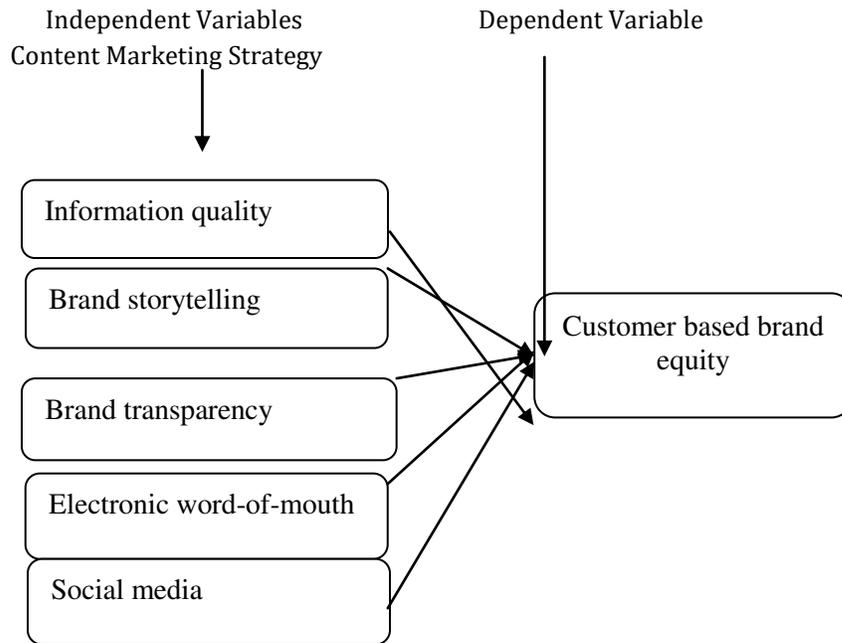
Social media refers to the online platforms that allow users to create, share, and exchange information, opinions, and content in virtual communities and networks. With social media's increased use in customers daily lives, firms now have broader options than ever to enhance their services in different ways. The main advantage is that it enables two-way communication between firms and buyers, which promotes buyer participation (Malthouse, et al 2016). The main purpose of this channel is to enable user communication and information sharing regarding a brand (Ahmad et al. 2016)

2.3 Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE)

Keller (2016) asserted that customer-based brand equity is the significant influence of brand knowledge on buyer responsiveness to the brand's promotion. Customer-based brand equity in this study includes brand awareness, brand loyalty, and brand association. Brand awareness increases when hotel guests start to learn more about hotel services. When the need to make a purchase decision arises, the brand that originally caught the consumer's attention is the one they choose. The intention to revisit and suggest a hotel brand is referred to as hotel brand loyalty (Dedeoglu et al., 2019; Pike & Bianchi, 2016). A satisfied customer's positive attitude towards a particular hotel brand is known as affective loyalty. Conative loyalty, which is typically expressed as a recommendation to friends and family, demonstrates a customer's commitment to a future purchase but does not ensure fulfilment. The ability to overcome inertia and make a repeat purchase despite obstacles is referred to as action loyalty. Keller (2016) classified brand association as what a hotel guest thinks the hotel brand is or has to offer, as well as what is involved in paying for the service. Attributes are descriptive features that identify a brand. Consumers connect brand benefits—also known as features—

with personal beliefs. Hotel guest can profit from both functional and non-functional features as well as experiential attachments.

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework



Source: Researchers Model2023

The model is an illustration of how the components of content marketing strategy affect customer based brand equity of hotels.

Information Quality and Customer-Based Brand Equity

The new technique in branding is to create advertising messages based on high-quality content. How well a piece of content accomplishes its goal determines its quality. It has to do with how much knowledge and understanding a piece of content has. The effectiveness of content can be evaluated by how effectively it performs in search engine results, attracts visitors, fascinates the intended audience, and turns prospects into buyers. Firms place a high importance on producing unique and useful content that attracts customers' attention (Gagnon, 2014; Rose, 2014). One of the most basic strategies to gain benefits and effectively compete with other market participants is to use valuable content in advertisements (Ausra&Ruta, 2016). Furthermore, it can aid in the improvement of the efficacy of several forms of advertising. Sawaftahet al, (2021) study found that customers are more attached and engaged when they are emotionally subjected to a credible message source, than when they are emotionally subjected to less credible ones.

Hypothesis 1.Information quality has significant positive effect on customer-based brand equity of hotels in South-South Nigeria.

Brand Storytelling and Customer-Based Brand Equity

The most powerful brand narratives evoke empathy, hold a spectator's interest, and persuade them to take a certain action that is advantageous to both the buyer and the firm. In order to forge a closer

connection with customers, this story usually links a brand's mission to their beliefs. Storytelling has the ability to influence buyers' opinions about a firm and can provide a vital competitive edge (Hemsley, 2016; Wang et al., 2016). Brands become unique and distinguishable in the market as a result of storytelling, making it nearly impossible for competitors to mimic them (Cahill, 2017). Storytelling is also critical for brands to stand out in the digital era since it conveys unique aspects of brands and helps consumers comprehend the brand's identity and key values (Mucundorfeanu, 2018). Olson (2019) asserted that whether it is a single image or a video, using visual marketing to tell a story helps to turn viewers into users and devoted buyers following the brand. A strong brand story can instill personality and value in a brand during promotional activities (Xie, 2021). Stories provide brands with a more solid emotional and imagetic legacy, making them more appealing to customers.

Hypothesis 2 Brand storytelling has significant positive effect on customer-based brand equity of hotels in South-South Nigeria.

Brand Transparency and Customer-Based Brand Equity

Consumer trust is earned through brand transparency. Kee and Yazdanifard (2015) asserted that content marketing that gives true and transparent information helps build confidence and preserve customer retention. Information transparency has been proven to be a reliable indicator of both private and public-sector credibility, as well as a marker of organisational integrity (Mabillard&Pasquier, 2016). Competence-based trust hinges on a company's depth of expertise and exposure; integrity-based trust hinges on the company's openness, sincerity, and care for the general welfare (Yu, et al 2022).

Hypothesis 3.Brand transparency has significant positive effect on customer-based brand equity of hotels in South-South Nigeria.

Electronic Word-of-Mouth and Customer-Based Brand Equity

E-WOM is a cheap strategy for contacting prospective customers. E-WOM is typically recognised as a trustworthy and reputable source of information (Septiari, 2018). Consumer perceptions, attitudes, purchasing choices, and post-use reviews can all be influenced by E-WOM evaluation (Al-Debei, 2015). Ngoma&Ntale (2019) asserted that E-WOM is a link between relationship marketing and customer loyalty.

Hypothesis 4.Electronic word-of-mouth has significant positive effect on customer-based brand equity of hotels in South-South Nigeria.

Social Media and Customer-Based Brand Equity

Customers now have access to a wealth of knowledge regarding the availability, quality, and pricing of lodging, as well as a gold mine of information regarding other customers' opinions and experiences with the place or company in question. As a result, businesses are no longer the only source of information influencing brand positioning and potential consumer behaviour; instead, a potent new communication channel has emerged that is not contracted with or under the company's direct control but connects customers from around the globe and has a significant influence on buying decisions. Bruhn et al. (2012) opined that social web communication have a higher impact on brand image than conventional media. Through the use of social media to raise awareness, Stojanovic et al. (2018) in a study have confirmed the close connection between the marketing's intensity and the brand while deciding on a holiday spot.

Hypothesis 5.Social media has significant positive effect on customer-based brand equity of hotels in South-South Nigeria.

2.4 Theoretical Review

2.4.1 Attachment Theory

The study is anchored majorly on attachment theory. As per attachment theory (Bowlby, 1978), a person's level of emotional attachment to an object can be used to predict how they will interact with it. Attachment Theory can be highly relevant to content marketing strategy, particularly in industries such as hospitality, where building emotional connections with customers can be a critical factor in driving business success. Attachment Theory suggests that emotional attachments are strengthened when individuals feel that their needs are being met and that they are being understood by their attachment figures. Attachment Theory suggests that emotional connections are built through repeated interactions and experiences. One effective way to create these experiences is through emotional storytelling. Hotels can use content marketing to tell stories that evoke emotions and resonate with customers' values and interests. This can help to build a sense of familiarity and trust with customers, leading to stronger emotional attachments and increased brand loyalty. Content marketing strategy can provide consistent messaging and experiences to customers over time. By consistently providing customers with valuable and relevant content, hotels can build trust and familiarity with their brand, leading to stronger emotional attachments and increased brand loyalty.

3. Methodology

Research Design

Deductive research methods and a cross-sectional survey research design were used. For current theory, a deductive approach has a well-established role: it guides the creation of hypotheses, the selection of variables, and the measures that follow. The theory is first articulated as hypotheses in the deductive method, and these are subsequently put to the test (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). The benefit of cross-sectional surveys is that they give researchers the opportunity to discover what is actually happening in a population rather than just what is being reported.

Population of the Study

The population of the study focused on customers who have used the internet to search for information about hotel offerings, specifically those who have experienced a wide range of services and amenities in three-, four-, and five-star hotels.

Sample Size Determination

The population of hotel customers in South-South Nigeria is unknown; the study therefore adopted the Cochran (1977) formula to determine the sample size of an unknown population. The formula is given as:

$$n = \frac{Z^2PQ}{e^2}$$

Where

n = sample size

z = the Z-score, standard normal deviation at the 95% confidence level = 1.96

p = the estimated ratio of the population with the desired attribute. 50% (0.5) was adopted in the study as the maximum variability, as recommended by Mugenda and Mugenda (2003).

Q = is the estimated ratio of the population without the desired attribute, (1-P).

e = margin of error (5%)

$$n = \frac{Z^2PQ}{e^2}$$

$$n = \frac{(1.96)^2 \times 0.5 \times 0.5}{0.05^2}$$

$$n = \frac{3.8416 \times 0.5 \times 0.5}{0.025}$$

n = 384.2

Therefore, the sample size for the study was 384 guests of hotels in the South-South of Nigeria.

Sampling Techniques

The stratified random sampling technique was applied to the investigation. Using stratified sampling, the researcher divided the population into several homogeneous groups known as strata. These strata were determined by important sample characteristics, such as the respondents' demographic profile. Stratified sampling assures that the sampling frame and sample have the same properties while still requiring exact knowledge of the sampling frame and population.

Research Instrument

The researchers used a structured questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale. The structured questionnaire consisted of 35 questions divided into two sections. The first section focused on collecting socio-demographic information about the respondents, while the second section focused on the sub-independent variables of content marketing strategy as well as the dependent variable such as customer-based brand equity. To ensure the quality of the data collected, the researchers included an attention check in the survey to encourage respondents to read each item carefully. The screening question was used to identify respondents who had used the internet to search for information about hotel offerings. This approach helped to ensure that the sample is representative of the population being studied and can improve the accuracy of the data collected.

Measurement and Operationalization of Variables

The study comprised of five independent variables and one dependent variable. They were operationalized and measured as follows:

Information quality: This was determined by how the unique, valuable, reliable, functional values, and intelligent brand messages of a firm's service affected the hotel brand image.

Brand storytelling: This was operationalized in terms of how brand narratives, emotional connections, the essence of the brand, the company's values, and the use of imagery affect hotel brand awareness.

Brand transparency: This variable was measured based on how firm honesty, being candid about mistakes, authenticity, responsiveness and accessibility of hotel service providers influence hotel perceptions of quality.

Electronic word-of-mouth: This was measured with regards to post-use reviews, customer complaints, information usefulness, message source credibility, and customer engagement as it affects hotel brand associations.

Social media: This was measured in terms of reach, influence, social interaction, sentiment, and conversion, as well as their impact on hotel brand loyalty.

Customer-based brand equity: It was operationalized as brand awareness, brand loyalty, and brand associations.

Validity of the Research Instruments

Both the face validity and the content validity were used in the study. The survey was sent to 5 university lecturers for their comments and to suggest changes. Usually, the degree of face validity is decided by a committee of experts who debate and come to an agreement (this is also referred to as expert validity). Before determining content validity, the researchers first considered what was to be measured and what should and should not be included in the definition. After defining what was tested, the researcher created

inquiries that are closely related to the definition. Because of this, most content validity was completed before actual measurement.

Reliability of Research Instrument

Mitchell and Jolley (2013) opined that there are three relevant elements used to assess reliability: internal consistency reliability, inter-rater reliability, and test-retest reliability. Since it demands the researcher to employ numerous items at once to measure the same idea, internal consistency reliability was used for the study. Using the Cronbach alpha, this section examined the internal consistency of the research instrument. Ghozali (2011) asserted that a variable can be said to be reliable if its Cronbach's alpha value is greater than 0.7.

Table 2 Operationalization of Variables and Reliability Statistics

SN	Concepts	Operational measures	Sources	Items	Cronbach's α
1	Information quality	Likert-type 5 scale	Repoviené (2017)	5	0.764
2	Brand storytelling	Likert-type 5 scale	Xie(2021)	5	0.811
3	Brand transparency	Likert-type 5 scale	Dong, et al (2022), Yu, et al (2022)	5	0.823
4	Electronic word-of-mouth	Likert-type 5 scale	Septiari (2018);Al-Debei et al (2015)	5	0.814
5	Social media	Likert-type 5 scale	Bu, et al (2020)	5	0.779
6	Customer-based brand equity	Likert-type 5 scale	Huerta-Alvarez, et al (2020).	5	0.881

Operationalization of Key Variables

Methods of Data Analyses

The researchers used a variety of statistical analyses in the study, including frequency analyses, Pearson correlation coefficient analysis, and multiple linear regression analysis. Each of these techniques serves a specific purpose and can provide valuable insights into the relationships between variables. Frequency analysis is a descriptive statistical technique that involves tabulating and summarizing the distribution of categorical or nominal data. It can provide a basic understanding of the distribution of data and identify any patterns or trends that may be present. Pearson correlation coefficient analysis, as mentioned before, is a statistical method that measures the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two continuous variables. It can help identify any significant correlations between variables and provides insights into the nature of the relationship. Multiple linear regression analysis can help to identify which independent variables have a significant effect on the dependent variable and predict the value of the dependent variable based on the values of the independent variables. By using a combination of these techniques, the researchers can provide a comprehensive analysis of the data and draw meaningful conclusions from the study.

Customer based brand equity = $f(\text{Content Marketing Strategy Dimensions})$

The response variable and the explanatory variables have the following linear relationship:

$$CBBE = \beta_0 + \beta_1IQ + \beta_2BS + \beta_3BT + \beta_4E - WOM + \beta_5SM + \epsilon \dots\dots\dots i$$

β_0 , = constant

Where:

CBBE is Customer Based Brand Equity

IQ - Information Quality

BS - Brand Storytelling

BT - Brand Transparency
 E-WOM - Electronic Word of Mouth
 SM - Social Media

The a priori expectation of all coefficients is expected to be positive based on the study's hypotheses $\beta > 0$ meaning that all the CMS dimensions are expected to have a positive effect on customer based brand equity. Given that multiple linear regression was used to test the study's hypotheses, it is vital to note that multiple regression using IBM SPSS Statistics 25.0 produces three significant results.

4 Results of Data Analyses and Discussions

Table 3 Response Rate

S/N	Response	Frequency	Percentages (%)
1	Copies of questionnaire administered	384	100
2	Copies of duly filled questionnaire retrieved	362	94
3	Copies of questionnaire not properly filled	22	6

Source: Field Survey (2023)

Table 3 showed that 384 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the respondents, and 362 of those copies were successfully filled out and returned. The last 6% of respondents revealed they had never utilized the Internet to look for information on hotel offerings. This suggested that they were unsuccessful on the survey's attentiveness test. Respondents who failed the attention tests were removed from the dataset. The results showed that 94% of the responses were used for the study's analysis. Kothari (2004) argued that since the analysis required a response rate of at least 50%, a response rate of 94% was adequate for the investigators to complete the study.

Table 4 Demographic Profiles of Respondents

	Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	194	53.6
	Female	168	46.4
Total		362	100
Age	18-25	25	6.9
	26-32	71	19.6
	33-39	144	39.8
	40 or over 41	122	33.7
Total		362	100
Marital status	Single	139	38.4
	Married	199	55
	Divorced	24	6.6
Total		362	100
Education	SSCE	13	3.6
	OND or NCE	118	32.6
	HND or BSc	137	37.8
	Postgraduate Degree	94	26
Total		362	100

Source: Field Survey (2023)

Table 4 showed that 54% of the respondents were men and 46% were women. According to the research, men predominated among hotel guests in South-South Nigeria. This showed that men are more

actively engaged in making choices about purchases based on information they find about hotel brands online. In addition, 7% of participants were between the ages of 18 and 25. Furthermore, 20% of respondents were between the ages of 26 and 32, 40% were between the ages of 33 and 39, and 34% of the remaining respondents were either 40 or older. The result showed that the majority of hotel guests were in the age range of 33 to 39. Moreover, 38% of respondents identified as single, 55% as married, and 7% identified as divorced. According to the result, most hotel guests in South-South Nigeria were married. The results showed that the majority of respondents (38%) held an HND or a B.Sc., while 4% had passed the SSCE and 33% had earned an OND or NCE. The remaining 26% of respondents held postgraduate degrees.

Table 5 Pearson Correlation Analysis

Study Variables	N	IQ	BS	BT	E-WOM	SM	CBBE
Information quality (IQ)	362	1					
Brand storytelling (BS)	362	.553**	1				
Brand transparency (BT)	362	.582**	.793**	1			
Electronic word of mouth (E-WOM)	362	.554**	.690**	.685**	1		
Social media (SM)	362	.552**	.728**	.738**	.630**	1	
Customer-based brand equity(CBBE)	362	.626**	.685**	.681**	.689**	.705**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

Source: Field Survey (2023)

Table 5 provides information about the inter-correlations between the study variables. The results suggest that there are strong positive correlations between most of the variables and customer-based brand equity. Information quality had a strong positive correlation coefficient ($r=0.626$, $p=0.01$) with customer-based brand equity. Brand storytelling also had a strong positive correlation coefficient ($r=0.685$, $p=0.01$) with customer-based brand equity. Brand transparency had a strong positive correlation coefficient ($r=0.681$, $p=0.01$) with customer-based brand equity. Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) had a strong positive correlation coefficient ($r=0.689$, $p=0.01$) with customer-based brand equity. Social media also had a strong positive correlation coefficient ($r=0.705$, $p=0.01$) with customer-based brand equity.

Table 6 Multiple Linear Regression

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	4.064	.782		5.195	.000		
	Information quality	.177	.033	.219	5.346	.000	.596	1.677
	Brand storytelling	.101	.045	.128	2.229	.026	.302	3.313
	Brand	.066	.052	.074	1.271	.205	.290	3.444

transparency								
Electronic word of mouth	.243	.045	.255	5.370	.000	.444	2.254	
Social media	.245	.045	.276	5.397	.000	.382	2.615	

a. Dependent Variable: Customer-based brand equity

Table 6 showed that there is no multicollinearity because the VIFs of information quality (1.677), brand storytelling (3.313), brand transparency (3.444), electronic word of mouth (2.254), and social media (2.615) towards customer-based brand equity of hotels in South-South Nigeria are below 10. Besides, the tolerance level is higher than 0.1 where information quality is 0.596, brand storytelling is 0.302, brand transparency is 0.290, electronic word of mouth is 0.444 and social media is 0.382.

The regression model was, therefore;

$$CBBE = \beta_0 + \beta_1IQ + \beta_2BS + \beta_3BT + \beta_4E - WOM + \beta_5SM + \epsilon \dots\dots\dots i$$

$$CBBE = 4.064 + 0.177IQ + 0.101BS + 0.066BT + 0.243E - WOM + 0.245SM \dots\dots ii$$

Table 7 Model Fitness

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1153.094	5	230.619	129.338	.000 ^b
	Residual	634.773	356	1.783		
	Total	1787.867	361			

a. Dependent Variable: Customer-based brand equity

b. Predictors: (Constant), Information quality, Brand storytelling, Brand transparency, Electronic word of mouth, Social media.

The F-ratio in Table 7 is statistically significant (F = 129.338, p=0.000 < 0.05), which implies that the regression model, which includes the dimensions of content marketing strategy are significant for the study.

Table 8 Model summary

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.803 ^a	.645	.640	1.335

a. Predictors: (Constant), Information quality, Brand storytelling, Brand transparency, Electronic word of mouth, Social media

Table 8 showed that the dimensions of content marketing strategy were found to explain 64% (0.640) of the variability in customer-based brand equity of hotels in South-South Nigeria, as indicated by the adjusted R2 value.

Summary of Findings

Table 6 showed that information quality has significant positive effect on customer-based brand equity of hotels in South-South Nigeria ($\beta = 0.219$). Test of hypothesis one showed that information quality has a significant positive effect on customer-based brand equity of hotels in South-South Nigeria ($0.000 < 0.05$). The result agreed with Sawaftahet al (2021) study findings that customers are more attached and engaged when they are emotionally subjected to a credible message source, e.g., user-generated content, than when they are emotionally subjected to less credible ones. One of the most basic strategies to gain benefits and effectively compete with other market participants is to use valuable content in advertisements (Ausra&Ruta, 2016). The finding suggest that information quality plays a critical role in enhancing customer perception, trust, and satisfaction, and ultimately leading to higher levels of bookings and loyalty in the hotel industry.

Brand storytelling has significant positive effect on customer-based brand equity of hotels in South-South Nigeria ($\beta = 0.128$). Test of hypothesis two showed that brand storytelling has significant positive effect on customer-based brand equity of hotels in South-South Nigeria ($0.026 < 0.05$). The result supports Olson (2019) assertion that whether it is a single image or a video, using visual marketing to tell a story helps to turn viewers into users and devoted buyers following the brand. A strong brand story can instill personality and value in a brand during promotional activities (Xie, 2021). The study suggests that brand storytelling can be a powerful tool for hotels to communicate their brand values, create emotional connections with customers, and build brand equity and loyalty. Hotels that use effective brand storytelling techniques can differentiate themselves from competitors and create memorable experiences for their customers.

Brand transparency has no significant effect on customer-based brand equity of hotels in South-South Nigeria ($\beta = 0.074$). Test of hypothesis three showed that brand transparency has no significant effect on customer-based brand equity of hotels in South-South Nigeria ($0.205 > 0.05$). The result of the study contradicted the findings of past empirical study. Competence-based trust hinges on a company's depth of expertise and exposure; integrity-based trust hinges on the company's openness, sincerity, and care for the general welfare (Yu, et al 2022). This study challenged the prevailing notion that by being transparent, hotels can build trust and loyalty with their customers, differentiate themselves from competitors. Brand transparency can only attract customers who value openness and honesty.

Electronic word of mouth has significant positive effect on customer-based brand equity of hotels in South-South Nigeria ($\beta = 0.255$). Test of Hypothesis 4 showed that electronic word of mouth has significant positive effect on customer-based brand equity of hotels in South-South Nigeria ($0.000 < 0.05$). The result agreed with Ngoma&Ntale (2019) assertion that E-WOM is a link between relationship marketing and customer loyalty. E-WOM is typically recognised as a reliable and reputable source of information (Septiari, 2018). The study suggests that E-WOM play a significant role in the hotel industry by influencing consumers' purchase decisions and shaping brand reputation. Hotels that actively manage their online reputation and respond to online reviews tend to have higher ratings and customer satisfaction ratings. However, hotels also face challenges in managing online reviews and dealing with negative feedback.

Social media has a significant positive effect on customers-based brand equity of hotels in South-South Nigeria ($\beta = 0.276$). Test of hypothesis five showed that social media has significant positive effect on customer-based brand equity of hotels in South-South Nigeria ($0.000 < 0.05$). Through the use of social media to raise awareness, Stojanovic et al.(2018) have also confirmed the close connection between the marketing's intensity and the brand while deciding on a holiday spot. The study suggests that hotels use social media primarily for marketing, customer engagement, and reputation management. Hotels that use social media more frequently and effectively tend to have higher occupancy rates, revenue per available room, and customer satisfaction ratings. However, hotels also face challenges in using social media such as managing online reputation and measuring the effectiveness of social media marketing.

Managerial Implications

The study extends the theoretical framework of attachment theory by incorporating content marketing strategy as a significant factor in shaping customer-based brand equity. Attachment theory could provide insights into how hotels can use content marketing to create emotional connections with their customers, build brand loyalty, and ultimately drive business growth. In the context of hotels, attachment theory could be used to explain how customers develop emotional attachments to certain hotel brands based on their experiences and interactions with them. The study's findings could have significant implications for the hotel industry, as they could provide insights into how hotels can use content marketing strategy to differentiate themselves from competitors, build brand awareness and loyalty, and ultimately drive business growth. By understanding how content marketing can impact customer-based brand equity, hotels can develop more effective content marketing strategies that align with their brand values and resonate with their target audience.

5. Conclusion

The study concluded that content marketing strategy has significant positive effect on customer-based brand equity of hotels in South-South Nigeria. The dimensions of content marketing strategy were found to explain 64% of the variability in customer-based brand equity of hotels in South-South Nigeria. The dimensions of content marketing strategy, such as information quality, brand storytelling, electronic word-of-mouth and social media have significant positive effect on customer-based brand equity of hotels in South-South Nigeria except for brand transparency.

6. Recommendations

- Hotels should ensure that the information they provide on their website and other marketing materials is accurate and up-to-date. This would give customers a clear understanding of what they can expect during their stay.
- Firms should be encouraged to use images and videos to tell their brand story visually. This can include showcasing the history of the hotel, highlighting unique hotel amenities, and showcasing the hotel brand's values in action.
- Hotels should be open to sharing information about their operations, such as staffing levels, amenities, and safety protocols. This will help build trust with customers and show that they are committed to their safety and well-being.
- Hotels should respond to both positive and negative reviews. Responding to positive reviews can reinforce positive feelings about the hotel and encourage repeat business.
- Social media is a visual medium, and hotels should use high-quality images and videos to showcase their property, amenities, and services. This can help attract and engage potential guests and build brand awareness.

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