

DIGITAL CONTENT ON THE CUSTOMER JOURNEY IN AGRICULTURAL BUSINESS

VANKOV, NIKOLAY¹

Abstract

The report explores the pivotal role that digital content plays in shaping consumer behavior in the agricultural business sector. It underscores how digital content impacts the entire customer journey, from the initial exposure to a brand, through the decision-making process, to the eventual purchase and ongoing consumer engagement. The research delves into the marketing funnel, a key model for understanding how businesses can guide potential customers through various stages-awareness, interest, evaluation, decision, and loyalty-ultimately transforming them into loyal advocates of the brand. In agribusiness, where traditional practices have long dominated, the integration of digital strategies has become indispensable. The report identifies several strategic components of the marketing funnel that agricultural enterprises can leverage to optimize their digital presence. These components are essential not only for attracting new customers but also for maintaining long-term relationships with them. By utilizing various digital channels such as social media, content marketing, search engine optimization (SEO), and targeted advertising, agricultural businesses can engage their audience more effectively at different stages of the customer journey. One of the core findings of the research is the importance of creating a cohesive digital strategy tailored to the specific needs of agricultural businesses. This involves selecting the right mix of digital channels and tools to reach potential customers, raise awareness, and eventually drive conversions.

The study emphasizes that, in today's fast-evolving digital environment, agricultural enterprises cannot rely solely on traditional marketing techniques. Instead, they must adopt digital tools that allow for better personalization and interaction with customers. This not only enhances customer satisfaction but also builds stronger brand loyalty. Furthermore, the report highlights the critical role that innovation and technology play in modern agribusiness. The adoption of cutting-edge technologies, such as data analytics and automation, can significantly enhance the effectiveness of digital marketing campaigns. Investing in analytical tools allows businesses to track consumer behavior and fine-tune their marketing strategies for maximum impact. In addition, training staff in digital technologies is key to ensuring that these strategies are implemented effectively.

In conclusion, the report recommends that agribusinesses expand their digital presence by adopting innovative technologies and developing comprehensive digital marketing strategies. This includes investing in tools that provide insights into consumer behavior and offering training programs to build digital competency within the workforce. By doing so, agricultural enterprises can improve their competitiveness, foster customer loyalty, and thrive in the rapidly changing business environment.

Keywords: marketing funnel, digital content, customer journey, marketing funnel components (before, during and after purchase)

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¹ Assoc. Professor, Dr., Department of Entrepreneurship, University of National and World Economy, Bulgaria, e-mail: vankov@unwe.bg

1. Introduction

At a time when digitization is transforming all aspects of economic life, agricultural business is also undergoing significant changes under the influence of digital technologies. The purpose of this research is to examine the importance of digital content in the customer journey in the agricultural industry, with a particular focus on how this content influences customer behavior and decision-making processes. As digital platforms and digital content generation strategies evolve, agricultural business faces new challenges and opportunities to engage customers in new and innovative ways.

The research sub-objectives are aimed at analyzing the impact that different types of digital content have at different stages of customer journey. It will examine how content influences awareness, perception, engagement and ultimately purchase of agricultural business products and services. The report provides a comprehensive view of the marketing funnel, from theoretical discussions to practical applications at various stages of the customer journey. By looking at the variety of digital channels and methods, this research aims to identify strategies that can improve the effectiveness of digital campaigns in agricultural business.

The research will employ a mix of research methods, including data analysis from social media, websites, blogs, advertising campaigns and interviews with agricultural business stakeholders. This approach will contribute to a more accurate and objective understanding of the role of digital content in marketing. The research will offer useful insights and conclusions to optimize digital strategies in agricultural business, providing a better understanding of consumer needs and increasing their satisfaction.

2. Digital content and marketing funnel – importance for agricultural business

Digital content encompasses any information that exists in a format that can be processed by computers, including different types of data such as software (computer programs and mobile applications), visual content (digital photos, videos and animations), audio content (music and podcasts) and text (emails, data set and blog posts). The proliferation of digital content in the Internet age has changed the way people and businesses share and create content.

In this regard, in the practice of creating and distributing digital content, the concept of “marketing funnel” has become established. A marketing funnel is a model used in marketing to describe the process of converting potential customers into actual customers. The funnel is so named because it looks like a vessel with a wide neck at the top that tapers toward the bottom.

The main stages of the marketing funnel are:

- *Awareness* – this stage involves drawing attention to the brand and its products or services. This can be achieved through digital advertising, content marketing, social media, search engines and more.
- *Interest* – when the potential customer has information about the brand and its products, interest in them may arise. This stage involves providing more information about the brand and its products to increase interest.
- *Evaluation* – after the potential customer has shown interest, it should be evaluated whether the brand's products meet his needs and requirements. This stage involves providing more details about the brand's products and services.
- *Decision / action / conversion* – this stage involves deciding to purchase the brand's products or services. And when the prospect makes that purchase decision, an action follows to make that purchase happen.
- *Loyalty* – Customers continue to buy from the brand regularly. The goal is to build a strong relationship that encourages repeat purchase.
- *Advocacy* – Customers are so satisfied that they actively recommend the brand to other consumers. The goal is to turn loyal customers into enthusiastic brand ambassadors.

The purpose of the marketing funnel is to convert a potential customer into an actual customer and increase brand sales. To achieve this goal, appropriate marketing strategies are used for each of the indicated stages of the funnel.



Figure 1. Marketing Funnel

Source: Salsi, H. (2024)

Using the marketing funnel allows businesses to identify and optimize key customer touch points at every step of their path to purchase, increasing the likelihood of successful sales completion and fostering long-term relationships. The classic model of the marketing funnel includes 3 levels (phases).

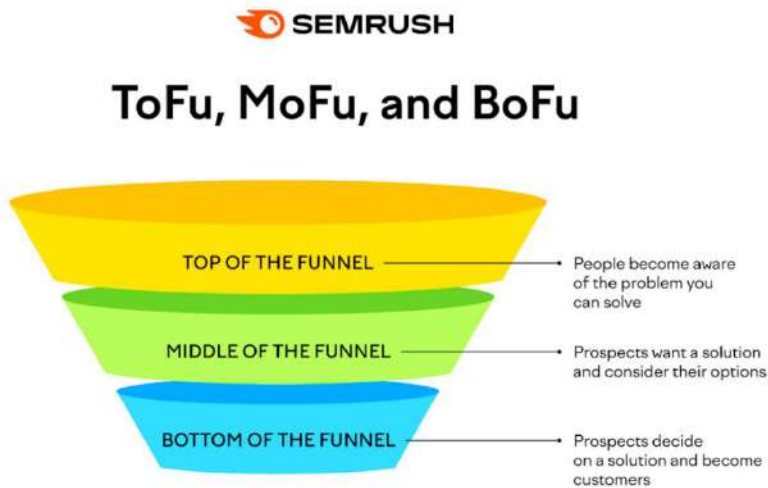


Figure 2. A classic 3-level marketing funnel model

Source: <https://www.semrush.com/blog/marketing-funnel/>, visited on 20.09.2024

Top of Funnel (ToFu) is the beginning of a marketing funnel, or it is the first contact with potential customers. In this phase, the goal is to reach potential customers, to attract their attention and to provoke their subsequent interest, which has materialized with action. Attention and interest is generated through some content (article, social media post Facebook, Instagram, infographic, video, book, photo, status, podcast, email, bot message, broadcast participation, etc.). Here, the content is not fully consumed, but is mostly “packaging” (headline, photo, video advertisement). Businesses realize this in two ways – paid (eg article advertising) or organic (users find the brand themselves through Google or through the sharing of someone – media and/or friend). In the ToFu phase, the channels through which the business will reach consumers are also evaluated, with the most appropriate format of the marketing (also called sales) funnel being content marketing (Content Marketing).

Middle of Funnel (MoFu) is the middle part of a marketing funnel. At this middle level of the funnel, the goal is to inform the user through content how the product or service can solve their problem. In this phase, the business must prepare the consumer for its offer. In this phase, the brand delivers to him what he promised him at

the cost of his attention, sample content being an e-book, downloadable research report, interesting article, report, video training, etc.

Bottom of Funnel (BoFu) is the lower, narrowest part of the marketing funnel, in which the so-called conversions – mini (sales) and micro (leads) goals of the business are realized. In this phase, the offer becomes clear, on the basis of which the consumer can make a purchase decision. This happens most often through a value offer (webinar, demo, trial period, email, article, free consultation), advertising (remarketing).

This classic 3-level marketing funnel model is important to businesses because it provides a structured approach to marketing and sales strategies, enabling managers and marketing professionals to plan and implement campaigns that effectively guide consumers through the various stages of the funnel, increasing return on investment (ROI) and customer loyalty.

The logical question arises: What are the benefits of using the marketing funnel for agribusiness?

The marketing funnel has some benefits for agribusiness, such as:

1. *Improve sales leads* – by using the marketing funnel, businesses can attract new customers and increase sales leads for their products or services.
2. *Increase the effectiveness of marketing campaigns* – the marketing funnel allows businesses to analyze and determine the effectiveness of their marketing campaigns at each stage of the funnel. This helps them adjust their strategies and improve results.
3. *Improve user experience (UX)* – the marketing funnel allows businesses to create personalized experiences for their potential customers by providing information that is fully tailored to the needs and preferences of each potential customer.
4. *Informing potential customers* – the marketing funnel allows businesses to inform their potential customers about their products and services by providing enough information about them at each stage of the funnel. This helps them prepare their customers and give them the information they need to make the right decision.
5. *Create loyal customers* – the marketing funnel allows businesses to create loyal customers by providing experiences that meet customer needs and preferences. This helps establish a long-term relationship with customers and ensure repeat sales in the future.

3. Key tools and components in developing the digital content marketing strategy – marketing funnel and customer journey

The marketing funnel and the customer journey are two tools that are often used interchangeably in the context of developing digital content marketing strategies by businesses. These tools describe the process consumers go through from initial exposure to the brand and/or product to final purchase and subsequent engagement. It is important to understand that these processes are not static, but dynamic and evolve over time, meeting the needs of users and helping to achieve the business goals of organizations.

Understanding and properly implementing the marketing funnel and customer journey are critical to the success of modern marketing strategies. These processes help organizations not only attract new customers, but also convert them into loyal followers and brand ambassadors. Adaptability and the ability to integrate different marketing channels and techniques are key to building an effective relationship with consumers in the long term.

Figure 3 presents a detailed overview of the consumer journey, which is equivalent to a marketing funnel, looking at how, at different phases of this journey, businesses interact with all consumers over time to move a potential customer from awareness to Brand Advocacy.

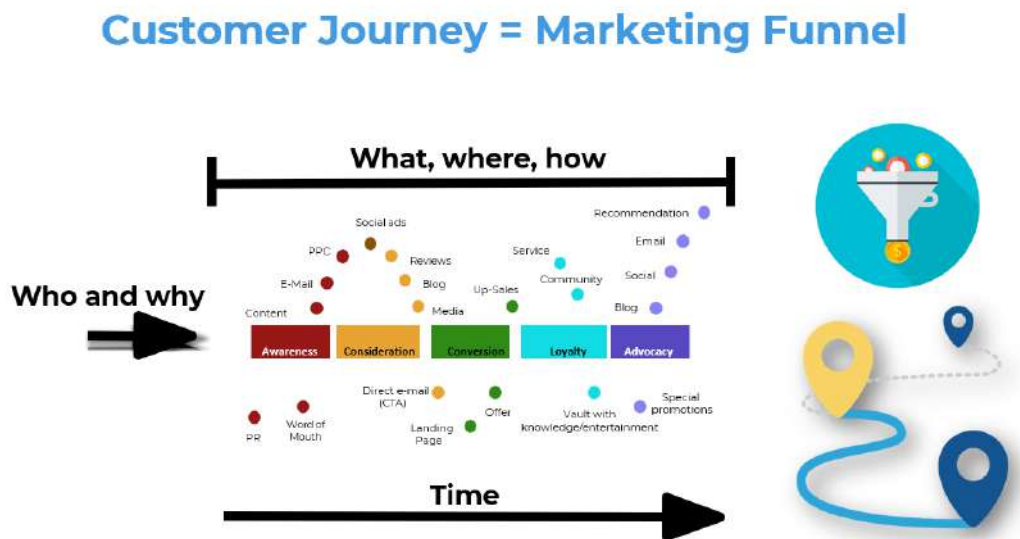


Figure 3. Key tools and processes in developing the digital content marketing strategy

Source: the author

Each phase includes specific channels and types of digital content that are aimed at fulfilling specific goals related to moving consumers through the funnel.

At the “Awareness” stage, consumers first become familiar with the brand or the products of the business. The goal is to attract attention and create a positive first impression. Digital content typically includes:

- Social ads;
- PPC (Pay-Per-Click) Ads;
- E-mail marketing;
- Content;
- PR (Public Relations);
- Word of Mouth.

Through these channels, the brand is presented to the audience and awareness of basic information about the products and services of the business is generated.

In the second stage, “Consideration”, consumers evaluate products or services and compare them with others on the market. The content here is more detailed and informative and includes:

- *Direct email;*
- *Landing Pages;*
- *Blog posts;*
- *Social media content.*

Tactics aim to convince potential customers of the benefits of your offer and guide them to the next stages of purchase.

In the third stage of “Conversion”, users make a purchase decision. The content and actions of the business are focused on facilitating the purchase process:

- *Special offers;*
- *Optimized sales pages;*
- *Loyalty Programs.*

In the fourth stage “Loyalty”, businesses seek to retain customers by getting them to buy from them regularly through special loyalty programs and special promotions for loyal customers. Content is aimed at retaining the customer and increasing their engagement and satisfaction.

At the last stage of “Advocacy”, the culmination of the consumer journey occurs, where satisfied customers actively promote the brand through:

- *Referral programs;*
- *Social media and email campaigns to share customer stories.*

The goal is to turn loyal customers into brand ambassadors who help attract new customers through their referrals.

By understanding how each phase and its associated digital content work together, businesses can effectively manage the consumer journey and optimize their marketing efforts to achieve maximum results.

3.1. Digital content strategies at every stage of the marketing funnel/customer journey

In digital marketing, there are three stages that represent the buying process of consumers through the marketing funnel:¹

¹ *Explanation:* These three phases in digital marketing are generally accepted in the marketing community and can reveal many studies and articles, discussing various aspects on these phases, without yes this is the only definitive source for the technology's origin; Those same things were turned into standard terms during marketing discussions, reflecting a consensus, splitting off the misleading leadership into a single researcher or professional.

- *Stage 1 includes all the activities and processes that happen to the user before the purchase – publications in the media, articles, free products, videos, etc.;*
- *Stage 2 includes everything that happens to the user during the purchase – special offers, emails, service, site, speed, etc.;*
- *Stage 3 includes everything that happens to the user after the purchase – emails, calls, care, feedback, gifts, attention, etc.*

Different digital content strategy components can be used at each stage. In the first stage of the pre-purchase marketing funnel, the components of the funnel are divided by types of activities and tools used to engage customers. This pre-sale stage is important for building awareness and interest in the brand, and for stimulating consideration of the purchase of the product or service. The main goal of this stage is to create a large base of informed and interested audience that will be prepared for the next stages of the marketing funnel, such as consideration and conversion. Every strategic action and every tool are chosen to reinforce the brand's position and encourage future customer engagement.

All business activities and tools are aimed at informing and attracting potential customers. These are:¹

- **Generate engaging content by:**

- *Organizing events* is an effective way to directly engage with potential customers, giving them the opportunity to experience the brand firsthand.
- *Publications of articles in the media and blogs* provide useful information that helps consumers understand more about products and services, as well as gain insight into businesses and products.
- *YouTube video content* to showcase products or services in a way that text and images cannot, thus creating a stronger visual connection to the brand.
- *Using podcasts and hosting webinars*, as these platforms allow for brand-related topics and provide the audience with real-time learning and engagement opportunities.

- **Using advertising channels and tools through:**

- *Organic (unpaid) search* – search engine optimization (SEO) helps content to be found by users easily in search results, which increases brand visibility.
- *Email marketing* – sending direct emails that are highly personalized and aim to keep in touch with potential customers by informing them about new products, offers or events.
- *Display and Video Ads* – these ads are aimed at attracting attention through attractive visual elements and can be placed on various platforms online.

¹ Lemon, K. N., & Verhoef, P. C. (2016). Understanding Customer Experience Throughout the Customer Journey. *Journal of Marketing*, 80(6), 69 – 96. available at https://pure.rug.nl/ws/files/81733365/Understanding_Customer_Experience_Throughout_the_Customer_Journey.pdf, visited on 08.09.2024.

- *PPC (Pay-Per-Click)* are paid advertisements that provide precise targeting to specific user groups and the ability to quickly test different messages.
- *Social media ads (Facebook and Instagram)* - these platforms offer powerful targeting tools and interaction capabilities that can help brands reach a significantly larger audience.

In the second stage of the marketing funnel at the time of purchase, the key strategic components of the marketing funnel are used to optimize the customer experience and increase sales. The second phase of the marketing funnel covers everything that happens to the consumer during the purchase, including special offers, emails, customer service, websites and speed of service:¹

- *Sales pages (Landing Pages)* are important for business because they are most often the first point of contact between the potential customer and the offered products or services. These pages should be optimized for conversion, providing clear and attractive information that makes it easy for the user to make an informed choice and drive them to purchase.

- *Offers (Up-sells, Down-sells, Cross-sells)*

Upsells are tactics where customers are offered improved versions of a selected product in order to increase the value of their purchase. Down-sells are offered when a customer turns down a more expensive product, offering them a cheaper but still suitable option. Cross-sells are product offers that complement or are related to the main product the customer intends to buy.

- *Webinars and demos*

These tools allow businesses to provide more information about their products or services in a way that is engaging and interactive. Webinars can include live product demonstrations, helping customers better understand the offerings and increase their confidence in the purchase.

- *Thank You Pages and emails*

Thank You Pages and follow-up emails play an essential role in improving the customer experience by notifying customers of the status of their order and providing additional information or promotions. These tools are important for maintaining customer communication and encouraging repeat purchases.

- *Consultations and trial periods*

Providing professional advice and opportunities for trial periods can significantly increase customer confidence and convince them of the value of the product or service. These strategies are particularly effective in the agricultural industry, where products require greater investment or deeper understanding.

¹ Lemon, K. N., & Verhoef, P. C. (2016). Understanding Customer Experience Throughout the Customer Journey. *Journal of Marketing*, 80(6), 69 – 96. available at https://pure.rug.nl/ws/files/81733365/Understanding_Customer_Experience_Throughout_the_Customer_Journey.pdf, visited on 08.09.2024.

Each of these strategic components of Stage 2 aims to optimize the customer experience during purchase by facilitating the process, improving satisfaction and maximizing conversions. Managing these components in an effective manner can significantly impact the success of a business.

In the third stage of the post-purchase marketing funnel, the focus is on the activities and processes that occur after a consumer makes a purchase. This stage is extremely important for maintaining a high degree of customer loyalty, driving repeat purchases and turning customers into brand ambassadors. Each of these strategic components at this final stage aims to enhance positive brand perception and extend the life of customer relationships. Here's a more in-depth look at each:¹

- *Phone call* – by making a personalized call to the customer after a purchase can significantly increase satisfaction and provide an opportunity to collect feedback. It also shows customers that their opinion is valued by the business.
- *Gifts* – sending gifts or samples of new products can be an effective way to build and strengthen the relationship with customers.
- *Emails* – regular email communication helps keep the brand in the minds of customers and inform them about new products, promotions or events.
- *Loyalty programs* – creating loyalty programs that reward customers for their repeat purchases is an excellent way to foster long-term relationships.
- *Discount coupons* – offering discount coupons for future purchases can encourage customers to continue shopping with the business.
- *Events* – invitations to special events can strengthen the community around the brand and give customers the opportunity to personally participate in the brand's organizational culture.
- *Digital community around the brand* – engaging with customers through online communities or forums can deepen relationships and enable the exchange of ideas and opinions.
- *Referral programs* – incentivizing customers to recommend your products or services to others can expand your customer base and increase business sales.
- *Affiliate programs* – the creation of affiliate programs allows third parties to promote the business's products in exchange for a commission, which can expand the reach of the brand.

Each of these strategic post-purchase components is essential to creating value for customers and strengthening their loyalty to the brand and the business. Effective use of these components can turn one-time buyers into repeat customers and active

¹ Lemon, K. N., & Verhoef, P. C. (2016). Understanding Customer Experience Throughout the Customer Journey. *Journal of Marketing*, 80(6), 69-96. available at https://pure.rug.nl/ws/files/81733365/Understanding_Customer_Experience_Throughout_the_Customer_Journey.pdf, visited on 08.09.2024.

brand ambassadors who share their positive experiences with others, increasing business success and growth over time.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be emphasized that digitization plays a key role in the transformation of agrarian business. Developing and implementing digital content strategies is critical to building and strengthening customer relationships and increasing customer engagement throughout all stages of the marketing funnel.

The conclusions to be drawn based on the analysis in the report are:

- *Impact of digital content* – the report highlights that digital content significantly influences consumer decision-making in the agricultural sector. It helps increase customer awareness and engagement, leading to higher conversion and loyalty.
- *Integration of marketing strategies* – the development of coherent marketing strategies covering the different stages of the consumer journey is essential for the success of an agrarian enterprise. This includes adapting to specific customer needs and preferences at every step.
- *Role of digital technologies* – the implementation of new technologies and content digitization platforms offers significant opportunities for innovation and personalization, which further increases customer satisfaction and operational efficiency.

The recommendations to be made based on the analysis in the report are:

- *Expanding digital channels* – agribusinesses must continue to expand their digital content access channels to ensure broad accessibility and personalization for consumers.
- *Investment in analytics tools* – to optimize digital content strategies, it is important to invest in analytics tools that allow tracking of user behavior and return on investment (ROI) of marketing campaigns.
- *Training and development of the staff of the agrarian enterprise* – it is also important to invest in training and development of the staff for the management of digital technologies and content, which will improve the competencies and ensure the successful implementation of the presented strategic components of the marketing funnel.

The report makes clear that agribusinesses that actively implement and optimize their digital content strategies can significantly increase their competitiveness and achieve long-term growth and success in a changing economic environment.

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