

Analysis of the concept of content marketing

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the concept of content marketing, and its objectives reveal the essence of content marketing and provide its structural model. The study presents the newest summarized results from the publications in the last decade. From this study, the authors concluded that content marketing should be understood as a type of marketing that includes sharing purposeful information in the digital space. Also, they concluded that content marketing happens through a mix of formation (e.g., aims, methods, tools of content marketing), interaction (e.g., co-sharing of formed content), and consequences (e.g., results like co-creation, other relationships), which affect formation and interaction. A structural model of content marketing is also provided. The authors reveal the uniqueness of content marketing based on the research and provide directions for further investigations.

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1. Introduction

The processes of globalization inevitably change our society. The opportunities to reach new markets, and potential customers, who had been unreachable before the changes brought by globalization, expand. On the other hand, the competition among different organizations (e.g., business organizations) inevitably increases (OECD, 2020). For instance, in Lithuania, the number of newly registered business companies through the period of 2015 to 2019 was over 30 thousand (31,303) (EI, 2020). The number of bankrupts through the same period was about 12 thousand (12,446) (OSP, 2020), which marks the increase of new businesses by nearly 19 thousand (18,857). This means that about 3,650 new companies are established every year, i.e., about 10 companies every day. The traditional, conventional business practices also face serious challenges (e.g., replacing regular books with electronic ones) (Cope and Phillips, 2006). In the face of growing competition and emerging adaptation issues, the challenge arises of standing out from competitors and gaining a competitive advantage. Increasing competition in the supply of business products, product diversity, globalization processes, intercultural cognition, and the development of

opportunities in the digital space also shape new challenges for building a relationship with the market. These and other processes determine changes in consumers' expectations, consumer savvy, and demand for high-quality content shaping a relationship with an organization. Considering that one of the main goals of marketing in an organization is to form a long-term and harmonious relationship with consumers, organizations need to focus on content marketing, which is one of the new ways to connect and create value for them through the relevant quality of content.

In the broadest sense, content is understood as any information or material published online or in any other form (Poradova, 2020). It can be stated that content is a broad concept used in various areas of reality, including social life, such as business, learning, or building relationships.

The activities in different areas of social life (e.g., business, education, public affairs) require various resources, which tend to be limited. To attract such limited resources, management and control, intended to influence others, are applied. For instance, strategic planning helps achieve management goals, and an integral part of management is marketing.

From the perspective of impact, marketing can be seen as an effort to capture the attention of a particular person, a group of individuals, or the public using a specific content that may be beneficial to the person who makes that effort (Smith, 2012). From a corporate perspective, marketing can be seen as an activity that allows attracting limited resources from a wider area (market). Those efforts or ways to

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attract resources are of various types. They include internal marketing (e.g., encouraging existing consumers to buy again); external marketing (e.g., encouraging potential consumers to buy); relationships marketing (e.g., I give you a discount on your birthday), and interaction marketing (I buy from you, and you buy from me). From a practical point of view, these forms of marketing are usually mixed and used together to create the so-called marketing complex. However, it can also be said that there is no such thing as the best mixture of marketing from the point of view of perfection. Hence, researchers and practitioners try to find the best strategy for attracting these limited resources. They improve the forms of marketing that are known already and also search for conceptually new forms. Usually, these new forms arise from noticeable changes in society (e.g., the spread of information and communication technologies) (Brady et al., 2008) and the advancements in other fields of science (e.g., neuroscience) (Lim, 2018). However, sometimes the new forms of marketing arise from the changes in marketers' perception of customers' behaviour. The authors of this article assume that content marketing differs from conventional marketing; thus, this research will focus on one form of interactive marketing, content marketing.

In terms of the theories explaining consumer behavior, it can be argued that conventional marketing is based on the theory of behaviorism (Skinner, 1965; Bartels, 1968). The essence of behaviorism is that behavior can be learned. Learning can happen spontaneously; a person does or does not do something and faces inevitable consequences. This kind of learning does not leave space to affect consumers' behavior. However, learning may not be only spontaneous; it may be preconditioned. Therefore, if we want a person to behave in one way or another (e.g., to buy a product), we need to teach them, and the teaching takes place through reinforcements or punishments. According to behaviorism, reinforcement could be positive (e.g., buy more often and get a more significant discount) or negative (e.g., generate higher income and regain previous perks). Punishment can also be positive (e.g., retrieving an opportunity to pay by cash on product delivery after refusing to accept the previously ordered product) or negative (e.g., if you buy less often, you will lose a free welcome drink at arrival) (Skinner, 1965). Such a point of view does not leave space for consumers' free will. It can be said that the current consumers' behavior is a result of a previously learned stimulus. If you give the 'right' stimulus, eventually, the consumer will behave the way the marketer wants. We suppose that content marketing cannot be based, at least partially, on the assumptions of behaviorism because it does not directly seek to steer the consumer in a particular direction, and that is why we decided to analyze this phenomenon.

Content marketing is a form of interactive marketing that does not have an unambiguous,

uniform definition (Du Plessis, 2017a; Repovienė and Pažėraitė, 2019; Poradova, 2020). For instance, content marketing is defined as a marketing strategy characterized by creating and disseminating the content that is valuable, consistent, and appropriate to achieve the desired goals (Baltes, 2015) or a marketing technique described by developing and disseminating an informative, entertaining, free of charge content (Wall and Spinuzzi, 2018). The existing empirical publications affirm that the basis of content marketing is the sense of community and value (Holliman and Rowley, 2014) with no intention to sell (Heimbach and Hinz, 2018). It is argued that, due to expanding content marketing tools and forms, content marketing is becoming multidirectional (it is not only the activities of the organization that are consumer-oriented) (Bakhtieva, 2016). Content marketing is asserted to foster closer consumer relationships (Halevi and O'Hanlon, 2016; Poradova, 2020) with an emphasis on mutual engagement (interaction) (Turon and Juzek, 2015). However, a review of definitions and limited research reveals that content marketing is understood as an exclusively practical activity (Baltes, 2015; Wall and Spinuzzi, 2018). The principles of the scientific method, such as systematic observation, do not seem to be applied in this practical activity. However, they are prerequisites for developing content marketing as a phenomenon (Kuş, 2016) and evidence-based practice. Despite the lack of a scientific basis, it has been stated that content marketing is becoming a leading (Du Plessis, 2017b), new and relevant (Repovienė and Pažėraitė, 2018) form of marketing in the digital space, which should be assessed critically.

The article aims to investigate how content marketing is understood in academic papers. By analyzing content marketing, the authors seek to understand the peculiarities of the marketing approach and convey the view in the scientific discourse. As the number of works on content marketing is growing, it is important to understand how this phenomenon is analyzed in this field of research, which approaches are prevalent, and what has not yet been investigated. The authors employ scientific analysis to provide a generalized, scientifically verifiable understanding of content marketing and a framework for applying it. The aim is to understand how the imperative of content marketing can be used ethically and responsibly, interacting with the target audiences to actualize ongoing processes and lead towards a collaborative process. The English keyword content marketing has been chosen for the analysis of the concept to objectively assess the phenomenon analyzed in international frameworks and not to digress into different interpretations of the concepts.

The study of scientific sources reveals significant differences in how researchers and practitioners perceive content marketing. Different researchers perceive the phenomenon of content marketing differently. It can be assumed that content marketing

conceptually differs from conventional marketing, so it is worthwhile to analyze this phenomenon. We presuppose that these differences arise from a conceptually different attitude towards the customer. Traditional marketing tries to affect the consumer to decide to consume an offered product, whereas content marketing does not attempt to do this. Instead of interfering with consumers' decisions, content marketing is more about inviting the customer to decide. The study of the chosen literature sources allowed observing general regularities from the empirical data collected. Thus, two questions were relevant to the study: What is content marketing? What is its theoretical structure? The research aims to analyze the peculiarities of content marketing and summarise the phenomenon in the scientific literature. We made an assumption that content marketing is more like a strategy.

2. Material and methods

To achieve the aim of the research, an analysis of scientific sources has been performed. The search was carried out using the keyword 'content marketing' and investigating the titles of the articles and the thematic sections. The investigation was conducted in May 2020 in the scientific databases and search engines Clarivate Analytics Web of Science, Emerald Management, Taylor and Francis, Academic Search Ultimate, Business Search Ultimate, Lithuanian Virtual Library, Directory of Open Access Journals. The search languages were English and Lithuanian; the search period was 2010-2020. We decided to choose ten years because the usual timespan for such analysis is 10 years (Mertens, 2010). Besides, according to the advanced search results on Google Scholar (<https://scholar.google.com/>) and Semantic Scholar (<https://www.semanticscholar.org/>) in 2021, the number of scientific publications on content marketing increased during the last ten years. According to Google Scholar, from 2000 to 2010, the number of scientific publications on content marketing was 150, and from 2010 to 2020, it was 351. Similar tendencies could be seen with Semantic Scholar. It recorded 74 in the first decade of the century and 290 in the second decade. The decision to choose one keyword was based on the authors' aim to focus strictly on the concept of content marketing. Including additional, possibly related keywords would have increased some digression to related concepts. More focus on the concepts related to content marketing could be found in another publication of the authors (Dilys et al., 2021).

The criterion of inclusion/exclusion was defined before searching for literature. The criterion for inclusion was the answer to the question of what content marketing is, and the criteria for exclusion are mentioned later. The authors suppose that to review how scholars define content marketing, the publications included should answer the question of what content marketing is. If the publication does not answer this question, it should be rejected.

A total of 292 articles were found, and 46 papers have been selected for a detailed review. After analyzing the titles and abstracts, 246 articles were rejected due to the following reasons: No analysis of the concept of content marketing was provided (N=170); duplicates (N=14); unavailability of the texts (N=54); inappropriate language (N=8). After a detailed review of the remaining 46 articles, 10 articles were rejected due to the following reasons: Analysis of content but not content marketing (N=5), the inappropriate language of the full-text article (N=3), prevention (how to avoid) content marketing (N=2). Additional sources found and read previously were also included in the analysis (N=3). The final number of the articles analyzed is 39.

To avoid biases, the search for the keyword agreed was done independently. After the search, individual results were combined into one set, and bibliographic software removed duplicates. After the removal of duplications, each author reviewed the titles and abstracts of the publications left and decided whether they met the inclusion/exclusion criteria or not. This process revealed that almost all publications were judged similarly by authors. A small number (N=3) with mixed evaluation was rejected. After coming up with 46 selected publications, the authors autonomously read all available full-text publications and made a joint decision that 11 publications should be rejected at this phase. No disagreements were found in the evaluation of full-text publications.

We assume that library research is the best method for this study because reviewing scientific sources allows for synthesizing the existing evidence and seeing a more generalized picture of the phenomenon. It also suggests answers to more general questions such as 'What is it?'. The answers to such questions allow seeing 'the missing pieces of the puzzle (phenomenon)' and provide a good base for finding them.

3. Results and discussions

The study disclosed that more profound knowledge of content marketing, the need to reveal its connections, the demand for more detailed analysis and research were determined by the different contexts of the development of relationships, i.e., digitization, social networks, interactive content, etc. (Bakhtieva, 2016; Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016; Salminen et al., 2019). The following reasons for the application of content marketing can be identified: The formation of the content sharing phenomenon, engagement in communities, willingness to participate in joint activities and engage in the process of development, as well as the aspiration for awareness, value creation, closer relationship through building loyalty and expansion of audience (market) (Ahmad et al., 2016; Du Plessis, 2017c; Repovienė and Pažėraitė, 2018; Turon and Juzek, 2015; Kuş, 2016).

There are noticeable links between services and content marketing. The development of service

marketing techniques and their application digitally aims at forming closer relationships with consumers. According to Holliman and Rowley (2014), one can rely on a service logic philosophy that views consumers as part of an extended organization and co-producers of the marketing of the organization. However, to properly assess the structure of the concept of content marketing, not only practical but also academic context is needed (Kuş, 2016). Involvement and participation in content creation mean sharing information, visual and (or) audio content, thus, basically forming a culture of sharing valuable content. In content marketing, the user's involvement is a reflex interaction or a value reflection of the experience in the digital space. From

the corporate perspective, content marketing is the art of communication (Heimbach and Hinz, 2018; Poradova, 2020), which should shape a sharing culture and environments that encourage the sharing of valuable content (Ahmad et al., 2016; Zomorodian and Lu 2018; Baltes, 2015). A value reason and (or) benefit are needed for this process (Zomorodian and Lu, 2018).

The systematized and generalized results of the study are presented in the following two tables. At first (Table 1), we introduce the theoretical findings of the peculiarities of content marketing; then, we provide the results regarding content peculiarities in the context of content marketing because content marketing and content are closely related.

Table 1: Peculiarities of content marketing

Peculiarities of content marketing	Findings	Authors
Approach/area of content marketing	marketing strategy; marketing techniques; marketing method; way of communication (the art of communication); undifferentiated approach	Wall and Spinuzzi (2018); Du Plessis (2017b; 2017c); Liang et al. (2019); Poradova (2020); Salminen et al. (2019); Järvinen and Taiminen (2016); Halevi and O'Hanlon (2016); Wilcock (2018); Wagner and Boatright (2019); Repovienė and Pažėraitė (2019); Repovienė (2017); Rastokaitė (2016); Radenković-Šošić (2013); Holliman and Rowley (2014)
	It is essential to convey information	Du Plessis (2017b; 2017c); Zomorodian and Lu (2018); Mansour and Barandas (2017); Ahmad et al. (2016); Salminen et al. (2019); Holliman and Rowley (2014); Poradova (2020)
	It is essential to motivate	Rastokaitė (2016); Repovienė and Pažėraitė (2018)
Aims of content marketing	The process is important	Ahmad et al. (2016); Du Plessis (2017b; 2017c); Järvinen and Taiminen (2016); Müller and Christandl (2019); Halevi and O'Hanlon (2016); Repovienė (2017); Pažėraitė and Gedvilaitė (2018); Dolezal (2019); Ho et al. (2020); Kuş (2016); Pažėraitė and Gedvilaitė (2016)
	The outcome is important	Järvinen and Taiminen (2016); Radenković-Šošić (2013); Du Plessis (2017c); Wagner and Boatright (2019); Turon and Juzek (2015); Tsiakali (2018); Repovienė and Pažėraitė (2019); Mansour and Barandas (2017)
Outcome of content marketing	Benefits for consumers and the organization; brand awareness; profit; transmission of information; attracting consumers; added value; meaning and consciousness	Du Plessis (2017a; 2017c); Poradova (2020); Repovienė and Pažėraitė (2018); Wagner and Boatright (2019); Turon and Juzek (2015); Repovienė and Pažėraitė (2019); Pažėraitė and Gedvilaitė (2018); Dolezal (2019); Ho et al. (2020); Holliman and Rowley (2014); Kuş (2016); Baltes (2015)

The analysis of the chosen publications is conducted based on the constructed elements of content marketing. We start with the approach/area of content marketing and move to aims, and lastly, outcomes.

3.1. Area of content marketing

Regarding the approach/area of content marketing specifically, the study of the publications revealed different approaches. Most authors perceive content marketing as a marketing strategy (Radenković-Šošić, 2013; Rastokaitė, 2016; Repovienė, 2017; Repovienė and Pažėraitė, 2019; Salminen et al., 2019; Wilcock, 2018; Wagner and Boatright, 2019). Other authors perceive content marketing as a marketing method (Wall and Spinuzzi, 2018), the art of communication (Poradova, 2020), or a marketing technique (Halevi and O'Hanlon, 2016). Some authors do not attribute content marketing to any approach and perceive it as a practical activity (Du Plessis, 2017b; 2017c; Liang et al., 2019; Holliman and Rowley, 2014; Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016). To sum up, there are two

major approaches to content marketing; one perceives it as a strategy, and the other assigns it to undifferentiated practice. A few authors perceive content marketing as a marketing method, technique, or way of communication. It can be stated that there is a significant gap between the academic and practical points of view towards content marketing mentioned by several authors e.g., Wall and Spinuzzi (2018) and Du Plessis (2017c).

3.2. Aims of content marketing

Regarding the aims of content marketing specifically, the study of publications revealed that it is essential to engage (Holliman and Rowley, 2014; Zomorodian and Lu, 2018), inform (Zomorodian and Lu, 2018; Salminen et al., 2019), attract (Zomorodian and Lu, 2018; Mansour and Barandas, 2017; Ahmad et al., 2016; Poradova, 2020), advert, connect with the audience (Du Plessis, 2017b), and entertain (Salminen et al., 2019).

To sum up, one of the aims of content marketing is to convey information to connect with the audience. The study also showed that to improve

motivation and form trust, it is essential to inspire (Repovienė and Pažeraitė, 2018; Rastokaitė, 2016) and enable (Repovienė and Pažeraitė, 2018). However, only some of the authors mentioned the importance of customers' inspiration and enablement, so it can be noted that content marketing does not try to motivate customers. The study also revealed that it is important to get involved (Ahmad et al., 2016; Dolezal, 2019), (co)create (Du Plessis, 2017b; 2017c; Ho et al., 2020; Müller and Christandl, 2019), interact (Halevi and O'Hanlon, 2016; Dolezal, 2019), distribute information (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016; Müller and Christandl, 2019; Repovienė, 2017), build relationships (Halevi and O'Hanlon, 2016; Pažeraitė and Gedvilaitė, 2018), share (Repovienė, 2017; Pažeraitė and Gedvilaitė, 2018; Ho et al., 2020), and manage (Ho et al., 2020; Pažeraitė and Gedvilaitė, 2016). The findings suggest that content marketing is essential, and the most important are (co)creation and distribution of information. Finally, the study of the aims of content marketing revealed that it is vital to make a decision (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016; Tsiakali, 2018; Mansour and Barandas, 2017), retain customers (Radenković-Šošić, 2013), build loyalty (Radenković-Šošić, 2013; Du Plessis, 2017c), provide benefits (Repovienė and Pažeraitė, 2017; Turon and Juzek, 2015; Repovienė and Pažeraitė, 2019), and build credibility (Wagner and Boatright, 2019). It can be stated that the results (outcomes) of content marketing are essential, and it is most important to provide benefits and decision making.

3.3. Outcome of content marketing

Lastly, the study of the publications regarding the outcome of content marketing showed that the vital results of content marketing are customers' attraction (Poradova, 2020; Wagner and Boatright, 2019), benefits for the consumer and organization (Holliman and Rowley, 2014), meaning and consciousness, profit (Baltes, 2015), added value (Repovienė and Pažeraitė, 2018; Turon and Juzek, 2015; Repovienė and Pažeraitė, 2019; Kuş, 2016), brand awareness (Wagner and Boatright, 2019; Pažeraitė and Gedvilaitė, 2018), and transmission of information (Dolezal, 2019; Ho et al., 2020). It can be stated that the most crucial outcome of content marketing is added value, which can create other positive effects such as customers' attraction and brand awareness. Based on the study results, it can be stated that most authors consider that the aims of content marketing are customers' attraction, engagement, decision making, information, distribution, (co)creation of information, and benefits. A small part of the authors says that customers' entertainment, advertising, motivation, and building trust are relevant to the aims of content marketing. It is important to note that the outcomes of content marketing depend on the purposes of and the approach to content marketing, and the aims of content marketing depend on the approach to content marketing.

Based on the results, three main parts of content marketing: the approach of content marketing, the aim of content marketing, and the outcomes of content marketing can be observed. Regarding the approach, content marketing can be viewed as a tactic or strategy. The approach to content marketing is related to its aims and outcomes. These peculiarities are generalized in the structural model of content marketing. However, content marketing cannot be isolated from the content, so the generalized results of the characteristics of the content in the context of content marketing are presented in Table 2.

3.4. Characteristics of content findings

The article further discusses the details of the content, including the features of the content, the quality of the content, the subject of the content, the forms and channels of the content, the formats of the content, and the marketing tools of the content.

3.4.1. Features of the content

The content for communication between organizations and consumers is increasingly being delivered in the digital space (Bakhtieva, 2016; Bennett, 2017; Du Plessis, 2017b; Wang et al., 2019); therefore, the authors argue that digital content will continue to be attractive. The digital space enables organizations to achieve their goals in unique ways (Du Plessis, 2017b), and relevant content attracts and joins consumers. Using social networks or other online platforms (Wall and Spinuzzi, 2018), interacting directly with consumers via a personal account on the digital platform can lead to more outstanding results. Therefore, consumer engagement is vital for organizations using content marketing, where the content is easily accessible. Content marketing should be integrated and complement the overall marketing and sales objectives (Wang et al., 2019). In such cases, the content is provided as an additional value, additional information, and a non-commercial outcome of interaction (Bennett, 2017). It is a donation that provides additional information and access to help consumers create accounts (Wang et al., 2019). The content needs to be relevant and introduced in a unique way (Du Plessis, 2017b). It should also build relationships and be attractive (Wang et al., 2019).

In many cases, content is made available to consumers free of charge (Wall and Spinuzzi, 2018; Müller and Christandl, 2019). One of the characteristics of the content is that it is continually under development together with consumers (Müller and Christandl, 2019). The content needs to be informative (Bennett, 2017), engaging, and attractive (Bennett, 2017). This can be achieved by using topical posts on social media and entertainment events or other types of educational, motivational introduction to the content (Wang et al., 2019). Due to unifying experiences, and joint initiatives, the content is disseminated organically,

triggering Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) communication (Du Plessis, 2017b). The value and dissemination of the content increase due to consumers' involvement in creating user-generated content (UGC) (Salminen et al., 2019). For eWOM, UGC, and other activities to develop as smoothly as possible, the content needs to be relevant, user-

driven (Du Plessis, 2017b), and of high quality. According to Poradova (2020), a high-quality content marketing strategy is a suitable and attractive alternative for new brands and projects. Business growth provides ample opportunities to create and publish engaging and valuable content.

Table 2: Characteristics of the content in the context of content marketing

Characteristics of Content	Findings	Authors
Features of the content	Unique; free of charge; under development; informative (facts); entertaining (through events); educational, cultivating; disseminated, spreading organically (eWOM, UGC); digital; online; attractive; need-based (benefit, relevance); high quality; non-commercial	Bakhtieva (2016); Bennett (2017); Wall and Spinuzzi (2018); Du Plessis (2017b); Müller and Christandl (2019); Wang et al. (2019); Salminen et al. (2019); Poradova (2020)
Quality of The content	high value; valuable; consistent; appropriate; encouraging; engaging/motivating	Zomorodian and Lu (2018); Repovienė and Pažėraitė (2018); Wagner and Boatright (2019); Rastokaitė (2016); Kuş (2016)
Subject of The content	Information; experience (emotions); video and audio content	Ahmad et al. (2016); Bakhtieva (2016); Bennett (2017); Liu et al. (2018); Pažėraitė and Gedvilaitė (2018)
Forms and channels of the content	Applications, gadgets, websites, social media, blogs, newsletters, podcasts, reports, reviews, filmed materials, tweets, online journals, Internet TV, viral news, news by e-mail, case studies, instructions, questions-answers, e-books, search engines	Bennett (2017); Du Plessis (2017a); Müller and Christandl (2019); Rubio (2019); Salminen et al. (2019); Fox et al. (2019); Wagner and Boatright (2019); Rowley (2008); Radenković-Šošić (2013); Halevi and O'Hanlon (2016)
Formats of the content	Sound; photo; text; picture; infographics/tables; video recording	Salminen et al. (2019); Zomorodian and Lu (2018); Wilcock (2018); Liu et al. (2018); Wagner and Boatright (2019); Rastokaitė (2016); Pažėraitė and Gedvilaitė (2018)
Marketing tools of The content	Tools of digital marketing; artificial intelligence; content automation	Järvinen and Taiminen (2016); Salminen et al. (2019); Kose and Sert (2017); Pažėraitė and Gedvilaitė (2018)

3.4.2. Quality of the content

When analyzing the quality of content, it has been observed that high levels of quality and value are emphasized (Repovienė and Pažėraitė, 2018). They must be unique and relevant to consumers' needs. The value aspect is particularly important for consumer engagement and retention (Du Plessis, 2017b; Poradova, 2020; Zomorodian and Lu, 2018; Repovienė and Pažėraitė, 2018). The quality of content can be characterized by the features such as consistency, which reveals purposeful usefulness to the community (Wagner and Boatright, 2019) and appropriateness (Zomorodian and Lu, 2018; Repovienė and Pažėraitė, 2018; Rastokaitė, 2016). Besides, the content must be stimulating or encouraging. However, the latter feature is dependent on intercultural differences (Kuş, 2016). When analyzing content development, some other authors emphasize the more ethical aspect of the involvement, i.e., motivation. The content should motivate, inspire, and engage (Du Plessis, 2017b; Kuş, 2016; Repovienė and Pažėraitė, 2018).

3.4.3. The subject of the content

The application of content marketing is based on relevant information and facts, which is more

prominent in the sphere of B2B (Bakhtieva, 2016), where reliability is desired, and is beneficial to brand health (Ahmad et al., 2016). In B2C, content generation is based more on experience and emotions. In this case, the content is introduced in the form of gamification (Bakhtieva, 2016), and the presentation of information is enhanced by video and (or) audio content (Bakhtieva, 2016). The emotional and enjoyable content is likely to go viral (Bennett, 2017; Liu et al., 2018).

To sum up, the primary function of content marketing is to complement the existing subject with relevant and valuable information that must be of high quality and motivate consumers to engage in content development.

3.4.4. Forms and channels of the content

Content delivery formats and dissemination channels are among the most important aspects of content marketing, frequently analyzed in academic papers. Some researchers study them as a critical aspect and provide a definition that suggests that content marketing is perceived as a technique rather than a strategy. Content marketing is supposed to be creating and sharing free of charge but valuable content providing it on websites, social media (blogs), e-newsletters, podcasts, footage, white

papers, apps, Tweets, Facebook, online magazines or television, trending news (virals), etc. (Bennett, 2017; Rubio, 2019). Content marketing is inseparable from online space and valuable content of mostly free access (Bennett, 2017). Other authors talk about the strategic aspect of content marketing when the content is disseminated via social networks and shared by consumers. Salminen et al. (2019) argued that the main difference between paid advertising and content marketing is that content marketing tends to focus on the organic distribution of the content instead of paying for it to be shown. The content followers actively share the created content themselves on their social networks. Du Plessis' (2017a) study also proved that content marketing communication through pushing messages on mobile devices does not yield immediate returns and is often perceived by consumers as a negative phenomenon. Fox et al. (2019) highlighted the importance of user-generated content on social media for content marketing. It is not only social media as a channel but also the content creation aspect that is relevant here. The user-generated content is more acceptable to other users and perceived as a sincere tool. Halevi and O'Hanlon (2016) pointed out that regardless of the type of content, it should be constantly updated, engaging, and delivered through different platforms and channels. Some other scholars note that the content needs to be disseminated systematically across various mediums to convey a unified message. It cannot be a one-off presentation of content through a single distribution channel. The content needs to be repackaged and adapted to different dissemination channels with a long-term perspective (Wagner and Boatright, 2019; Rowley, 2008; Radenković-Šošić, 2013).

3.4.5. Formats of the content

When analyzing content marketing, many researchers emphasize the variety and importance of content formats. According to them, content marketing uses words, sounds, and photographs to increase customers' awareness and introduce brands and new products (Zomorodian and Lu, 2018). Salminen et al. (2019) pointed out that content marketing is a strategic marketing action involving the original digital or analog multimedia content (e.g., text, images, infographics, footage) that aims to entertain and inform consumers. The research findings offer practical advice on how to use content formats for specific content marketing purposes and which design, volume, or type of content is most acceptable to consumers (Wagner and Boatright, 2019; Wilcock, 2018; Liu et al., 2018). It has been discovered that consumers should be offered modern and personalized platforms that include marketing tools (availability of search results based on the content, etc.) with links to social networks, contextual information, user-generated content, citation tools, content tagging, etc. (Wilcock, 2018). It has been determined that consumers express a

higher intention to watch a video if it contains fewer scenes (Liu et al., 2018).

Meanwhile, the user-generated content can be very diverse: evaluative (e.g., users' reviews provided) or non-evaluative. The evaluative content can be positive, mixed, and emotionally neutral (Müller and Christandl, 2019). When the content includes a marketing subject, storytelling can be successfully applied to deliver the content (Turon and Juzek, 2015). According to Rastokaitė (2016), given the Google search mechanism, the content created for the user should answer specific questions, address relevant issues, and help during the process of buying. In the future, increased demand for visual content, orientation towards differentiation rather than an abundance of content, and the presentation of the content across different distribution channels to bring together a specific target audience are predicted (Rastokaitė, 2016).

3.4.6. Marketing tools of the content

The aspects of content marketing automation and digital marketing are frequently mentioned in the papers of various authors. However, there is little practical and specific research in this area. Kose and Sert (2017) analyzed how artificial intelligence can be applied to content marketing to identify the behavior of target customers and users, create self-learning digital content, track consumers' feedback and evaluate services, and select the best content marketing strategy, etc. Järvinen and Taiminen (2016) studied marketing automation in B2B content marketing. Other authors discovered that machine learning and automatic tagging of content on the web could contribute to the effectiveness of content marketing. They suggest extending the application of machine learning in content marketing by combining it with the opportunities offered by neural networks (Salminen et al., 2019).

To sum up, it can be stated that the decisions on all aspects of the content regarding its type, distribution channels, formats, tools, and other elements are vital for the concept of content marketing (Pažeraitė and Gedvilaitė, 2018).

Based on the study results, it has been found that content is an integral part of content marketing. The authors distinguished the features, the quality, the subject, the forms and channels of the content, formats, and marketing tools. The features of the content should be unique and digital, and the quality should be appropriate and encouraging. The subject of the content can be information or ideas. The forms and channels include social media, tweets, instructions, and websites. The format of the content can be text, video, etc. The marketing tools of the content are artificial intelligence and automatization.

3.4.7. Structuring the concept of content marketing

Considering the generalized peculiarities of content marketing (Table 1) and characteristics of

the content in the context of content marketing (Table 2), the authors designed a structural model of

content marketing, which reveals its structure. The results are presented in Fig. 1.

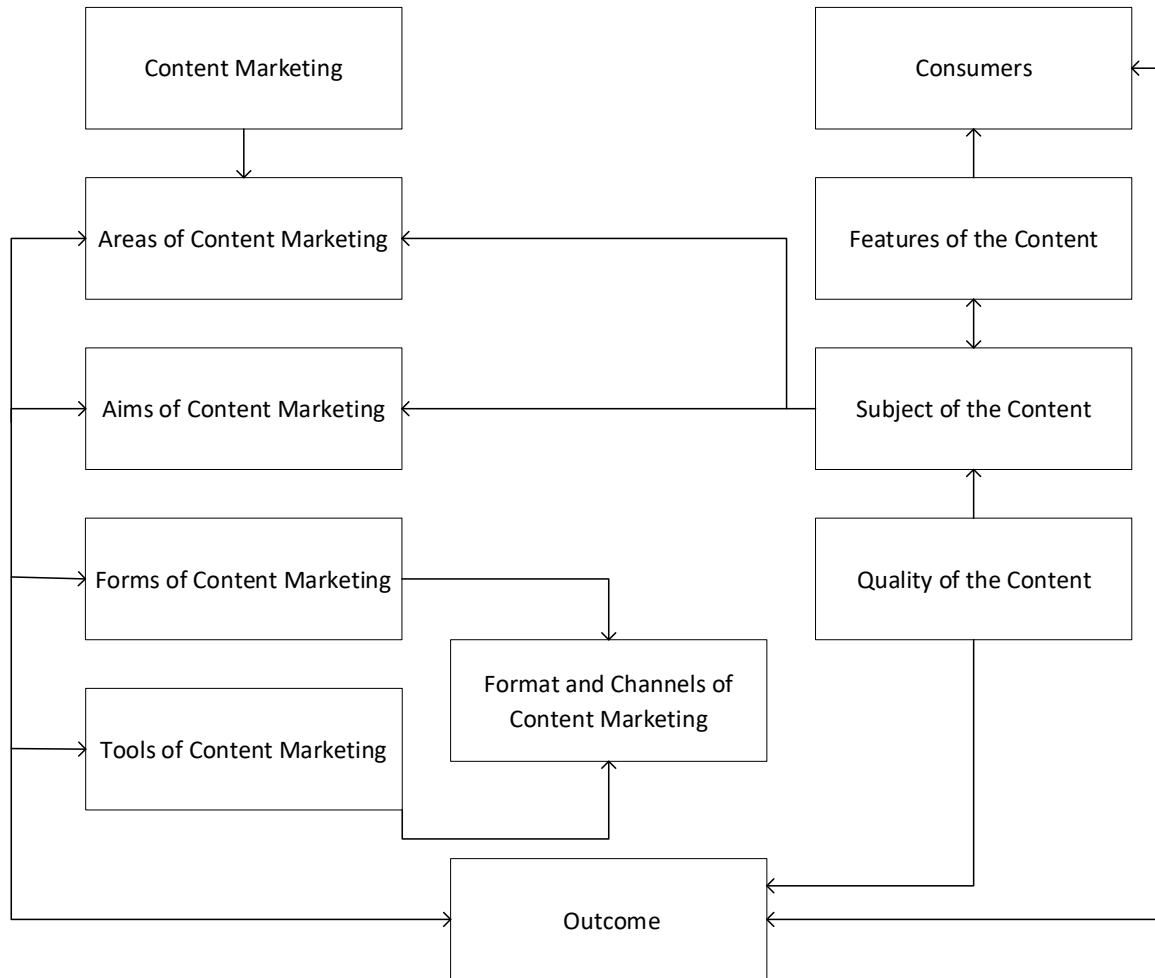


Fig. 1: The structural model of content marketing

According to this structural model, one of the ongoing processes in the internal environment of an organization is marketing, to which the organization may have a diverse approach. Content marketing in the context of marketing can be seen as a marketing technique or a marketing strategy. This approach determines the aims of content marketing (e.g., short-term sales promotion or long-term community engagement). The aims of content marketing, in turn, define the forms and channels of content marketing and the selection of appropriate tools for them (e.g., automatically generated content). All of this determines the format of the content (e.g., texts, videos, images) and the quality of the content and encourages the consumer to act to achieve the outcomes anticipated. On the other hand, it is consumers who determine the effect of content marketing by choosing the content based on its features by engaging in its co-creation or performing other content-driven actions. Then one or another outcome is reached; this outcome affects consumers and the approach to marketing.

In this study, the concept of content marketing has been analyzed, and based on the results of library research, a structural model of content marketing has been designed. The study results show that most authors research content marketing

revealing its conceptual essence in the context of its application depending on the objectives. Research is dominated by the investigation regarding trust/reliability (Holliman and Rowley, 2014; Du Plessis, 2017c; Zomorodian and Lu, 2018; Repovienė and Pažeraitė, 2018). These theoretical insights do help determine the effectiveness of the use of content marketing; however, its benefits are fragmented, i.e., they depend on the content and context used (Du Plessis, 2017c; Liu et al., 2018; Fox et al., 2019).

A long-term investigation into content marketing or a research study is needed to determine the regularities (long-term effectiveness), usefulness, and interrelationships of its components. The benefit of content marketing should be revealed through the causality of the aims and forms, tools, and formats pursued, i.e., how the subject of the content is used. This type of innovative application of content marketing can lead to a closer relationship between the organization and its customers in the long run and social dialogue in value creation, i.e., implementing the agreement on the value desired. The main objectives of content marketing are the involvement in the development of the content (expansion of the subject of the content) and the changes in behavior (transition from individual to

communal value aspects) using digital content. Maintaining the value of content on social networks or other forms of content activation depends on the interest, involvement, and size of the audience.

In the physical environment, marketing objectives are focused on actions using an incentive push or pull strategy, which leads consumers to loyalty to the brand or another subject of the organization and provides practical benefits. However, the objectives of content marketing are more process-oriented (Du Plessis, 2017b; 2017c; Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016; Müller and Christandl, 2019; Halevi and O'Hanlon, 2016), i.e., to provide knowledge or emotional admiration in the content and build a sense of community through sharing impressions (Wall and Spinuzzi, 2018; Salminen et al., 2019; Holliman and Rowley, 2014).

The theoretical conceptualization of content marketing does not take into consideration the peculiarities of its practical application. In the authors' view, those peculiarities depend on or are influenced by the aims of marketing, such as using software to optimize the content object in search engines, increasing its visibility, building its image, increasing sales, etc. While conceptualizing content marketing, the authors believe that content marketing is broader in scope and depends on the approach, the core objective of which is creating value by involving target audiences. The article aims to reveal how value creation decisions are shaped. The tactics of digital marketing are understood as a consequence of content marketing strategies.

Relationship-building decisions, the distance between the consumer and the product provider determines whether content marketing becomes a strategic or tactical tool. If consumers prefer to interact without face-to-face contact, organizations are more inclined to communicate and create attractiveness digitally. The acceleration and intensification of market processes urge reducing the distance between the production and the consumer market, which is facilitated by a range of computerized technologies and online communication tools intended for content delivery. Content marketing solutions are designed to maintain and build relationships with target audiences. In this case, technology and software make it possible to present the content to be communicated in a more sophisticated and detailed way, corresponding to the desired stimulus and revealing its characteristics. Content marketing is based on the use of specific channels that are acceptable to audiences, allowing organizations to focus even more on these channels of communication. A specific ID of the device or users' profile login enables segmenting the content more precisely (e.g., a social network profile can be used to create a portrait of a consumer). Of course, there is also a lot of uncertainty or insecurity in this area (e.g., fake profiles on social networks), so digital identity could be one of the further areas of content marketing to be explored.

4. Content marketing application

Content marketing solutions aim to respond to community needs through unique and specific delivery methods. This encourages organizations to be extremely fast and responsive in terms of the quality of the content because while channel selection is a strategic decision, the content quality parameters are more tactical. Even though the definition of quality in terms of valuable content is a strategic part of its delivery and adaptation, the message, its forms, and formats are already tactical in terms of the tone and frequency with which decisions will be initiated. All this is performed considering consumers' reactions and comments. The frequency of content creation, application, and development within the company determines the type of communication to be focused on. This is observed when content developers set out to teach the audience something valuable and strive to be together on the journey of cognition. In other words, through feedback reactions (the results obtained, such as a click on 'like', comment or share), the digital environment shapes the path of users' actions that lead to the anticipated outcome. Interaction and analytics become significant here. It is necessary to assess the delivery of the content and the lasting value, e.g., by using remarketing solutions - conversions-to avoid confusing the audience and creating an overflow of content traffic. In this way, the target audience would be reached by the actions taken already, which would be used to differentiate what content is relevant and valuable and for whom (Pažeraitė and Gedvilaitė, 2018; Ho et al., 2020).

In addition, it should be mentioned that the use of various tactics and tricks to get closer to consumers requires adherence to the principles of honest communication for the presentation of the content not to become experimenting with consumers. In content marketing, information and its quality are the main subjects, the core basis for what happens. They provide the benefits for new experiences or new interaction solutions and lead to the consolidation of the value of the content. Meanwhile, channels, formats, and tools enliven the environment of the anticipated outcome and serve the function of physical visibility.

As a result, the presentation of the content becomes a critical component not only in terms of communication but also in terms of consolidation of value. The content should be informative and motivate people to take responsibility if it does not comply with the norms set in the digital environment. In this way, the community that creates content seeks shared commitment and strives to manage the consequences and the peculiarities of additional content.

The content that is personalized in the sense of communication is more the result of systemic interactions. It is delivered using artificial intelligence solutions such as chatbots. Orders are managed through self-service functions in an e-shop. In contrast, posts on social networks, and blogs are

more based on organic dissemination. While detailing the characteristics of content marketing, it has been observed that the content needs to be purposeful, often bidirectional, dynamic, and adaptable (Wang et al., 2019; Bakhtieva, 2016; Bennett, 2017; Poradova, 2020). The content delivered is accessible to a large audience. However, it is also personalized and adapted, thus creating and developing a relationship.

In general, personalization in marketing is possible in various aspects such as distribution, price adjustment, etc. In the digital environment, communication involves a slightly broader range of personalization: digital formats can be used to express and simulate natural and sometimes artificial or personified emotions, which, due to the variety of formats and the relative absence of physical contact, can be more expressive or engaging for other interest groups. The distinctiveness is also highlighted through the possibility provided to the consumer to suggest solutions directly being logged in to the system or social network and completing the desired outcome (Wilcock, 2018; Tsiakali, 2018; Kose and Sert, 2017). In this way, the application and development of the content are also linked to the consumption of the service or design of the product itself. If this is done in a distinctive way and is supported by a larger audience, it boosts the consumer culture. Tactical decisions can then provide the impetus for an organization to change the way it operates, taking content marketing to a strategic level, e.g., by moving away from physical outlets or intermediaries, focusing on, and delivering goods through electronic channels, and allowing the consumers to manage the orders themselves.

The digital content and its features determine the attractiveness of the content and its uniqueness for three main reasons: it can be used here and now; it creates opportunities to attract large audiences; it allows the content user-creator to participate personally. In terms of value formation, the success of a feedback response accompanies those who enable the audience to become more engaged and involved, create, feel responsible, or meaningful. Therefore, the emphasis is placed on educational or patronizing and proactive actions leading to new practices together with audiences (Fox et al., 2019). This confirms the idea put forward by Holliman and Rowley (2014) that content marketing can be based on the logic of marketing services, which is to create value that meets the needs of the market and form proposals that increase consumers' satisfaction. However, everything is transferred to the digital space, which is confirmed by most of the works analyzed (Kuş, 2016; Bakhtieva, 2016; Du Plessis, 2017b; Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016). However, Pažėraitė and Gedvilaitė (2016) suggested that in shaping value, it is not the virtual environment that is more important but the information provided or, in other words, its informativeness or usefulness.

In support of this idea, it can be stated that the emerging technological breakthroughs and artificial intelligence-initiated solutions in the field of

marketing should be used not only for process optimization but also for their purposeful management in the context of the perception of content marketing. According to Wilcock (2018), content marketing should be linked to improving the experience using personalized content presented in a modern interface. It can be added that content marketing is geared towards shaping relationships or interactions in unique ways using various digital forms. The uniqueness of the subject of content marketing is revealed through the relevance of the social value and its problems prevailing in the context.

There are still inconsistencies in the content development process due to value or benefit aspects. On the one hand, business organizations expect and strive for content marketing as a technique or method to reap economic benefits in the shortest time possible. On the other hand, the audience expects openness and freedom in creating and participating in the process. In other words, the business seeks purposefulness; in contrast, consumers, depending on the different levels of cognition, generate content or analyze the subject of the content in various turns of thought, promoting its free creation or autonomy. Therefore, content marketing is like a self-sustaining process that organizations purposefully adapt to using ever-evolving digital forms, social networks, or other platforms where there is a larger audience that meets the goals of the business organization. Content synergies can be complementary while striving to appropriately respond to or develop the ongoing dialogue towards the agreement on what content is relevant in a particular context and time.

The aims of content marketing can vary in intensity depending on the area of its application:

- incentive (passive focus on the content)
- self-regulatory (moderate involvement of focus on the subject of the content)
- educating/inclusive (intensive involvement of focus)

The initiated content, its subject, or its feedback reaction precondition whether the area of the content marketing in the organization will be tactical or strategic and what techniques or methodologies will be used to achieve benefit. Researchers interpret the concept of content marketing based on the logic that the phenomenon analyzed is determined by two or more interest groups, i.e., the organization and its audience, which can grow depending on the intensity of the content area, the origins of their relationship (interaction), and the evaluation of the subject (consequences). In other words, the connection or its moment is established when time as the central value attribute in developing the relationship needed with the subject is identified.

To sum up, three main conditions for the content marketing process can be distinguished, illustrated in Fig. 2.

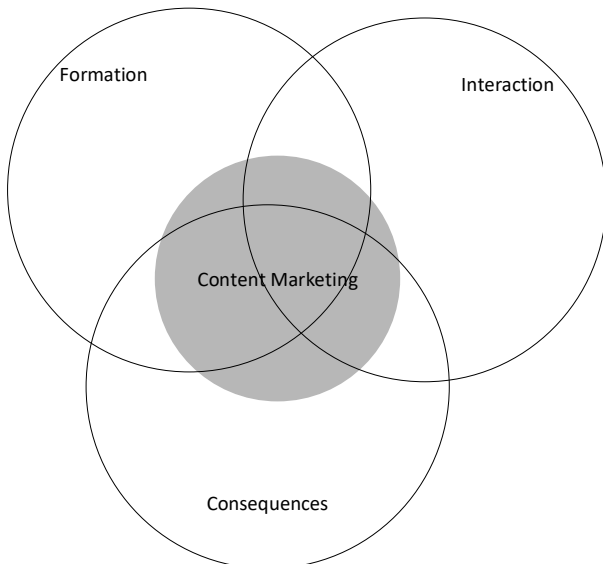


Fig. 2: The main conditions of the process of content marketing

The formation is the determination of the interest in the process, i.e., aims, methods, tools, etc.; the interaction includes sharing and creating the subject of content marketing, and the consequences are the outcome of the process and determine the relationships, their duration and nature, and the peculiarities of formation.

It can be argued that the effectiveness of content marketing can be measured, and the methods and techniques used in it can be evaluated. However, it is crucial for content marketing to be applied following legal norms and principles of ethics. By ignoring them or seeking one-way benefits, the organization will not only fail to achieve positive results but also trigger negative opinions and cause the elimination of user-generated content. In this way, the entire reputation of the organization can be affected. The problem also arises because organizations tend to seek to manage communication channels purposefully and strategically, whereas consumers expect to be free to develop content or form opinions. Frequently, consumers are more active, and the organization fails to respond and manage the consequences adequately. With these aspects in mind, it is appropriate to shape the value provisions of the organization and communicate them to consumers to jointly create the content that responds to the values of the organization, forms a conscious culture that is helpful and is based on meaningful interaction in the digital space.

It is also vital to comprehend that new forms and channels make content management more difficult, which is particularly relevant in terms of consumer data protection, copyright, and other aspects. It is, therefore, necessary to anticipate the solutions or techniques that will help design processes appropriately to recognize and identify in an open system what the subject of the content is and why it is used in the digital space to prevent the use of malicious content. Thus, based on the analysis and discussion of scientific sources, the authors of this publication present the following generalized

concept of content marketing: content marketing is sharing purposeful information in the digital space, the procedural structure of which depends on the sphere of application of marketing. To provide benefits or create value through communication by strengthening relationships between stakeholders, the process is implemented through voluntary engagement.

The classified features of content marketing and its structural model presented define the procedural structure and allow consistent planning of decisions to achieve results and proper selection of marketing areas. They also reveal the causality of applying the form and possible practical applications.

5. Limitations and future directions

The limitations of the research field of content marketing and research challenges include different interpretations of the concept of content marketing, the determination of the level of its research ability, different intercultural contexts, and a broad pragmatic field of interdisciplinarity in analyzing the subject. Moreover, information rapidly ages, and the analysis or performed research depends on the context and its dynamics while choosing the forms of activation and activating its digital content. These limitations determine the complexity of the phenomenon under analysis while seeking to apply it universally.

Given these limitations, it is further appropriate to study the techniques of applying content marketing in a specific context and empirically investigate the relationships between the components presented in the structural model considering the content subject analyzed within a particular context (e.g., co-creation of tourism service through the dissemination of content in social media). Empirical research should be conducted to identify the factors that determine the effectiveness of content marketing depending on the context and reveal what types of audience behaviour predetermine the effectiveness of participation or engagement. It should also identify how the application of content formats and forms change for the consumers of different generations or in various areas of activity, what content marketing solutions should be fixed, and which of them should be variable and adaptive to the content channels. Given the ongoing digitization processes and the growing relevance of content marketing, it is purposeful to analyze and research the use of artificial intelligence in creating shared content with the target audience, the peculiarities of the new phenomena, such as crowdsourcing on social media, and forging co-creation conditions in the digital space. As a possible limitation, we consider the fact that the search was conducted using one keyword, content marketing.

6. Conclusion

The study shows a general upward trend in scientific publications, suggesting that the field is

becoming increasingly relevant in practice and is, therefore, analyzed in a scientific context. Undoubtedly, the research results have a subsequent impact on practical decisions.

We conclude that content marketing is a type of marketing that includes sharing purposeful information in the digital space, the procedural structure of which depends on the sphere of application of marketing. The process is implemented through voluntary engagement to provide benefits or create value through communication by strengthening relationships between stakeholders. Also, it can be concluded that content marketing as practice can be approached as a marketing strategy or technique. This approach defines the aims of content marketing (long-term or short-term); the aims of content marketing define specific forms and channels of the content and the selection of tools. All of this determines the format and quality of content, which affect consumers' actions to reach the outcomes. However, on the other hand, consumers assess the effect of content marketing by choosing the content based on preferences by deciding to participate (or not) in co-creation or by performing (or not) other content-based actions. Then one or another outcome is reached, which affects consumers and the approach of the marketing.

The study suggests that content marketing is an evolving area of marketing and is perceived more as a strategy than a marketing technique.

Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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