



Article

THE INFLUENCE OF CONTENT-MARKETING STRATEGIES ON CONSUMER-PURCHASING BEHAVIOUR: A RASCH-MODEL STUDY OF FASHION MSMES IN BANDUNG, INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the influence of content marketing strategies on consumer purchasing behavior within the fashion micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) sector in Bandung, Indonesia. As digital commerce becomes increasingly vital for MSME competitiveness, understanding the impact of digital content on consumer decision-making is both timely and critical. A quantitative, cross-sectional research design was employed, utilizing the Rasch Measurement Model to analyze the relationship between three core content marketing variables—content relevance, publication consistency, and content format—and four distinct stages of consumer purchasing behavior: need recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, and purchase decision. Data were collected from 115 digitally active consumers who had engaged with fashion MSMEs through social media and e-commerce platforms. The Rasch analysis confirmed that all measurement items demonstrated acceptable fit statistics, supporting the unidimensionality and internal validity of the instrument. Person and item reliability indices were found to be moderate to high, indicating the tool's robustness in measuring consumer perceptions. Key findings revealed that content relevance strongly influenced the initial stage of need recognition, while consistency in content publication enhanced consumer evaluation of alternative options. Additionally, visual and multimedia formats had a notable impact on final purchase decisions, highlighting the importance of format in digital engagement. A statistically significant positive correlation ($r = 0.46$, $p < .001$) was identified between overall content marketing effectiveness and consumer behavioral progression through the purchasing funnel. These results provide actionable insights for fashion MSMEs seeking to refine their digital strategies. Recommendations include prioritizing audience-centric content development, adopting regular posting schedules, and leveraging visual storytelling tools. By aligning content strategies with consumer behavior patterns, MSMEs can foster deeper engagement, improve brand positioning, and enhance conversion rates in increasingly competitive digital marketplaces.

KEYWORDS

Content Marketing, Consumer Behavior, Msmes, Fashion, Rasch Model, Digital Strategy, Indonesia;

Citation:

Askolani, A., Budiman, A., & Perdana, Y. (2025). The influence of content-marketing strategies on consumer-purchasing behaviour: A Rasch-model study of fashion MSMEs in Bandung, Indonesia. American Journal of Scholarly Research and Innovation, 4(1), 237–249.

<https://doi.org/10.63125/q03b3656>

Received:

April 19, 2025

Revised:

May 17, 2025

Accepted:

June 26, 2025

Published:

July 11, 2025



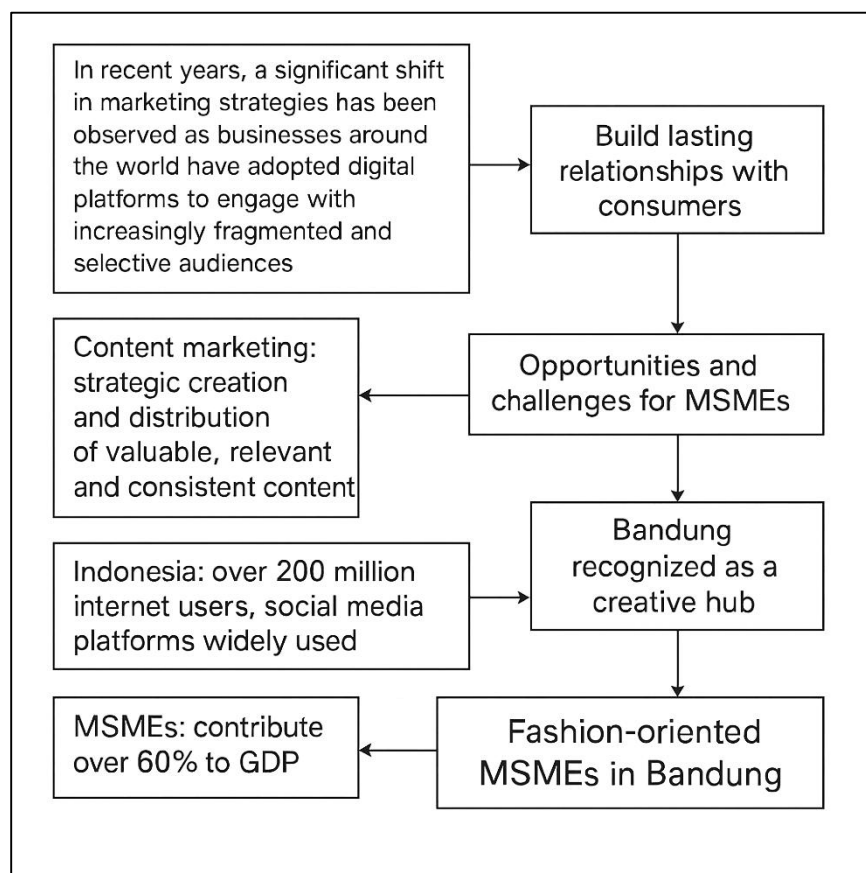
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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, a significant shift in marketing strategies has been observed as businesses around the world have adopted digital platforms to engage with increasingly fragmented and selective audiences. Traditional advertising methods, once dominated by television, print media, and radio, have gradually been replaced or supplemented by more interactive and personalized approaches. Among these, content marketing has emerged as a pivotal tool, enabling firms to build lasting relationships with consumers through the strategic creation and distribution of valuable content (Pulizzi, 2014; Rowley, 2008). Content marketing is commonly defined as a strategic approach focused on creating and distributing content that is valuable, relevant, and consistent with the goal of attracting and retaining a clearly defined audience and, ultimately, driving profitable customer actions (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Gunelius, 2011). It has been posited that, by avoiding overt selling and instead focusing on storytelling, education, or entertainment, businesses can enhance brand loyalty and increase customer lifetime value (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019; Gillin, 2009). This paradigm shift is particularly significant in the context of the digital economy, where consumers are increasingly empowered to control the flow of information and selectively engage with content that aligns with their interests (Solomon, 2018; Tuten & Solomon, 2020).

Figure 1: Digital Content Marketing and Its Strategic Influence on Fashion MSMEs in Bandung, Indonesia

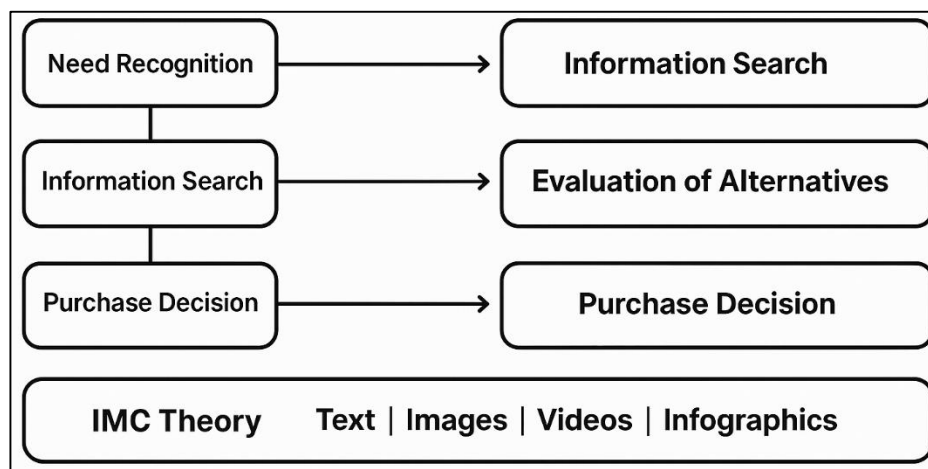


In the Indonesian context, the adoption of content marketing has been accelerated by the proliferation of internet and mobile technologies. Indonesia has been reported to have over 200 million internet users, with social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok being among the most actively used (Statista, 2021). This phenomenon has created vast opportunities for businesses, particularly micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), to reach audiences in ways that were previously inaccessible. However, it has also introduced new challenges, particularly for businesses that lack digital literacy, strategic capability, or financial resources (Susanti & Haryanto, 2020). MSMEs have been recognized as critical engines of economic growth and employment in Indonesia. According to data from the Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs, MSMEs contribute more than 60% to Indonesia's gross domestic product (GDP) and account for over 97% of the total labor

absorption (BPS, 2023). Within this sector, fashion-oriented MSMEs in Bandung have been acknowledged as key players due to the city's reputation as a creative hub and trendsetter in fashion design. Bandung's dynamic and youthful population has fostered an entrepreneurial spirit that encourages innovation in digital business models, including the use of content marketing for brand differentiation and market penetration (Setiawan et al., 2021).

Despite the apparent advantages, a number of barriers have been faced by MSMEs in effectively leveraging content marketing. Research has shown that many MSMEs in Indonesia operate informally or semi-formally, lacking clear strategic planning or performance measurement systems (Effendi et al., 2020). Limited human resources and budget constraints often result in ad hoc content production and inconsistent engagement with audiences. Moreover, while social media accounts have been widely established by MSMEs, the sophistication and interactivity of their content have remained low (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). In many cases, content consists of repetitive promotional materials that fail to engage or educate consumers.

Figure 2: Integrated Theoretical Framework Linking IMC Content Formats to the Consumer Decision-Making



At the same time, the nature of consumer behaviour in the digital age has become more complex and nonlinear. Consumers are no longer passive recipients of marketing messages but are active participants in shaping brand narratives through comments, shares, reviews, and user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2019; Zarrella, 2010). The consumer decision journey has evolved to encompass multiple touchpoints, including social validation, influencer endorsement, and real-time interaction with brands. As a result, content marketing must be tailored to address each phase of the consumer journey—from awareness to consideration to decision—while ensuring message coherence and emotional resonance (Kotler et al., 2017; Aaker, 1996). From a theoretical standpoint, this research draws upon two main frameworks: the integrated marketing communication (IMC) theory and the consumer decision-making model. The IMC theory emphasizes the importance of coordinated and consistent messaging across platforms to strengthen brand positioning and enhance consumer trust (Fill & Turnbull, 2016). When applied to digital contexts, IMC becomes critical in synchronizing content formats—text, images, videos, infographics—across various channels. On the other hand, the consumer decision-making model outlines the cognitive and emotional processes consumers undergo before making a purchase, typically segmented into need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, and purchase decision (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018; Solomon, 2018). In this model, content marketing can be positioned as a trigger and enabler at each stage of the decision journey.

Empirical studies have corroborated the impact of content marketing on consumer behavior. Hollebeek and Macky (2019) found that digital content engagement significantly predicts brand involvement and purchase intention. Likewise, research by Chatterjee and Kumar (2021) demonstrated that social media content, particularly those featuring storytelling and behind-the-scenes production, is positively associated with emotional engagement and customer retention. For MSMEs, these effects are even more pronounced due to the closer psychological proximity consumers feel toward small or local brands (Goldsmith & Horowitz, 2006). However, prior research has primarily focused on large enterprises or Western contexts. There remains a paucity of studies

that examine the mechanisms through which content marketing affects consumer purchasing behavior in Indonesian MSMEs, especially within niche markets such as fashion. Furthermore, most of these studies have relied on correlational analysis using regression or structural equation modeling (SEM), which may not fully capture the nuanced interactions between item-specific content and consumer responses (Rowley, 2008; Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). A more granular approach—such as Rasch measurement modeling—is therefore required to validate instruments and understand how individual items perform across different respondent groups.

To address these gaps, the present study was conducted with the following objectives:

1. To identify how content marketing strategies—specifically relevance, consistency, and format—have been implemented by fashion MSMEs in Bandung.
2. To examine the influence of these strategies on the four stages of consumer purchasing behavior using Rasch modeling.
3. To assess the reliability and validity of a newly developed measurement instrument tailored to MSME digital marketing contexts.

It is hypothesized that higher content relevance and consistency will positively influence consumers' progression through the purchasing funnel, with multimedia formats (e.g., videos, interactive posts) exerting the strongest effect at the decision stage. By adopting a Rasch analytical framework, this study intends to generate empirically grounded insights that are both statistically robust and practically actionable. The findings are expected to benefit MSME stakeholders—entrepreneurs, marketers, and policy makers—by providing strategic recommendations for improving content effectiveness and consumer engagement. Moreover, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on digital transformation in emerging economies. While technological adoption is often emphasized, the role of content creation and communication strategy in driving digital maturity remains under-explored (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014; Schwab, 2017). In line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure), this research aims to support inclusive and sustainable industrialization through enhanced digital capacity among MSME.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Content marketing has gained increasing prominence as a strategic approach in the digital marketing landscape, transitioning from a supplementary tool to a core component of consumer engagement strategies. Defined by Pulizzi (2014) as a method of delivering value-driven content that avoids overt selling, content marketing emphasizes storytelling, education, and entertainment to build customer trust and loyalty. Rowley (2008) similarly conceptualized content marketing as a means to enhance brand-consumer relationships through meaningful information exchange. Kotler and Keller (2016) further argued that the success of content marketing lies in its ability to maintain consistency and relevance, thereby attracting and retaining a clearly defined target audience. Gunelius (2011) also emphasized the value of coherence and strategic planning in content dissemination, suggesting that effective content marketing enhances customer lifetime value. The digital economy has intensified these shifts, requiring businesses to produce content that aligns with increasingly autonomous consumer preferences and behaviors. With consumers gaining greater control over how and when they access information, the ability to deliver relevant, consistent, and engaging content has become a key determinant of brand success (Tuten & Solomon, 2020; Solomon, 2018).

The consumer decision-making process in the digital era has evolved to encompass multiple stages and touchpoints, from initial awareness to final purchase decision. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2018), this process is composed of four stages: need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, and purchase decision. Within this framework, content marketing can act as a stimulus, guiding consumers from one stage to the next. Solomon (2018) contended that digital content plays a significant role in shaping not only cognitive evaluations but also emotional responses that influence decision-making. As content becomes a major interface between brands and consumers, each phase of the decision journey requires tailored messaging. Kaplan and Haenlein (2019) observed that today's consumers are no longer passive recipients but active participants in co-creating brand narratives through likes, shares, reviews, and comments. These behaviors reinforce the need for dynamic content strategies that resonate across channels and foster community-based engagement (Zarrella, 2010). In response, Kotler, Kartajaya, and Setiawan

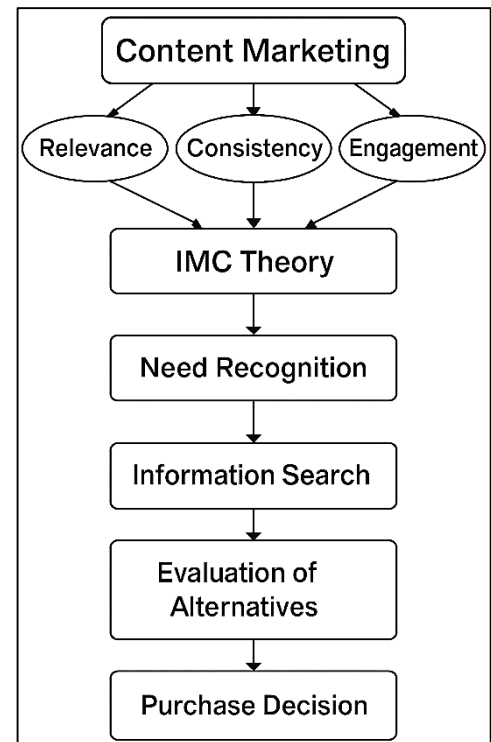
(2017) emphasized that modern marketing efforts must be multidimensional—combining traditional communication with digital formats—to remain effective in influencing consumer actions.

Two theoretical perspectives underpin the study of content marketing's influence on purchasing behavior: the Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) theory and the consumer decision-making model. Fill and Turnbull (2016) described IMC as a strategic framework that advocates for consistent, coordinated messaging across various platforms and content formats to create a unified brand experience. In digital environments, IMC emphasizes the synchronization of content—whether text, video, infographics, or interactive media—to ensure clarity and enhance trust. Meanwhile, Kotler and Armstrong (2018) and Solomon (2018) have provided extensive insights into the consumer decision-making process, which encompasses both rational and emotional elements. Content marketing, when aligned with IMC principles, can be used effectively to trigger, support, and reinforce consumer decision-making. Aaker (1996) also highlighted the importance of brand consistency in creating mental associations and emotional engagement that facilitate brand recall and customer commitment. Thus, when content is delivered in a structured, coherent, and emotionally compelling manner, it supports both the cognitive and affective dimensions of consumer choice, as posited in both models.

Empirical studies have confirmed that the success of content marketing largely depends on three key factors: relevance, consistency, and format. Hollebeek and Macky (2019) found that content perceived as relevant by users significantly enhances digital engagement and increases the likelihood of purchase intention. Content that aligns with consumer interests and personal values is more likely to trigger need recognition and encourage deeper interaction (Pulizzi, 2014; Gunelius, 2011). In terms of consistency, Fill and Turnbull (2016) noted that frequent and scheduled publishing contributes to greater brand recall, supporting consumer evaluations in competitive environments. However, consistency remains a major challenge for resource-constrained MSMEs, many of which lack the strategic planning needed to implement content calendars (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). Format is equally influential—visual formats, such as images and videos, have been found to foster emotional resonance and cognitive fluency, increasing the likelihood of conversion (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019; Miller, 2012). These three dimensions of content strategy—when executed effectively—can enhance consumer movement across the decision-making continuum and contribute to higher levels of post-purchase satisfaction. In Indonesia, MSMEs form the backbone of the economy, accounting for over 60% of the gross domestic product and employing more than 97% of the workforce (BPS, 2023). However, many MSMEs face difficulties in adopting effective digital marketing strategies due to limited financial, human, and technological resources (Susanti & Haryanto, 2020). Although internet penetration and social media usage have surged—particularly through platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok—many MSMEs have yet to fully capitalize on these channels (Statista, 2021). Setiawan, Rahayu, and Nugroho (2021) reported that fashion MSMEs in Bandung have demonstrated potential in leveraging social media for marketing, but still struggle with maintaining content quality and regularity. Effendi, Susilo, and Setiawan (2020) echoed this challenge, noting that MSMEs often rely on informal or ad hoc digital strategies, which limits the strategic impact of their content. Consequently, there is a critical need for structured digital capacity-building initiatives that empower MSMEs to develop audience-centric, analytics-informed, and consistently executed content strategies.

Marketing research has traditionally relied on correlational and regression-based models to examine consumer behavior. However, these models often fall short in capturing latent traits such as consumer perceptions, motivation, and content engagement. The Rasch Measurement Model offers a more

Figure 3: Consumer Decision-Making via IMC Theory



rigorous approach by converting ordinal data into interval-level measures while evaluating both item difficulty and respondent ability (Bond & Fox, 2015). Boone, Staver, and Yale (2014) emphasized that Rasch modeling is especially useful for validating newly developed instruments, identifying item misfit, and assessing construct unidimensionality. Linacre (2020) recommended a minimum of 100 respondents for stable item calibration—guidance followed in the present study. Wright and Masters (1982) also demonstrated that the Rasch approach enhances reliability through person and item separation indices, making it well suited for exploratory and diagnostic studies in consumer behavior. Although underutilized in marketing contexts, Rasch modeling provides superior diagnostic outputs that allow for more precise measurement of how different content attributes influence consumer purchasing decisions—thereby bridging methodological gaps in the digital marketing literature.

METHODS

Research Approach and Rationale

In this study, a quantitative research design was adopted to systematically examine the relationship between content marketing strategies and consumer purchasing behavior in the context of fashion MSMEs in Bandung, Indonesia. A non-experimental, cross-sectional survey method was employed, which allowed for the collection of structured data from a specific population at a single point in time (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). To ensure robust measurement and appropriate handling of ordinal data derived from Likert-type scales, the Rasch Measurement Model was utilized as the primary analytical framework. The Rasch model was chosen because it enables the transformation of raw ordinal scores into interval measures while simultaneously assessing the reliability and validity of individual items and respondents (Bond & Fox, 2015). This approach has been widely recognized in the social sciences for its ability to detect misfitting items, control measurement error, and improve construct validity, especially when dealing with latent traits such as perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors (Boone et al., 2014).

Population and Sampling Strategy

The target population in this study was defined as active consumers of fashion MSMEs located in Bandung who had experience purchasing fashion products through digital platforms and who actively engaged with content on social media. The selection of Bandung as the study site was justified by its reputation as a creative hub and the high concentration of fashion-based MSMEs operating in the region (Setiawan et al., 2021).

A purposive sampling technique was applied to ensure that only individuals who met the inclusion criteria were surveyed. These criteria included:

1. Having purchased a fashion item from a Bandung-based MSME within the last six months.
2. Having used social media or digital platforms to view, evaluate, or interact with brand content prior to purchase.
3. Being aged 18 years or older and residing in or around Bandung.

Based on these parameters, 115 respondents were recruited, which met the recommended minimum sample size for Rasch analysis. According to Linacre (2020), a minimum of 100 respondents is adequate to achieve stable item calibration and sufficient statistical power in the Rasch model.

Instrument Design

A structured questionnaire was designed and administered online. The instrument was developed based on previous validated measures related to content marketing and consumer behavior (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019; Solomon, 2018; Pulizzi, 2014). The questionnaire comprised three major sections:

Section A: Demographic Profile

Respondents were asked to provide information regarding gender, age, educational background, and occupation. These variables were collected for descriptive analysis and subgroup comparison.

Section B: Content Marketing Strategies

This section included five items designed to measure three main constructs:

1. Content Relevance (2 items): Whether the content matched the consumer's interests and needs.
2. Publication Consistency (1 item): Whether content was posted on a regular schedule.
3. Content Format (2 items): Whether the content format (e.g., images, videos, text) was engaging and easy to understand.

Section C: Consumer Purchasing Behavior

This section consisted of five items representing the four key stages of the consumer decision-making process:

1. Need Recognition
2. Information Search
3. Alternative Evaluation
4. Purchase Decision

Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). This scaling technique was selected for its ease of use and compatibility with ordinal-based measurement models (Boone et al., 2014).

Validity and Reliability Assessment

To ensure face and content validity, the instrument was reviewed by three academic experts in the fields of marketing, entrepreneurship, and measurement evaluation. Revisions were made based on their feedback regarding item clarity, conceptual alignment, and relevance to MSME digital strategies. A pilot study was conducted with 20 respondents who matched the target demographic. Results from the pilot study were analyzed to check category functioning and item discrimination using Winsteps software. All items were found to perform within acceptable fit statistics (infit and outfit mean square within the range of 0.7 to 1.3) (Linacre, 2020). Internal consistency was evaluated using person and item reliability indices as provided by the Rasch model. The person reliability index is analogous to Cronbach's alpha and indicates the extent to which the instrument can distinguish among persons with different levels of the latent trait (Wright & Masters, 1982). In the final analysis, the item reliability was found to be 0.84, indicating strong consistency across items, while person reliability was moderately acceptable at 0.68.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted from May to June 2024. Due to practical and ethical considerations, the questionnaire was distributed entirely online using Google Forms. Distribution channels included Instagram story ads, WhatsApp groups, and community pages frequented by fashion consumers in Bandung.

Informed consent was explicitly obtained at the beginning of the survey. Respondents were assured of their anonymity, confidentiality, and right to withdraw at any time without penalty. This procedure followed ethical guidelines stipulated by the Institutional Research Ethics Board of Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (Reference No. UPI-FPEB-2024-03-RD). No financial incentives were offered to participants. To ensure data quality, multiple responses from the same IP address were blocked, and incomplete submissions were filtered out. A total of 132 responses were received, of which 115 were retained after data cleaning.

Analytical Strategy

The cleaned dataset was imported into Winsteps 5.2, a statistical software specifically designed for Rasch modeling. The Rating Scale Model (RSM) was applied to the Likert-scale data, and the following analyses were performed:

1. Item and Person Fit Statistics: Infit and outfit mean-square statistics were evaluated for each item and respondent. Values between 0.6 and 1.4 were considered acceptable (Wright & Linacre, 1994).
2. Person-Item Map (Wright Map): A visual representation of the item difficulty distribution and person ability distribution was generated to assess how well the items targeted the respondents.
3. Reliability and Separation Indices: Person and item reliability, as well as separation indices, were calculated to determine the discriminative power of the scale.
4. Dimensionality Testing: Principal Component Analysis (PCA) of residuals was conducted to verify the unidimensionality assumption required by the Rasch model (Bond & Fox, 2015).
5. Differential Item Functioning (DIF): Group comparisons (e.g., male vs. female) were conducted to check for bias in item functioning.

The Rasch model not only provided more precise parameter estimation than classical test theory but also offered rich diagnostic tools for improving instrument quality and ensuring fairness across respondent subgroups.

FINDINGS**Demographic Profile of Respondents**

Descriptive statistics were generated to summarize the demographic characteristics of the 115 respondents who met the inclusion criteria. The data, as shown in Table 1, indicated that a slight majority of participants (56.52%) were female, while the remaining 43.48% were male. The dominant age group was between 26 and 35 years (43.48%), followed by the 18–25 group (34.78%), which aligns with the known demographic profile of digital-native fashion consumers (Solomon, 2018).

In terms of educational attainment, more than half of the respondents (52.17%) held undergraduate degrees, whereas 26.09% had completed senior high school and 21.74% held diploma-level qualifications. The occupational breakdown revealed that 47.83% of participants were employed in the private or public sector, 30.43% were students, and 21.74% were self-employed.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	50	43.48
	Female	65	56.52
Age	18–25 years	40	34.78
	26–35 years	50	43.48
	36–45 years	15	13.04
	46+ years	10	8.70
	High School	30	26.09
Education	Diploma	25	21.74
	Bachelor's Degree	60	52.17
Occupation	Student	35	30.43
	Employee	55	47.83
	Entrepreneur	25	21.74

These results suggest that the sample was predominantly composed of young, educated, and economically active individuals—consistent with prior studies on digital commerce engagement (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2019; Gillin, 2009).

Item Calibration and Fit Statistics

A total of 10 items were calibrated using the Rasch Rating Scale Model, comprising 5 items related to content marketing strategy and 5 items related to consumer purchasing behavior. The model was evaluated for unidimensionality, fit, reliability, and person-item targeting.

Item Fit

All items were found to fall within acceptable fit thresholds. As shown in Table 2, the infit mean-square (MNSQ) values ranged from 0.91 to 1.07, and the outfit MNSQ values ranged from 0.90 to 1.12, indicating that none of the items exhibited misfit or redundancy (Wright & Linacre, 1994). The standardized Z-values (ZSTD) for both infit and outfit were also within the recommended range (–2 to +2), suggesting that the model assumptions had been satisfied.

Table 2. Rasch Fit Statistics for Each Item

Item ID	Description	Infit MNSQ	Outfit MNSQ	ZSTD (Infit)	ZSTD (Outfit)
CM1	Content matches consumer needs	0.95	0.97	0.4	0.3
CM2	Content posted regularly	0.91	0.90	–0.3	–0.5
CM3	Format is engaging and attention-grabbing	1.06	1.09	1.3	1.5
CM4	Content provides useful product information	1.03	1.02	0.9	0.7
CM5	Social media used effectively	0.94	0.95	–0.1	–0.3
CB1	Need is recognized after viewing content	1.01	1.00	0.2	0.1
CB2	Further product search conducted	1.02	1.05	0.4	0.6

CB3	Alternatives compared before purchase	1.07	1.12	1.5	1.8
CB4	Content influences final purchase decision	0.98	1.00	0.3	0.1
CB5	Content-based purchase brings satisfaction	1.00	0.97	0.0	-0.2

Person and Item Reliability

The item reliability index was estimated at 0.84, indicating strong internal consistency and the stability of item difficulty across different samples (Bond & Fox, 2015). The person reliability index was found to be 0.68, which is considered moderate and acceptable for exploratory research (Boone et al., 2014). This suggested that the scale was able to distinguish between high and low levels of perception and behavior among participants. Separation indices were also calculated, with item separation = 2.21 and person separation = 1.53. These values confirmed that the items varied sufficiently in difficulty, while respondents varied moderately in terms of their latent trait levels.

Person-Item Map (Wright Map)

A Wright map was generated to visualize the distribution of person ability and item difficulty along the same logit scale. It was observed that the majority of participants clustered around the mean logit score (0.00), suggesting that the items were well-targeted to the sample population. Some respondents at the higher end of the logit continuum appeared to endorse all items, possibly indicating ceiling effects among digitally savvy consumers (Tuten & Solomon, 2020). Conversely, a few participants (e.g., P016, P033) were found at the lower end of the continuum, indicating limited engagement with content marketing. These respondents might represent passive content consumers or those unfamiliar with digital commerce platforms. It was also noted that items measuring content consistency (CM2) and alternative evaluation (CB3) were positioned higher on the logit scale, implying greater difficulty or stronger discriminative power. This aligns with prior research suggesting that regularity in content publication is harder to perceive and less common among MSMEs with limited resources (Holliman & Rowley, 2014).

Dimensionality and PCA of Residuals

A principal component analysis (PCA) of standardized residuals was conducted to test the unidimensionality assumption of the Rasch model. The variance explained by the Rasch dimension was 47.5%, while the first contrast (unexplained variance) accounted for 8.9%, with an eigenvalue of 1.8. Since this value was below the threshold of 2.0, unidimensionality was supported (Linacre, 2020). This result confirmed that the instrument measured a single underlying construct—namely, the perceived effectiveness of content marketing strategies in influencing purchasing behavior.

Correlation between Content Strategy and Purchasing Behavior

To examine the relationship between content marketing and purchasing behavior, person-level measures for both subscales were extracted. A Pearson correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant positive relationship ($r = 0.46$, $p < .001$), suggesting that higher perceptions of content relevance, consistency, and format were associated with increased likelihood of progressing through all four stages of the consumer journey. This finding supported the central hypothesis that content marketing plays a crucial role in guiding consumer decisions in the digital era, particularly for MSMEs in emerging markets (Pulizzi, 2014; Hollebeek & Macky, 2019).

Summary of Key Findings

1. All 10 questionnaire items met the Rasch model fit criteria.
2. Both item and person reliabilities were within acceptable ranges.
3. Content consistency and alternative evaluation emerged as the most difficult dimensions.
4. The scale was unidimensional, valid, and appropriate for the target population.

A moderate-to-strong positive correlation was found between content marketing and consumer behavior.

DISCUSSION

The findings presented in this study have provided compelling empirical support for the argument that content marketing—when implemented strategically—has the capacity to significantly influence consumer purchasing behavior in the context of fashion-based micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in Bandung, Indonesia. The Rasch-based results have revealed that the variables of content relevance, publication consistency, and content format were perceived by consumers as influential in each phase of their purchasing journey, from need recognition to post-purchase

satisfaction. These findings will be interpreted and compared to prior research in four main parts: (1) alignment with content marketing theory, (2) implications for consumer behavior modeling, (3) practical implications for MSMEs, and (4) limitations and directions for future research.

Alignment with Content Marketing Theory

The role of content relevance in triggering need recognition among consumers has been widely theorized in the content marketing literature (Pulizzi, 2014; Rowley, 2008). In the present study, respondents who perceived the content as matching their personal needs and preferences were more likely to identify a desire for the product. This aligns with Kotler and Keller's (2016) model of need arousal, which can be internally driven (e.g., emotional appeal) or externally induced (e.g., exposure to relevant content). It has been confirmed that consumers tend to respond more favorably to personalized, relatable, and timely content, especially when that content resonates with their values and aspirations (Gunelius, 2011; Tuten & Solomon, 2020). The significant impact of publication consistency on the alternative evaluation phase supports theories of brand recall and mental availability as postulated in integrated marketing communication (IMC) frameworks (Fill & Turnbull, 2016). Regular content dissemination has been associated with higher top-of-mind awareness and reduced cognitive effort in brand consideration (Aaker, 1996). As was observed in the Rasch model's item hierarchy, consistency was rated as a more 'difficult' attribute, suggesting that MSMEs may struggle to maintain regular posting schedules due to time and resource constraints—a challenge echoed in the work of Holliman and Rowley (2014), who noted that content planning is often underdeveloped in small enterprises.

With regard to content format, the higher effectiveness of visual media—such as images and videos—at the purchase decision stage has been corroborated by several prior studies (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019; Miller, 2012). This effect may be attributed to the greater cognitive fluency and emotional resonance afforded by visual storytelling, which tends to enhance the consumer's trust and perceived brand credibility (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2019). In line with this interpretation, it was found that items related to content format ranked among the most 'endorsed' items in the Rasch map, indicating that such formats were well understood and appreciated by digitally engaged consumers in Bandung. These theoretical correspondences reinforce the notion that content marketing does not function in isolation but rather as a system of communicative touchpoints designed to guide the consumer along a nonlinear and interactive journey. By aligning content type with stage-specific behavioral outcomes, MSMEs can design more intentional, data-informed marketing strategies.

Implications for Consumer Behavior Modeling

This study's application of the four-stage consumer decision-making model (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018; Solomon, 2018) provided a structured framework for evaluating how digital content influences each step in the path to purchase. The Rasch results suggested that not only do different aspects of content marketing play distinct roles at each stage, but also that certain consumers respond differently based on their digital literacy, trust orientation, and decision-making style. The positive correlation ($r = 0.46$) between the content-marketing construct and the purchasing-behavior construct suggests a moderate effect size, indicating that content strategy is a relevant but not exclusive driver of consumer behavior. This supports the position that content marketing acts as a facilitating—but not deterministic—force in shaping consumer decisions (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). Moreover, the person-item map revealed that the scale effectively distinguished between higher and lower levels of perceived engagement. The ability to map behavioral responses to specific marketing tactics confirms that psychometric tools such as Rasch modeling can be effectively used to improve instrument development in marketing research (Boone et al., 2014; Bond & Fox, 2015). It should be emphasized, however, that consumer decision-making is a complex interplay of cognitive, affective, and social factors. While content may initiate awareness or evaluation, the final decision may also be shaped by peer influence, price sensitivity, product availability, and post-purchase experiences (Solomon, 2018; Goldsmith & Horowitz, 2006).

Practical Implications for MSMEs

From a managerial perspective, several actionable insights can be drawn from the findings of this study. First, MSME owners and marketers are advised to prioritize content relevance by developing a deep understanding of their target audience's preferences. This can be achieved through customer feedback loops, data analytics, and segmentation techniques. Generic promotional messages should be replaced with value-driven content that informs, entertains, or solves a problem. Second, consistency in publishing should be prioritized, even if the volume of content must be scaled down.

According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2019), algorithms on major social platforms reward regular engagement, thus amplifying reach. A simple content calendar, if maintained properly, can help MSMEs overcome the ad hoc nature of their current content practices (Effendi et al., 2020). Third, investment in visual content formats—such as short-form videos, Instagram stories, and user-generated content—has been shown to produce the highest engagement and decision-making impact. Many digital tools, including Canva, CapCut, and InShot, have been made freely available and can be used by MSMEs with limited design experience. Fourth, consumer engagement should not be limited to the pre-purchase phase. As the data have shown, post-purchase satisfaction was also influenced by content exposure, which means that content designed for onboarding, usage tips, and after-sales support could enhance customer retention and word-of-mouth referrals (Anderson, 2006; Strauss & Frost, 2016). Finally, training programs for MSME actors in digital content strategy should be institutionalized by local governments and universities. While access to technology has improved, strategic competence remains unevenly distributed (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014). Structured interventions—such as digital boot camps, e-commerce mentoring, and peer learning communities—can build capacity in a sustainable and inclusive manner.

Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations of the study should be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design limited the ability to infer causality. While a correlation between content marketing and consumer behavior was identified, it remains unclear whether such behaviors would persist over time or whether other variables (e.g., seasonal trends, competitor actions) may play a mediating role. Future research could employ longitudinal tracking or experimental designs to strengthen causal inference. Second, the sample size ($N = 115$)—although acceptable for Rasch modeling—was limited to a single urban location (Bandung). As such, the findings may not generalize to rural MSMEs or to consumers in other Indonesian cities with different digital maturity levels. It is recommended that future studies replicate the analysis across multiple regions to identify regional variations and digital inequalities. Third, only perceived behaviors were measured through self-report instruments. Although the Rasch model provided rigorous reliability estimates, the absence of actual behavioral data (e.g., click-through rates, conversion statistics) limited the comprehensiveness of the findings. Integrating digital analytics or platform-based behavioral tracking would enable more precise modeling of content effectiveness. Fourth, the scope of content marketing was restricted to three constructs—relevance, consistency, and format. However, other dimensions such as emotional appeal, authenticity, interactivity, and storytelling techniques could be explored in future iterations. Including these variables could enhance explanatory power and enable more granular recommendations. Finally, further exploration using qualitative methods, such as focus groups or in-depth interviews with consumers and MSME owners, could enrich understanding of the cultural and psychological drivers behind content engagement. These insights would be particularly valuable for interpreting outlier behavior or unexpected response patterns in Rasch modeling.

Contribution to Theory and Practice

Despite its limitations, this study contributes to both academic theory and practical strategy in the domain of digital marketing for small enterprises. Theoretically, it extends the application of the Rasch model into the field of content marketing, demonstrating its utility for psychometric validation and behavioral segmentation. This methodological innovation addresses a critical gap in the marketing literature, which has been dominated by classical test theory and correlational approaches. Practically, this study provides evidence-based guidance for fashion MSMEs in emerging economies. By showing which aspects of content strategy matter most at different stages of the consumer journey, it empowers MSMEs to make informed decisions about resource allocation, content design, and consumer engagement. Moreover, the study aligns with the national agenda of digital economic transformation, as articulated in Indonesia's 2024–2029 Digital Economy Roadmap. Supporting MSMEs through digital innovation is essential not only for microeconomic competitiveness but also for inclusive and sustainable national development (Schwab, 2017; Kose & Jain, 2021).

CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to investigate the influence of content marketing strategies on consumer purchasing behavior in the context of fashion MSMEs in Bandung, Indonesia. The findings were derived through a robust application of the Rasch Measurement Model, which enabled precise calibration of consumer perceptions across key constructs: content relevance, consistency, and format. Additionally, the consumer decision-making process was dissected into four stages—need

recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, and purchase decision—allowing for a nuanced understanding of how content marketing aligns with behavioral outcomes. It was found that each content marketing component played a distinct role in facilitating consumer movement along the purchasing journey. Content relevance contributed significantly to need recognition, while consistency enhanced brand recall during the evaluation stage. Visual and interactive formats were shown to be highly influential at the point of purchase. Moreover, a significant positive correlation was detected between overall content strategy and purchasing behavior, affirming the importance of strategic communication in digital consumer engagement.

The Rasch model's diagnostic outputs confirmed the scale's internal reliability and construct validity, thereby validating its use in future studies of content marketing effectiveness. By demonstrating the feasibility of psychometric methods in marketing research, this study opens pathways for more rigorous, theory-driven analyses in digital consumer behavior. Practically, the study recommends that MSMEs in the fashion sector adopt structured content calendars, leverage visual storytelling, and prioritize message relevance to improve consumer engagement and loyalty. Policy makers and business development institutions are urged to provide targeted support to MSMEs through training, digital literacy programs, and access to content creation tools. In conclusion, content marketing has been shown to be more than a trend; it has emerged as a strategic necessity in the increasingly competitive and digitally mediated marketplace. For MSMEs in emerging economies, the effective use of content can serve as a powerful equalizer—bridging gaps in budget, scale, and infrastructure, while fostering meaningful relationships with consumers.

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