Thomas Hörner

Advertising Impact and Controlling in Content Marketing

Recognize Impact Mechanisms, Optimize Controlling and Adapt Strategy

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ISBN 978-3-658-40550-2 ISBN 978-3-658-40551-9 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-40551-9

This Springer imprint is published by the registered company Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden GmbH, part of Springer Nature.
The registered company address is: Abraham-Lincoln-Str. 46, 65189 Wiesbaden, Germany

Preface and Introduction

Content marketing has developed with the advent of the Internet as a form of marketing communication that primarily does communicate about products and services, not about product benefits, not about a brand and also not about offering companies—in short: a non-advertising marketing communication that has become an increasingly important discipline of online marketing in e-commerce.

But if content marketing doesn't communicate any directly advertising content at all, but rather deals with topics of interest to customers in a more editorial-journalistic sense—how can content marketing achieve any advertising effect at all and contribute to marketing and corporate goals? Can budgets and working time for content marketing activities be reasoned and justified at all? Are they possibly even necessary and to be demanded? And how can this not only be asserted, but also justified on a professional basis?

That content marketing is not only a nice-to-have for marketing, but can even play an increasingly important role in the e-commerce competitive environment through its advertising effect, this book shows. In the first part, an **advertising effect model of content marketing** is introduced, which is based on theories that have been proven in science for many years, mostly from psychology. In passing, this also sharpens the definition of the term and the discipline of content marketing and differentiates it on the one hand against advertising marketing communication, but also against other disciplines such as journalism or corporate publishing, on the other hand.

In the second part of the book, the **psychological background** on which the presented advertising effect model is based is explained in more detail. There we deal with the attitudes, knowledge or motivation of customers[1] and we will look at psychological models such as taxonomies, the elaboration likelihood model or the theory of planned behavior to explain human behavior.

All this leads us in the third part to concrete **recommendations for the design of effective content marketing** in marketing practice. It will be shown how to find structured advertising-effective and customer-suitable topics of content marketing and how to design effective content marketing contributions.

Finally, it is also necessary to measure the content marketing and its effects and to record them in figures—which is done in the fourth and final section of the book on the **Content Marketing Controlling Framework**. The goal: to actually establish achieved successes and advertising effects and to use the key figures as a steering instrument for decision-making in content marketing.

This book therefore aims to contribute to the promotion of the theoretical foundation of this discipline, to offer an entrepreneurial justification for its use and to provide practical recommendations, procedures and tips to make content marketing more successful in practice.

The author hopes that the following subject matters will help practitioners to create good content marketing as well as practitioners, students and learners to gain a good understanding of this discipline. For theory and science, further elaborations are to be encouraged on the basis of the proposed theoretical background and methodological framework in order to advance scientific research on content marketing.

Have fun and wish for one or the other interesting insight
the author
Thomas Hörner

Bamberg, Deutschland Thomas Hörner

[1]It should be pointed out at this point that the term customer in this book usually does not only mean existing customers or buyers, but also potential customers, interested parties, people to be addressed in the target group, etc.

Contents

Part I

How Content Marketing Works and Helps to Achieve Marketing Goals

Let's start at this point with the basic question of what marketing in general (and content marketing as part of it) actually is and what significance it has for companies: "The basic idea of marketing is the consistent orientation of the entire company to the needs of the market" (Kirchgeorg 2018b), in order to ultimately achieve value creation for the company.

To achieve this, a wide variety of marketing strategies, tactics and instruments are used. They are often structured with the help of the marketing mix or the so-called 4Ps.[1] A key, overarching goal of marketing is to trigger short-, medium- or long-term purchases from customers.

Content marketing as a sub-area of marketing must therefore contribute directly or indirectly to this function of marketing. It must contribute to the value creation of the company by also contributing in one way or another, in the short, medium or long term, to sales.

But what is actually meant by this content marketing and, in particular, how it can achieve an advertising effect in the sense mentioned above, will be the focus of the next two chapters.

Marketing and controlling in their historical development

Marketing and controlling are not new ideas of modern corporate management. So entrepreneurial people and organizations have been pursuing the basic ideas of marketing for centuries—without actually calling it that. The term "marketing" only came into use at the beginning of the 20th century. The first mention can be found in 1906 by S. E. Sparling (Meffert et al. 2015, p. 6). Initially still strongly sales-oriented and understood purely as a

[1] The marketing mix or the 4Ps are originally based on McCarthy and were first published in (McCarthy 1960) and can also be found in more recent publications by the author, e.g. (Perreault et al. 2012, pp. 35–36).

distribution function, marketing developed over the decades into a strategic management concept (Meffert et al. 2015, pp. 6–18).

Controlling developed similarly to what will be discussed in terms of content marketing in the fourth part of this book. Controlling originally emerged from the tasks of the secretary and the treasurer. As their tasks increased with industrial development, controlling (in a similar timeframe as marketing) institutionalized as an independent corporate area. The first position to be so named was in 1880. However, a further spread and establishment of corporate controlling in the USA only took place with the world economic crisis in 1929 or in Germany in the second half of the 1950s (Horváth 2015, p. 15).

The emerging digitalization and the digital medium Internet that arises from this have changed marketing and controlling again. "The new media have undergone rapid development, opened up new opportunities for companies and at the same time presented them with new challenges. Classic marketing alone is no longer enough to reach the consumer today. Advertising in the traditional sense is increasingly being ignored and has to find its way to the consumer via social media" (Meffert et al. 2015, p. 858). And for controlling, the IT-supported, digital nature of the Internet medium results in new possibilities for measuring customer behavior and supporting marketing with valuable information and decision-making.

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1 Basics of Content Marketing

Content marketing is a relatively new marketing discipline and has only developed as a separate discipline in recent years. However, as can be seen in Fig. 1.1, which shows the number of search queries for this topic, it has been steadily gaining importance since 2013/2014.

1.1 What is Content Marketing?

This book is all about content marketing, how it works and how it's effect can be measured in controlling. But what is this discipline “content marketing” actually? And what is included and what is not?

Unfortunately, there are many misunderstandings in marketing practice, especially about what falls under the term content marketing and what does not. In particular, the improvement of product description texts or the addition of more product images in online shops are often wrongly classified as content marketing measures.

Content marketing is not simply everything that handles with content in marketing.[1] It is also not just another online marketing channel for publishing content and no more online marketing instrument in the sense of a marketing tactic.[2]

[1] For a more precise distinction between advertising communication and content marketing, see also later in Sect. 2.3.2.1.

[2] For the conceptual distinction between strategy and tactics, see Mintzberg: “[…] ‘strategy’ refers to the important things, ‘tactics’ to the details […]”, Mintzberg (1987, p. 11).

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https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-40551-9_1

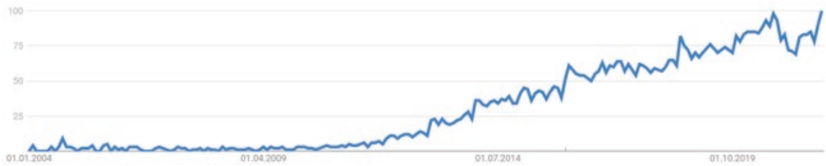

Fig. 1.1 Google search volume for the term content marketing worldwide. (data source: Google Trends: https://www.google.com/trends)

Content marketing is rather a strategic approach. It is a basic, channel-spanning, strategic approach and a certain type of marketing communication that is mainly defined by the content of the communication. These strategic principles and content of content marketing are then communicated in the various channels (website, YouTube channel, social media, newsletter, etc.).

1.1.1 Previous Definitions of Content Marketing

If you look at the literature on content marketing, it is sometimes worked on completely without any clarification and definition.

If there are definitions in the literature, they are very practice-oriented and build on specific tasks, processes and tools of content marketing as defining features. However, this approach in the style of an exemplary description of content marketing is not suitable as a scientific definition.[3]

If a definition of content marketing is given, this is most often the definition from the Content Marketing Institute (CMI).[4] Even if the weaknesses of this definition are discussed in Sect. 2.3.1 and an improved definition is offered there, it should serve as a working basis here:

[3] The list of examples, processes and procedures etc. cannot serve as the basis for the definition of technical terms in a scientific sense. Because "tight normative ideas, prejudices, personal opinions or even exemplary descriptions of manual activities as part of definitions do not meet such requirements" (Fröhlich Romy 2015, p. 108).

[4] The CMI is not an institute that has emerged from the scientific environment, as the name might suggest. Rather, it is a commercial "global content marketing education and training organization" (Content Marketing Institute). However, the Content Marketing Institute and its founder Joe Pulizzi have made a name for themselves with high-quality posts to content marketing and very early publications on this topic.

> "Content marketing is a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience—and, ultimately, to drive profitable customer action." (Content Marketing Institute)

This definition hits the core of the marketing discipline content marketing very well:

- Content marketing is a strategic marketing approach. So it's not just another advertising media, no new marketing tool, no new channel, but an overarching principle.
- It's about—for a specific target group—valuable and relevant content with added value (ie "more value" for customers beyond the usual, advertising marketing communication).
- In the end, the goal is to generate profitable customer behavior.

Content marketing therefore does not deal with individual products,[5] brands, services or other offers of the company. But it looks at customers and provides—in an editorial-journalistic sense—interesting, helpful or entertaining content for them.

On the other hand, content marketing does not take place "as one (further) measure", but it is a basic approach to various online marketing activities. So content marketing can be operated on the website in the form of a magazine or blog, it can take place in social media channels in the form of posts, stories, reels, videos, etc., in podcasts as an audio format or even within a newsletter. So you don't do "website, newsletter AND content marketing" in online marketing, but "content marketing on the website and in the newsletter".

1.1.2 "Marketing with Good Content" Versus "Content Marketing"

A very common misunderstanding that is often found in practice and unfortunately sometimes also in science is that "Content marketing" is not used as a fixed, clearly defined term, but only is interpreted literally.

[5] As we will see later, we need to make a more precise distinction here between, on the one hand, the offered and advertised individual products and, on the other hand, whole product groups or categories. So the communication of advantages of a certain e-bike model would not be content marketing (but advertising communication), while the discussion of (possibly even the same) advantages of e-bikes as a whole product group would certainly be content marketing. See also Sect. 3.3.2.

Understanding Content marketing literally as "marketing using content" would lead to (or is unfortunately still done incorrectly[6]), that all marketing activities with (communication) content would be assigned to content marketing, for example the creation of good product descriptions, the integration of more pictures for webshop product pages or simply the improvement of any texts on the website.

The problem of such a concept of terms: Content marketing would then be completely superfluous as a term. It would not be definable as a distinct discipline. Because if "marketing with good content" or "improving communication content" were always content marketing, then ultimately the entire marketing would also be content marketing—after all, every communication and marketing communication consists of content (and alone to call their improvement content marketing would make content marketing a quality criterion for marketing communication—which also seems absurd).

In short: Since communication always requires content and thus every marketing communication automatically becomes content marketing, the term "content marketing" must never be understood literally as "content (in) marketing" or "marketing with good content", but has to be used as a self-contained, clearly defined term.

▶ **Remember** "Content marketing" is something different than a"marketing with good content".

1.2 Content, Formats and Channels

Content marketing **content** is primarily a conceptual construct. They are statements, knowledge, experiences, opinions, etc.—without these having to be formulated or implemented in any other way. With "content" it is about a certain understanding, not about how something is concretely realized in a certain medium for communication. Put simply, content is what is actually supposed to be said or what is actually meant.

[6] Partly this is due to a false understanding, partly but probably also deliberately, after all, the revision of product texts can be sold better by agencies under the (false) term content marketing. But this should not obscure the fact that it is still not a correct classification.

For communication, these contents are implemented by a sender in a media format, which is then interpreted by an addressed recipient and, if communication is successful, also understood.[7]

In content marketing, it is therefore important to clearly distinguish between the actual content of content marketing and the **format** in which it is implemented.[8] However, here, for the sake of clear communication, a further distinction should be made between media formats and content formats (informational formats). **Media formats** are, for example, texts, images, videos, audio/sound, etc., i.e. the basic communication types. A **content format** would be the way in which content is conveyed. This can be (for the same content) a longer text with or without pictures, a slideshow of 10 pictures (and possibly a short text for each picture), an explanatory podcast episode, a video interview or a how-to video. Content formats are therefore composed of (one or usually several) media formats, but are fixed by clear typification.

The content then implemented in different formats is finally transported via different **channels**. This can be the channel website, a company page on Facebook, a podcast channel, a newsletter, an Instagram account or any other channel. Some formats can be used in several different channels. But on the other hand, not every format is suitable for every channel, which is why some content has to be implemented in several formats for use in different channels. Just as an example, the media format video is used in the YouTube channel, in Instagram, in TikTok or on the website, but it has to be implemented in detail differently, e.g. in the width-height ratio of the video, in the permitted or usual length, in the content approach, etc.

▶ **Remember** In order to communicate content, this content must be implemented in content formats—composed of basic media formats—in order to then be published in a channel (medium).

A recipient (website visitor, follower, etc.) finds these media content in the channel used by him, interprets these and tries to reconstruct the originally intended content (mentally).[9]

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[7] For communication and, in particular, its comprehensibility, the book by Ballstaedt (2019) is recommended.

[8] This distinction between content and format may sound very theoretical at first, but it is of practical relevance when it comes to marketing efficiency. For example, once researched or elaborated content can be implemented in different formats—or, in other words, multiple use and thus efficient work is possible.

[9] See also the communication model by Ballstaedt (2019, p. 23).

1.3 Level of Abstraction and Levels of Observation

With "content marketing" different things can be meant in communication: One can mean the entire content marketing publications of a company, one can refer to the activities of a corresponding department, one can speak of the strategic principle of content marketing as a rather cognitive, abstract construct (as is the case in the sections on the definition of the discipline of content marketing in this book), it can be a question of a resource perspective or the perspective of effect—and much more.

For understandable human communication it is therefore important that all communication partners communicate from and on the same perspective—otherwise the comprehensibility suffers or there are misunderstandings. In philosophy, there is the concept of levels of abstraction (levels of abstraction) for these different description or perspectives on an object. From a scientific point of view, an object to be considered can always be described from different perspectives (levels of observation or abstraction, levels of abstraction). So the object "tree" can be considered from a biological perspective, from the perspective of its ecological importance, from an economic perspective, from the perspective of a health effect, from an artistic perspective, from a historical perspective, etc. Or a tree is considered in its overall function, on the level of the leaf level or the root level, on the level of water hydraulics in the tree, on the level of a wood fiber, on the level of chemical processes in the tree and much more. Only the totality of all levels of observation results in a comprehensive picture of the observed object "tree". Problems arise when different levels of observation are mixed in communication or argumentation or it is not clear to which level of observation statements refer. This can impair the comprehensibility of communication to misunderstandings or to false descriptions and erroneous knowledge. The philosopher Floridi introduces the method of levels of abstraction (LoAs) as a central method of philosophy of information (Floridi 2011, pp. 46–79).

In this book, we will try to avoid this problem as much as possible and increase the clarity by using different terminology for different perspectives and explaining them briefly here. In addition, three levels of observation in content marketing will be briefly discussed, which always allow a structured approach to content marketing.

1.3.1 Abstraction Levels of Content Marketing

The general term content marketing is used to describe very different things. Some common uses are briefly shown here (although this does not claim to be complete):

Content marketing (discipline)
Content marketing can be used quite abstractly to describe this marketing discipline, e.g. in a sentence "I work in content marketing".

Content marketing (activities)
With content marketing, only the activities carried out in this context may be meant, e.g. when "We do content marketing". It is then meant as the planning, the content creation, the implementation of the controlling etc. as an activity.

Content marketing (department)
In companies, content marketing is often understood as an organizational unit, e.g. as the content marketing department, e.g. in sentences like "Our content marketing is quite large".

Content marketing (strategy)
From a strategic point of view, content marketing can be understood as an abstract strategic approach. The sections on the definition of content marketing in this book (Sect. 1.1.1 and 2.3) use the term content marketing in this sense.

Content marketing (publications)
For example, when speaking of "In our content marketing you will find …", content marketing is meant to mean its publications.

These examples should show that the term content marketing can have a variety of meanings, depending on how it is used—which can also lead to a variety of misunderstandings.

1.3.2 Observation Levels of Content Marketing

We will use three other terms repeatedly in the following: the *content marketing as a whole*, *content marketing segments* and individual *content marketing posts*.

The distinction is important because advertising effects can be analyzed at these different levels of observation (e.g. the advertising effect of content marketing as a whole, of certain segments or of individual s) and, in particular, in the section on controlling, key figures are always collected for these different levels of observation (and depending on the research question, only certain levels of observation provide meaningful and helpful information).

1.3.2.1 Individual Parts of Content Marketing

Content marketing, at a deep level of observation, consists first and foremost of individual **content marketing posts**. This can be a blog article, a Facebook post, a podcast episode or any other publication that is closed in terms of content and form in an online medium.

Such a post usually has a specific topic, which is carried out through content and implemented in media or by means of content formats for publication in channels (see also Chap. 7 on topic finding as well as Chap. 8 on the design of effective content).

Such a post is usually composed of a—more or less large—number of individual **content marketing elements**. So an Instagram post consists of the elements post image and accompanying text. A podcast episode, for example, consists of an intro, introduction, main part and conclusion or, at a more detailed level of observation, of elements such as spoken text, music elements, recordings, interview questions (and answers) etc. A blog post, on the other hand, consists of individual content areas (e.g. recognizable as text paragraphs or subheadings), statements and arguments (e.g. in sentences or text parts), overviews (e.g. lists) as well as images, inserted infographics, supplementary videos etc. that support the text. These elements build on each other and form the red thread of the blog post (analogously in other content formats).

Therefore, when we talk about the *content marketing post* below, we mean the whole post as a unit of content; when we talk about the *content marketing element,* we mean a (content) individual part thereof.

1.3.2.2 Content Marketing Corpus

If not a single posting of content marketing is considered, but the totality of all contributions (or publications), the term **content marketing corpus** is the right terminology. It is based on the term corpus from linguistics. However, the term cannot be transferred 1-to-1 to content marketing, it is really only used for texts in linguistics, while content marketing posts consist of multimedia elements (text, image, video, audio, …). That is why we do not only speak of a "corpus" or a "text corpus", but always of a "content marketing corpus".

So if it is about the effect of all content marketing posts as a unit, one would speak of the advertising effect on the level of observation of the content marketing corpus. Analogously, in controlling, a key figure "reach" on the level of observation of content marketing as a whole would be the number of people reached by all posts together, while "reach" on the level of observation of a content marketing post would only be the number of people reached by this post.

Last but not least, the term content marketing corpus can also be used to clearly delimit the publications of content marketing from other publications and communication content in marketing and the company.

1.3.2.3 Content Marketing as a Whole

If you want to name not only the totality of the media content or the publications of content marketing (the corpus), but also all activities, processes, etc. around content marketing of a company, in this book we speak of **content marketing as a whole**.

1.3.2.4 Content Marketing Segments

Between content marketing as a whole or its complete corpus on the one hand and individual posts on the other hand, of course, there are still various content, media or organizational units. This can be content marketing in one channel or content marketing posts that have a certain content or a certain type of content. Such sub-areas are generally referred to as **content marketing segments**.

For example, such a segment can be the division into topic areas (e.g. all DIY articles, all articles on food & drink, all tutorials, …), campaigns (all articles belonging to a certain period of time and often to a certain goal, e.g. all articles that are to support the Christmas sales) or an organizational unit (e.g. all articles by one author or one team) can be. Segments are often used as viewing levels according to publication channels (e.g. all articles in Instagram, a podcast with all its episodes, the blog as a whole, etc.).

If the *content marketing segments* are therefore referred to as the observation level, the corresponding statements can be considered valid for any arbitrary segment. If only a specific segment or segments formed in a certain way are meant, this is named as such.

Content Marketing—What we're Actually Talking About

Content marketing is a strategic approach in which the communication content does not relate to products, brands or companies, but is informative, helpful or entertaining from the perspective of customers. They have a more editorial-journalistic style.

Content marketing must be understood as a technical term and its own marketing discipline. This is to be distinguished from other (advertising) content and directly advertising marketing communication. Terms such as content, formats and channels are also to be distinguished.

Content marketing can be observed at different levels: the individual content marketing posts (consisting of content marketing elements), the entire content marketing corpus and sub-areas thereof, the content marketing segments. These three levels also repeatedly represent the observation levels for the advertising effect, the design and planning of content marketing as well as for content marketing controlling.

2 Advertising Effectiveness Model of Content Marketing

How can content marketing achieve an advertising effect, especially since its content is not of an advertising nature? This is one of the central questions of this book. In order to answer this, it is first necessary to clarify what this desired advertising effect is. Then, based on human behavior and the existing models of psychology, an advertising effect model for content marketing can be developed, as can be found in Sect. 2.1 (the psychological basics that are used for this are explained in more detail in the following Chap. 3).

2.1 Advertising Effect in Marketing

An effect is basically a "change, influence, result caused by a causative force" (Dudenredaktion 2019). For an advertising effect in marketing this means: There is a "causative force", which of course is the marketing communication of a company. In the case of content marketing, this is its corpus, i.e. the published content marketing posts. On the other hand, according to the definition of an effect mentioned above, there is something that is influenced and changed as a result of the effect. In marketing, this is usually the behavior of the customers.

Use of the term advertising effect

Attention: The term advertising effect can be used on the one hand to describe the advertising effect of communication on a **single person,** in particular the process of this effect. However, the term can also mean the advertising effect of advertising media as a whole, i.e. the entire advertising effect on **all reached people,** i.e. rather an overall result of achieved effects, not the process or the effect on a single person.

How the term is used in a specific case must be inferred from the context of the term usage in order to avoid misunderstandings if necessary.

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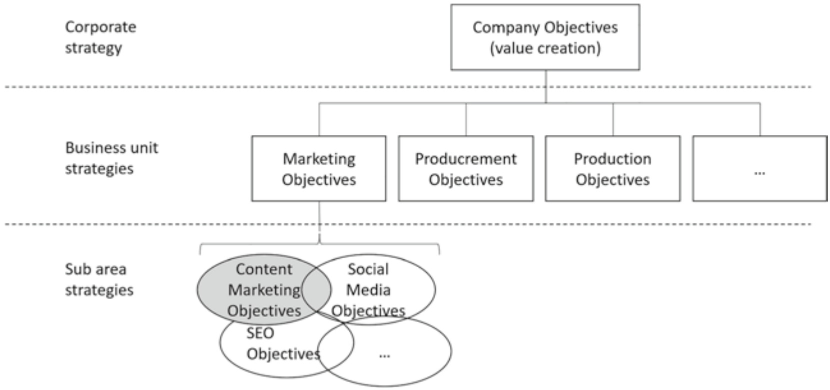

Fig. 2.1 Embedding of content marketing in the goal hierarchy of the company. (Source: own representation)

However, an advertising effect is not about changing customer behavior in any direction. It is about causing customer behavior that contributes to achieving the company's goals. First and foremost, this is of course the value creation, but it does not exclude other, altruistic or social goals (e.g. "strengthening the health of customers", "making customers happier" or "strengthening the democratic society"), if they are anchored in the vision and mission of the respective company.

The top and constituting goal of companies is to generate value,[1] to which all company parts and activities contribute, including marketing. As part of this, content marketing is also committed to this supreme goal.

Hierarchically, there are also goals on these three mentioned levels (company, marketing, content marketing) each with their own goals. Goals of a lower level must always contribute to the goals of the higher level. There is therefore a more extensive goal system in companies, in which content marketing is also embedded. This "staged build-up of goal systems is often referred to as goal hierarchy" (Reichmann et al. 2017, p. 34) and is graphically represented once again in the goal pyramid in Fig. 2.1.

[1] This value creation as the top goal of a company was long seen as only financial value creation, that is, a profit-making. Meanwhile, more and more social, societal and sustainability goals are counted as central goals of companies and have thus become part of the value creation.

Advertising effectiveness therefore describes whether, how and to what extent marketing communication contributes to a behavior of the customers, which has a positive effect on marketing and corporate goals.

A distinction is often made between an economic advertising effect and a psychological advertising effect, with the former being an “advertising effect that is measured in terms of sales and turnover”, while the latter can be “measured using various behavioral science variables” (Esch 2018). However, both types of advertising effects are closely related: First, marketing communication must achieve a psychological advertising effect, then this will influence behavior and finally lead to an economic advertising effect. The psychological effects and their target variables “because of the clearer connection with the advertising measures […] are better suited as target specifications and control of advertising effectiveness” (Esch 2018), which is why the focus on the consideration of content marketing advertising effectiveness in the further course of the book is also on such effects.

What sounds very theoretical so far is also of very practical relevance in companies: Marketing activities that have no effect at all,[2] are unnecessary and to be classified as entrepreneurial wrong investments.[3] Of course, this also applies to content marketing. However, it is often difficult for even proponents of content marketing to justify and prove such a necessary positive effect of content marketing and the investments in it (financial budget, time expenditure). The advertising effectiveness model of content marketing presented in the next section is intended to close this gap as well.

Excursus: Advertising Effectiveness Research—A Short History

Note: This section provides background information on the history of advertising effectiveness research and its psychological models. It should help to classify the different models that keep appearing in the literature, such as AIDA, etc. from a professional point of view.

However, this part is not a prerequisite for the explanations in the following chapters. The following content is not relevant for the further course. Readers

[2] Or they show an effect, but it has nothing to do with the target system of marketing.

[3] It should be pointed out at this point that this statement must not only be understood from a sales and direct marketing perspective. Also, a years-long brand building or activities for image care, which do not lead to such effects immediately, but in the long term and indirectly, are to be assessed positively. But if a measure has no or only minimal contributions to company goals (neither in the short nor in the long term, neither directly nor indirectly), it is to be understood as a wrong investment.

who do not want to deal with the general development of advertising effectiveness research over the past few decades, but rather want to continue with content marketing effectiveness, can skip the following explanations with a good conscience and continue with Sect. 2.2.

How advertising and marketing work has always interested companies and science—after all, such an understanding can lead to better, more effective activities and ultimately increase corporate success. And so the development of theoretical models for the effect of advertising can be traced back to the end of the last century.

If you look at the literature on advertising effectiveness, you can find a variety of research approaches. These can be classified into four major research traditions[4]: stimulus-response models (SR models), stage or hierarchy models, relational models, and other complex behavior models.

The first two model types, the SR models and the stage/hierarchy models, are now considered outdated from a scientific point of view (the reasons for this will be explained shortly). Although they are still used in practice (e.g. the AIDA model), as they can provide an easily understandable and structured framework for marketing. But beyond this helpful, organizational and work-systematic framework, they can no longer be considered valid. Let alone explain how advertising and marketing work (even if that was once the original purpose of their development).

Stimulus-Response Models (SR Models)

These models postulate that a person perceives a certain stimulus and this stimulus then triggers a certain reaction. For the marketing we are considering, this would mean: a certain advertising communication would also lead to a certain reaction. Stimulus/stimulus and reaction would therefore be causal and directly connected to each other and the same stimuli would always have the same effects.

The simplicity of such models (a stimulus—resulting clear reaction) is what makes them so attractive for use in advertising practice. However, “advertising does not work so crudely, and without an understanding of certain psychological mechanisms, processes and laws, it will be difficult to predict how advertising works to any approximation. In fact, nowadays hardly anyone would still claim

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[4] An overview and classification of different research approaches from 1898 to 1995 in this classification can be found in Bongard Bongard 2002, p. 167. This classification will also be followed here.

that advertising immediately and directly achieves its intended effect and, for example, causes the purchase of a product. Rather, it is generally expected that there are different variables that mediate between the presentation of an advertisement and the purchase of the advertised product" (Moser 2015, p. 14). The stimulus-response approach therefore seems untenable from a scientific point of view, because "since the actual decision-making process of the consumer escapes direct observation, the cause-and-effect relationship between the individual marketing measures (as system input) and the decision of the consumer (as system output) […] is purely speculative and therefore potentially misleading (Bongard 2002)".

Content marketing and stimulus-response models

Unfortunately, stimulus-response models seem to have become entrenched in the minds of e-commerce retailers, but also repeatedly in agencies or marketing departments, leading to poor content marketing.

It is partly assumed—probably partly without being aware of it—that the right presentation of the content (the right stimulus, e.g. in the browser) would generate a certain action (e.g. clicking on a link or even the purchase transaction, the response). As a result, "impressions" or "click-through rate" (and often specifically meant: to a product page) are often given as central KPIs for content marketing. Even the cost per lead from content marketing is sometimes calculated (Heinrich 2017; Löffler 2016). However, such a key figure results more from a stimulus-response thinking and is only limitedly meaningful and hardly tenable from the perspective of the advertising effectiveness model presented below and the possible delimitation of causes of purchases (content marketing and advertising media), as we will see.

In addition, the thinking in simple stimulus-response models is probably the reason why direct advertising elements are often found in content marketing, as one hopes to generate a certain reaction and would like to lead the customer directly (in the sense of SR models) to the purchase. But content marketing in this (direct) form cannot do this at all and rather leads to poorly made content marketing and thus finally reduces its actually possible positive effect, as it is presented in the following chapters of this book.

Hierarchy models

The theories referred to as stage or hierarchy models take into account, as "it is generally expected that there are different variables that mediate between the presentation of an advertisement and the purchase of the advertised product" (Moser 2015, p. 14), i.e. a stimulus does not immediately and directly trigger a reaction. They postulate several successive stages of effect (hence the name stage or hierarchy model). The AIDA model, which is widespread in marketing practice today, is the best-known representative of this type of advertising effectiveness model.

The AIDA model was first published by Edward K. Strong (Strong 1925), but can be traced back to Elmo Lewis in 1898 or his article 1903 (E. St. Elmo Lewis 1903). AIDA can still be found in many practice-oriented marketing books today and consists of the stages 1) Attention/attention, 2) Interest/interest, 3) Desire/desire and 4) Action/action. So an advertising medium first has to experience attention, then develop an interest and ideally subsequently a stronger desire. This finally leads to a certain action, that is, a behavior of the customer.

These stages were originally not intended to explain the effect of advertising, but only as an instruction for the construction of sales conversations (Bongard 2002, p. 211). However, the principle of Lewis was taken up and, in addition to AIDA, a large number[5] of such models were developed. Two well-known models are, for example, the 6-stage Hierarchy-of-Effects model (Lavidge and Steiner 1961), which tries to scientifically foundation the different stages in a conceptual connection to AIDA, or the Information Processing model presented by McGuire (McGuire 1985).

The basic criticism that such stage/hierarchy models have to face is the fixed, linear course of the effect, even if individual stages may be skipped in some models. Lavidge and Steiner formulate this themselves as a “pressing” or a “force” that drives consumers along the respective stages: “Advertising may be thought of as a force, which must move people up a series of steps” (Lavidge and Steiner 1961, p. 59). The order of the different stages is therefore fixed and the achievement of a stage is considered a prerequisite for the achievement of the next stage. Other influences, such as the type of purchase or the person’s own circumstances, are not provided for.

The Hierarchy-of-Effects model (Ray 1973) does try to break this clear course by providing different hierarchies or different sequences of cognitive, affective and conative effects for different types of purchase processes. However, a fixed, linear course is still the basis of the model.

[5] Bongard provides a good overview of such stage models up to the end of the 20th century (Bongard 2002, pp. 215–217).

The validity of hierarchy models could only be scientifically proven in individual cases. The models seem to be limited to a few, specific purchase situations each (Bongard 2002, pp. 225–227). Based on the current state of research, they can be seen as only very limitedly valid for explaining advertising effectiveness.

However, the fact that they break down the effect process into manageable individual parts and the resulting checklist character for the practical implementation of marketing measures makes them interesting—despite this lack of scientific accuracy (Bongard 2002, p. 227).

They are therefore not helpful in explaining how marketing really works. But they can help to structure marketing measures and marketing content, to set complementary goals and in this way to contribute to better marketing.

And so almost all such models have a stage that describes the achievement of attention: in AIDA as “Attention”, in the Hierarchy of Effects model as “aware of its existence”, in McGuire “Attention to Message” etc. (Bongard 2002, pp. 215–217) and (Meeder 2007, pp. 19–21), with some models preceding this stage with the actual perception (e.g. Edmund Sundhoff the “sensory effect” or (DeLozier 1976) “consciousness”, or (Maecker 1962) “unconscious perception” and “conscious perception”).

Such (possibly multiple) stages are then followed by affective stages, e.g. in AIDA Interest (interest) and purchase desire (desire), in the Hierarchy of Effects model “like”, “preference” and “conviction”. Other models speak of Confidence/trust (Rowse and Fish 1944), Conviction/conviction (Rowse and Fish as well as the DAGMAR model by (Colley 1961)) or simply of “affective attitude” (by Werner Kroeber-Riel).

Such (possibly multiple) stages are then followed by the conative, i.e. behaviour-related stage, e.g. in AIDA “Action”.

Content marketing and hierarchy models

The division underlying most hierarchy models—attention, affective effects and action—which was just shown, and the fact that all stages must be passed through for a successful effect, can already be used to improve content marketing without the exact advertising effect being known.

When looking at individual content marketing content or posts, these should include elements that create initial attention. This could be an attention-grabbing image in a social media post, an eye-catching and appealing headline in a blog post, or the need to make the first few seconds of a YouTube video attention-grabbing. The search engine-optimized design that makes it possible to find the post at all can also be subsumed here.

However, just reaching attention is by no means sufficient to also achieve an effect. Rather, the same content marketing post must also convince in some way and affectively address. This corresponds to what we will later describe more precisely as “change of attitudes”.

In addition, it is of course helpful in the conative phase if the relevant content marketing post finally also opens up action options. This can be the simplest case of linking to the product page in an online shop (which saves the visitor the effort of searching for it for a long time) or the request to deal with something else.

In short, the stage/hierarchy models show and help to build content marketing cposts not only one-sided, but from at least three perspectives (attention, affective effect and action perspective).

The same can be said of the level of observation of the entire content marketing corpus. For example, posts that are more for attention can be supplemented with other, more convincing posts, and other posts can contribute to the customer’s action competence (and these posts may be linked to each other, e.g. as links). This helps to build a rounded, goal-oriented content marketing corpus.

The phases of stage/hierarchy models can thus contribute to a work structuring, prioritization or evaluation of content. With regard to advertising effectiveness, however, they are scientifically less meaningful and should not be further considered here.

Relational advertising effectiveness

The main criticism of the previously presented, historical advertising effectiveness models is on the one hand that mostly a fixed, unidirectional sequence of the stages of effect is postulated. The other criticism is that it is tacitly assumed that media content affects all consumers who are exposed to it in absolutely the same way. But it is easy to see that this is often the case or only in very limited exceptions.

The current state of research is therefore based on advertising effectiveness models in which “the effect of communication unfolds from the trimodality of information offer (stimulus), internal context of the recipient (experience, knowledge, attitudes and situational disposition) and external context (situational and social conditions)” (Bongard 2002, p. 83).

In this way, these models give up the rigid sequence of effect steps and the independence of the effect from the respective recipient assumed by stage models. Often they are then based on the tradition of the Involvement construct or include this (Bongard 2002, p. 293).

In addition to so-called consonance-dissonance models, path-of-effect models are now very common. By far the most prominent representative is the Elaboration-Likelihood Model presented by Petty and Cacioppo.

The Elaboration-Likelihood Model (ELM) was published in 1986 as a comprehensive theory proposal (Petty and Cacioppo 1986), but had first been presented as a social psychological concept as early as 1981 (Petty and Cacioppo 1981). The transfer of this original concept to advertising effectiveness research (Petty et al. 1983) is one of the most frequently cited articles in the field of advertising and consumer behavior (Schuhmann et al. 2012, p. 52). It therefore has a great deal of acceptance and dissemination in science. Around the same time, the also frequently used Heuristic-Systematic Model (HSM), which deals with the information processing of people and their resulting conviction, was also developed (Chaiken 1980, 1987). And also the often found MODE model (Fazio 1990), which highlights the importance of motivation for the emergence of human action, as well as the Theory of Planned Behavior (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975), which considers the emergence of action from attitudes, are relational models.

However, this is not the place to go into more detail about relational advertising effectiveness models. The brevity of this section should not conceal their importance—neither in current science nor for this book. Rather, it is based on the current state of research on relational models and draws conclusions from this for successful content marketing.

Conclusion
Stimulus-response models as well as **stage/hierarchy models** (such as the well-known AIDA) are **outdated from a scientific point of view** and cannot be used to explain advertising effectiveness. This is due in particular to their rigid course and the fact that they are independent of the actually acting human being.

However, due to their simplicity, such models are **quite suitable for practical work** in order to support a structured approach to content marketing.

In contrast, the **current research is based on relational models** that also take into account the inner context of people (in particular, attitudes). Models **such as ELM or MODE** are very common in science and form the starting point for the following explanations of the advertising effect of content marketing and the resulting recommendations.

2.2 Advertising Effect of Content Marketing

Human behavior—and thus the behavior of existing or potential customers—is researched by the scientific discipline of psychology. It has various findings and models to offer in this regard and can therefore serve as a good foundation for an advertising effect.

The advertising effect model of content marketing presented here has also been created in this way: Various psychological theories of human behavior were analyzed, compared with central marketing goals and the possible ways of action for content marketing were extracted from this. The results were finally summarized in the overview model presented in the following. Again and again reference is made to the underlying psychological models, which are explained in more detail in the section "Psychological Backgrounds" (Chap. 3, 4, 5 and 6).

2.2.1 The Advertising Effect Model of Content Marketing at a Glance

Content marketing does not **have one** advertising effect. Rather, it acts in different ways—often even simultaneously in several ways. But which effect paths contribute to the overall effect (and thus to the achievable marketing goals) and how strongly in practice depends, among other things, on the respective design of the respective content marketing. So later on, practical recommendations for content marketing practice can be derived from the advertising effect model and the underlying psychological theories.

Content marketing, as can be seen in Fig. 2.2, develops, on the one hand, a direct advertising effect, i.e. it directly influences ***awareness and image*** of objects to be advertised, such as the company, the brand or products, etc. It thus contributes to two central objectives of every marketing. In addition, it can strengthen trust and customer satisfaction. These direct effects are summarized in the content marketing advertising effect model under the term **Direct Content Effects (DCE)**.

Content marketing also has an effect in which the content marketing posts do not have any direct effect on the objects to be advertised at first. First of all, they cause other effects that are not directly related to marketing objectives, but which

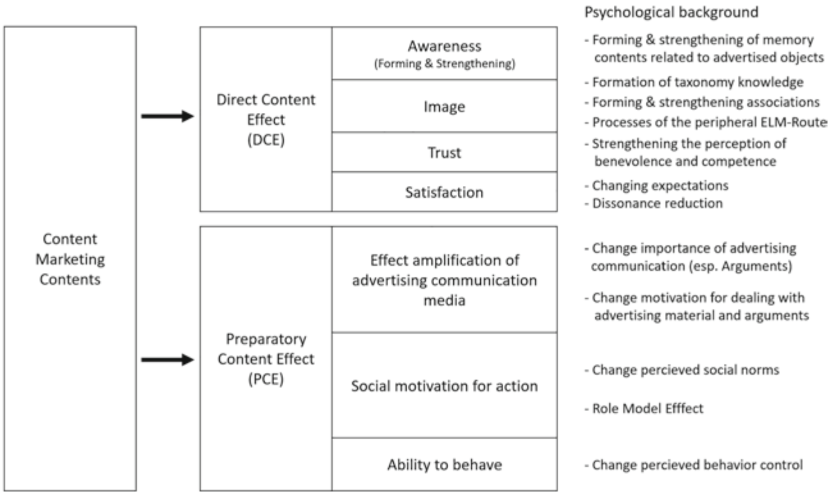

Fig. 2.2 Content marketing effect model. (Source: own representation)

nevertheless achieve an advertising effect in the sense of marketing or a desired customer behaviour in a further stage of effect. This is done by content marketing either ***strengthening the effect of classic, directly promotional advertising media*** (e.g. the product presentation in the webshop, ads placed etc.) or ***eliminating existing barriers*** for customers that impede the formation of a customer behaviour desired by advertising communication. These indirect effect paths are referred to or summarized in the advertising effect model under the term **Preparatory Content Effects (PCE)**.[6]

The following will show the mechanisms of action in more detail. As will be shown (in particular in Chap. 3, 4 and 5), these are based essentially on the change of the three central psychological constructs of knowledge, attitudes and motivation (which also influence human behavior centrally).

[6] The effects mentioned here can be caused by the content of individual content marketing posts. But also the content marketing corpus as a whole or individual segments or channels can have an effect even if customers have not consumed any of the individual posts at all (this will be explained in more detail later, it should only be pointed out here by way of example that the overall impression of a comprehensive website magazine can be positive even if not a single post has been called up).

2.2.2 Direct Content Effect (DCE): The Direct Advertising Effect

Content marketing offers content related to the customer interests (see Sect. 1.1 and 2.3.2.1) in a more editorial-journalistic style. Products, brands or companies to be advertised[7] are not the topics of content marketing posts. But how can such content have a direct advertising effect nevertheless?

A fundamental starting point for the explanation of such an advertising effect is the finding that human knowledge is stored as structures in memory from a psychological point of view. Memory structures for advertised objects can also be generated without these being advertised directly or even appearing in communication at all.

From a marketing perspective, the memory structures regarding objects to be applied for (products, brands, companies, etc.) can be differentiated into two essential constructs: awareness and image (Esch 2005, p. 67). Awareness refers to the knowledge of existence and properties, the image to the attitudes and associations with product, brand or company.

Content marketing can create or change memory content for both (awareness and image) as a direct advertising effect—without any advertising statements about product, brand or company having to be substance of the content marketing communication.

2.2.2.1 Advertising Effect: Awareness

Awareness is a very frequently aspired goal in marketing, as the marketing literature shows (e.g. Meffert et al. 2019; Becker 2019). "This is due on the one hand to the simple and quick planning, implementation and evaluation of memory tests. On the other hand, memory tests are based on the consideration that the awareness of a brand or product is a prerequisite for advertising success" (Moser 2015, p. 165).

[7] We will talk about "objects to be advertised" and "products, brands and companies" throughout this book. However, this formulation must not conceal the fact that in principle any type of object to be advertised can be meant, for example also clubs, persons, product groups, but also cognitive constructs such as "a strategy to be advertised" or "sustainability goals". They are all meant when talking about objects or the three most common objects to be advertised "products, brands and companies".

Analogously, Kotler's 5-phase model for purchase decisions (Kotler et al. 2017, pp. 218–228) also points out that awareness is a very basic requirement for a purchase. He shows that a purchase is only made from a limited choice set, which in turn represents a selection from the consideration set, which in turn is formed from the awareness set—that is, all products or brands known to a person (Kotler et al. 2017, p. 220).

And also the stimulus-response models used in early advertising effectiveness research (see also the box in Sect. 2.1) did not coincidentally mostly have attention, awareness or similarly named constructs as the first phase.

Awareness is therefore a very basic marketing objective and a mandatory prerequisite for most other objectives in marketing (from image to purchase to customer loyalty). And it is precisely to this very basic awareness objective that content marketing can contribute and achieve a corresponding direct advertising effect.

> **Awareness—of what?** At this point it must be pointed out that in content marketing it is always necessary to make a distinction in thought between the awareness of the content itself (does a person know that there is a content post and does she know its content) and on the other hand the awareness of an object to be advertised (of the product, a brand or the company). The former is indeed a prerequisite for content marketing to work, but only the latter is to be seen here as the actual desired advertising effect.
>
> Therefore, when awareness is mentioned in this chapter of the content marketing effectiveness model, it always refers to the awareness of the object to be advertised (and not the awareness of the content itself).
>
> In the section on controlling content marketing, however, separate key figures for both awarenesses (of the content itself Sect. 10.5.1 and the advertising effect on the awareness of the object to be advertised Sect. 10.7.1) are integrated into the controlling framework.

Awareness is always to be understood from a psychological point of view as a memory performance. But it is not only an on-off switch (known/unknown). Rather, memory contents have different degrees of availability or are retrieved to different degrees. Awareness therefore has a strength or intensity.

Awareness also plays a role not only when we consciously retrieve information from memory. The human behavior is also influenced by the easy or difficult availability of memory contents, as various psychological models show, e.g. the MODE model to be presented in Sect. 5.2.

These psychological findings are also reflected in marketing research when, for example, (Esch 2005, pp. 69–71) the depth of brand awareness is shown as an important factor in purchase preference and is based on the stages of depth of awareness developed by Aaker: unknown, passive awareness (supported recognition), active awareness (memory), intensive active awareness (top of mind) and dominant (exclusive memory) (Aaker 1992, p. 84).

Content marketing can now create an effect in terms of marketing objectives by creating initial awareness on the one hand and deepening awareness on the other.

2.2.2.1.1 Create Initial Awareness

At some point a consumer must first learn about a provider, come into contact with a brand for the first time or first become aware of the existence of a certain product. Or, to put it another way: Corresponding memory content must for the first time be created for an object to be advertised. Content marketing can achieve this in two ways: first of all, without the product to be advertised appearing in the content at all (but the brand or company is, for example, a recognizable sender of the communication), and secondly, by products to be advertised appearing in the content, but not as the actual content, but only as a means to an end for the representation of other content (we will explain this in more detail shortly).

Advertising object as sender of the content

An advertising effect is achieved in this case in that advertising objects are recognizable as senders of content marketing posts (but advertised products, brands, etc. are not to be found or mentioned in the content). The mere perception as sender of (then non-advertising) content creates awareness of the brand, company, etc.

In practice, this often happens simply by the domain name of a website (on which the content marketing articles can be found) containing the company or brand name. Or the company logo or a trademark of the content provider can be seen on the content marketing pages of a blog. The same happens when the name of one's own YouTube channel also contains the name of the offering company or brand, or when these are clearly recognizable in the designation of a podcast channel or the social media presence (Facebook fan page, Instagram account name, …). While in the publishing industry the publisher is typically not in the foreground and a magazine name stands for itself or the content, in the case of content marketing publications, the sender and its recognizability are central.[8]

If one does not consider the advertising effect as awareness with a single person, but the advertising effect as a whole (overall awareness in the target group), it becomes even clearer how important content marketing is for this marketing : The scope of the advertising effect of content marketing posts or the corpus is in fact further increased by the effect on machine systems on the Internet (e.g. on websites by good placement in search engines, by hashtag or interaction optimization in social media channels, etc.) and the awareness of the provider is significantly increased. When creating content, it is not only people, but also intermediate machine algorithms that need to be considered in order to achieve maximum advertising effect (see also Chap. 6).

Object to be advertised as part of the content

The second way to create awareness for products, brands or companies using content marketing is, in addition to their role as sender, their integration into the content itself. But here a clear line must be drawn to (undesired) promotional communication, which would present the product, brand or company in a positive way or even make it the main subject of the article—that would be purely (regardless of the format, e.g. also a blog post) promotional communication and no content marketing anymore. Such a thing could have partly negative effects on the advertising effect.

Products, brands or companies can be used in content as a means to an end or as an integral requirement. They are therefore not the actual subject or the actual content, but are used as a communication tool to convey this (other, actual content).

The best way to compare this is with a product placement,[9] as often seen in films. Even there, the placed product is not the focus of the story or highlighted.

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[8] In practice, it is always a matter of finding an optimal balance between good recognizability on the one hand and the negative effects thereof (excessively present and perceived as intrusive, it can also have negative effects on the image or the content marketing content is no longer perceived as neutral content and helpful for customers, but as advertising or promotional communication).

[9] Definition: “Product placement involves the effective, targeted integration of products or services into the plot of a cinema, video or television program” (Bente and Bente 1990, p. 24.

The placed product only supports the actual action of the film quite naturally and in a non-advertising form for the product. For example, in a film the protagonist may evolve into a hacker for a good cause and always use computers from the Apple brand (or Dell, Lenovo, …). At such points in the film, the brand or product is clearly recognizable, but the content is not about this product, but still centrally about what the protagonist is doing within the film. The placed brand is a side issue and means to an end for the actual content. Nevertheless, a certain level of awareness is achieved. Analogously, objects to be advertised cannot be the central content of content marketing, but they can very well be included as a means to an end for conveying other, non-advertising and customer-oriented content, thus achieving a level of awareness. This applies not only to videos, but also to any other content format in general.

2.2.2.1.2 Intensify Awareness

The stronger a memory content is (psychologically formulated: the easier it is to access; formulated in marketing: the deeper the awareness of the product, brand or company), the more likely it will also have a more intense effect, in particular an influence on behaviour.

The strength of awareness can influence which products customers consider or look at more closely when making a purchase decision—up to and including an overall increased likelihood of purchase. Studies show that while passive awareness can already contribute to more frequent purchases (Nedungadi 1990, cited in (Esch 2005, p. 70)), active or even intensive awareness is associated with a high probability of product choice.[10]

The repetition effect, which originates from the field of learning and memory psychology and has been investigated and confirmed in numerous experiments[11] , provides us with a central psychological mechanism of action for content marketing to increase the depth of awareness. “In the research literature, there is hardly any doubt that repetitions improve memory” (Peterson and Mulligan 2012, p. 1786).

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[10] Note at this point: In addition to the direct effect on behavior with respect to the advertised object, intensive awareness also has an effect on what content a person consumes, i.e. for example, which Google Ads ads are clicked or which product information is read at all. However, this indirect effect with respect to the handling of advertising materials is to be assigned to the indirect advertising effect of content marketing in Sect. 2.2.3.1.2, not here to the direct advertising effect of content marketing—even if both effects are based on the same or similar psychological effects.

[11] For an overview of the relevant research, see, for example, (Greene 2008).

The mere fact that a provider is repeatedly present with its content marketing to a customer or a prospective customer has a positive advertising effect in the form of deepened awareness and ultimately effects on purchasing behavior—without the content itself having to be advertising in any way.

At this point, the *Content Marketing Corpus* plays an important role overall (while for the initial awareness the perspective of individual *Content Marketing Posts* or *Content Elements* was still more important). Of course, a blog that only publishes one article per month offers very few opportunities to be retrieved again and again. But if a larger number of articles on various topics are published, the probability of repetition and thus a deepening of the awareness of the provider increases. On the one hand, the users themselves have a greater motivation to call up this blog again from time to time, and on the other hand, more search terms are covered in search engines and the blog is more often seen on the search results page (possibly including the brand/company name in the displayed URL, so that just by being visible on the search results page, even a deepening of awareness occurs, even if the content post itself would not be called up).

The same applies to YouTube channels with only a few versus regularly and in greater numbers published videos, for podcasts with only rarely versus regularly published episodes or for the frequency of social media posts. Always the awareness is deepened.

Deepen awareness with voice assistants

Voice assistants have a special feature with regard to the repetition effect and the achievement of deep awareness. There, so-called voice apps can be created, which can be addressed with “Alexa, ask (voice app name)” or “Google, talk to (voice app name)” (Hörner 2019, pp. 16–20). This voice app name can then be, for example, the brand or company name.

Even if the voice app would only provide dialog content in the sense of content marketing (assistance, tips, entertainment, etc.), awareness can be deepened very well—the sender of these dialogues (of the content) is not only passively perceived by the consumers, but actively spoken to or spoken to with each communication.

That is why voice assistants and voice apps are also very important for brands and companies without direct advertising content—quite apart from the other marketing and sales opportunities that this marketing instrument offers (see also Hörner 2019).

Therefore, with regard to the objective of a deeper awareness, it is important to provide many different types of content in content marketing. People in the target group should always encounter different reasons and interests again and again. All of this speaks for a more comprehensive content marketing and its strategic content and channel planning in order to finally achieve a disproportionate effect compared to only isolated, irregular content marketing activities.

This applies both within a single communication channel (e.g. blog posts, Facebook posts, etc.), as well as a repetition effect occurs when users repeatedly encounter the same provider in various channels (e.g. detailed articles in a website magazine that can also be found in Google, Facebook posts on the go and podcast episodes for the car ride). The awareness or the easy availability of the corresponding memory structures for the advertised objects (i.e. the providers of the content marketing content or by product placement) is always increased. A positive advertising effect in the sense of marketing and ultimately in the following on purchasing behaviour is achieved.

2.2.2.2 Advertising Effect: Image

The image—often referred to as brand image in marketing research—is just as important a objective for marketing as awareness. So “the brand image […] is the sufficient condition for the success of the brand” (Esch 2005, p. 73). Similar to awareness, one can also ask about the image: How can editorial-journalistic content marketing posts that are not directly advertising have a direct advertising effect on the image?

Image is “the perception of a brand by consumers” and “corresponds to associations and knowledge structures represented in memory” (Moser 2015, p. 378). This gives us the approaches for explaining the corresponding advertising effect: Knowledge and associations can be created by content marketing, and this is—as we will see in more detail—without the advertised object even appearing in the content of the content marketing articles.

As we have already mentioned (and this will be explained in more detail in Sect. 3.3), knowledge is stored in memory in a hierarchical structure. If knowledge is generated for a higher-level structure (for example, the general product group), this is automatically transferred to the advertised object (for example, the actual product to be advertised). Content marketing therefore does not achieve a direct advertising effect by changing the memory structures related to a product or brand directly, but by addressing and influencing higher-level memory structures (taxonomy knowledge), associations and other associated memory content in a hierarchical manner. In this way, “product-related or non-product-related attributes, functional, experiential or symbolic benefits and the general attitude towards the brand” (Keller 1993, p. 5) emerge and are conveyed by content marketing into the image of the product to be advertised.

In addition, the Elaboration-Likelihood-Model (ELM) of psychology, which will be introduced in more detail in Chap. 4, shows us that attitudes (positive/negative evaluations and thus part of the image) are not only created by active cognitive processing of content, but can also be changed by processes of the so-called peripheral route, for example the mere-expose effect. In this way, too, further content marketing advertising effects arise with regard to the image.

2.2.2.2.1 Knowledge and Attitude Towards Product or Brand by Means of Taxonomies

In Sect. 3.3 we will look at this in more detail, that human knowledge (and thus also objects such as products, brands etc.) is stored in various, hierarchically ordered taxonomies in memory. So a tulip belongs to the taxonomy of flowers, this in turn to the taxonomy of plants and this in turn to the taxonomy of living beings.

For example, the product "Samsonite Proxis" belongs to the taxonomy of hard-shell suitcases, which in turn belongs to the higher-level taxonomy of suitcases and these in turn are travel utensils. And the product "Sennheiser HD450BT" belongs to the noise-cancelling headphones as well as to the taxonomy of wireless headphones, both of which are subordinate in the hierarchy of the taxonomy headphones.

The key insight for content marketing with respect to taxonomies is that knowledge and properties of higher-level taxonomies automatically also apply to lower-level taxonomies and objects (Sect. 3.3.2). This means: Properties of and settings for the higher-level taxonomies of a product also influence the product's image itself.

While in content marketing the objects to be promoted cannot be the content themselves by definition, this is possible in any form for their taxonomies. So, for example, product groups[12] can be the content and subject matter of content marketing. So content marketing could, for example, show the advantages (and, for the sake of balance and customer orientation, also the disadvantages) of the taxonomy "wireless headphones". Or it explains what materials hard-shell suitcases are made of in general and how their stability is created or what loads they can withstand (and why that is important). This enhances the image of these taxonomies or product groups.

This knowledge and image of the taxonomy are automatically transferred by people to the individual products assigned to this taxonomy. The "Sennheiser HD450BT" or the "Samsonite Proxis" would benefit in terms of image (again,

[12] An important note should be made here: Under the term product group, any group of products with common features should be understood here. It is worth thinking outside the box here well beyond the product groups used in warehouse management in order to create attractive content marketing.

without these appearing in the content marketing content themselves). Analogously, this is possible for brands, entire companies or any other objects to be promoted.

2.2.2.2.2 Image Effect by Means of Associations

In addition to taxonomies (i.e. semantically similar, hierarchically ordered cognitive concepts), associations with objects are always formed in memory, which are to be understood as semantic relations between partly completely different cognitive concepts (see Sect. 3.3.3).

While the taxonomies of an exemplary product "Genta Sun 50 Protect" might be sun creams, sun protection products, cosmetics, holiday supplies and health protection products, associations with this sun cream would be other, non-hierarchically linked cognitive concepts. These can be real objects like "UV radiation", "plastic bottle" or also the memory content of another person from whom one would like to get creamed. But also abstract cognitive concepts can be associated, for example "feeling good" or "safety".

If the object "Genta Sun 50 Protect" is now activated in the memory, all associated associations are also activated to a greater or lesser extent. They are part of the image of this product and influence the attitude towards it.

In addition to knowledge, these associations as an important part of the image provide us with another way of action for content marketing: This can build or reinforce exactly such associations in order to support the desired image and the positive attitude towards the object to be advertised.

Of course, the formation of associations takes place in content marketing again without the respective product being the actual content of communication. To achieve this, we have the three psychological paths already known from the previous sections at our disposal: The object to be advertised (the company, the brand or the product) is the sender of the communication—i.e. the provider of the content marketing posts -, associations are created with taxonomies or the object to be advertised is only a means to an end in the actual content.

Let's assume that the exemplary product "Genta Sun 50 Protect" would be particularly skin-friendly and would avoid cancer-causing ingredients. In this case, it might be helpful to strengthen the image by creating associations with safety and health. Exactly this could do the provider by delivering content marketing posts on exactly these topics on the brand website, in its social media channels or in the podcast of the company. This is done without mentioning the product or the brand in the content. The content itself would not even be about sun creams and their safety (see the following point on taxonomies), but for example about safety at the beach (from theft to injuries), about health on vacation or simply tips for a hassle-free summer vacation—all topics that address the topic of safety directly or indirectly and thus create associations with the respective provider. Important for the advertising effect is only that the sender, whose image is to be influenced, is clearly recognizable (e.g. logo on website or in YouTube video, brand name in domain name or as name of the social media channel etc.).

The second way to create associations through content marketing are the taxonomies, whose properties and associations are transferred to the subordinate cognitive concepts. For example, if the “Genta Sun 50 Protect” belongs to the product group (taxonomy) of the “tested sun creams”, then in content marketing—without mentioning the specific product—associations could be created between this product group and the topics of health and safety. For example, in an editorial video or Weblog report, the activity of a laboratory (which does not even have to be a service provider for the sun cream manufacturer) would be presented, which tests cosmetics for such problematic ingredients. In this way, a connection is made between the cognitive concept of “safety” and the taxonomy “tested sun creams” and associations are made with the “Genta Sun 50 Protect”, that is, its image is changed—an advertising effect of content marketing. Analogously, in the example of the headphones given above, the (taxonomy) “noise-cancelling headphones” could occur again and again in stories, which are used particularly often by relaxed, comfortable (or alternatively: by successful etc.) people.

Finally, there is still the third way to create associations, which was shown in the section on awareness: The product is not the actual content in the content marketing post, but it can be found there as a means to an end (in the sense of a product placement). In a video “The perfect holiday planning”, for example, it could be seen how the husband (a very safety-conscious father) mentioned in the story also packs the “Genta Sun 50 Protect” when packing his suitcase (in the sense of the product placement, but without this being particularly advertised). In this way, safety (represented by the father’s need for safety) is associated with the “Genta Sun 50 Protect” in a non-advertising way. Again, the image of the product is influenced by content marketing.

2.2.2.2.3 Perception of Competence through Knowledge about Company/ Brand

“Competence refers to the perceived ability, skills and capacity to meet performance promises” (Esch and Rühl 2015, p. 154; Andaleeb 1992) and it is an important part of the image in terms of marketing or business success.

Do you think BMW and Audi are competent for cars? In most cases you will attribute such competence to these brands. And Husqvarna? It is certainly not competent for cars, but in the field of gardening and especially garden equipment. Zara may hold the same competence for fashion and styling as a small fashion store in your city. And for photo accessories, tools, smartphones, food and much more, you have manufacturers, brands or retailers to whom you attribute more or less high competence in the respective area.

But it's not always just about pure product competence. Which of the aforementioned providers do you consider competent in terms of sustainability? Which one for competent that customers feel comfortable? And which brand is competent in managing to make people feel safer? And so on.

"A competent brand is a brand that is able to solve a customer's problem and meet the needs" (Afzal et al. 2009, p. 45). Solution competence (solving the customer's problems, not just manufacturing products) is of particular importance. If such competence is perceived, it also has a positive effect on the purchase intention of customers (Aaker et al. 2012; Xue et al. 2020).

Content marketing with its diverse posts can project competence and offer solutions (also beyond products or services offered) very well. In this way, a provider or brand can demonstrates in an editorial-journalistic way that it is really competent in exactly that area in which products or services are offered or in which the brand moves. It is also important here that the sender of the content marketing is clearly recognizable.[13]

This can be done on the level of observation of the *content marketing corpus* already through the selection of suitable topics and content. For example, a (editorially created and neutral) checklist demonstrates the customer that the provider knows all the important criteria for good products—he apparently has competence for such products. The same can be achieved by posts with expert knowledge, tips & tricks or how-tos from the relevant competence area—if a larger number is found, this reflects the corresponding competence.

So, for example, if household remedies for plant pests are presented with all the advantages and disadvantages, the exact mode of action of different chemical and biological substances is explained and many tips & tricks for plant protection are provided, then this provider shows that he "does not just want to sell whatever

[13] Which, by the way, speaks against the sometimes observed practice of publishing the webshop and the content marketing website on two different domains, in different designs or even under different provider names.

product" (and not just has competence in marketing and advertising), but he has dealt with the relevant topic area and really has product competence.

The competence does not always have to be conveyed through factual and technical content. Well-made story formats, reports, interviews, portraits or, for example, infographics can also contribute to making the content marketing more attractive and achieving an advertising effect.

2.2.2.2.4 Effects via the Peripheral ELM Route (e.g., Mere Exposure)

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM, Chap. 4) also provides us with explanations for a direct advertising effect of content marketing. Thus, the ELM shows us various ways of such effects via the processes of the peripheral ELM route in order to change attitudes and, thus, the image of an object to be advertised—even if the content marketing content would not be actively used (i.e. read, viewed, thought about, …).

At this point, only one important and well-known such process of the peripheral ELM route should be mentioned by way of example. The **mere-exposure**-effect "that the attitude towards this improves through frequent encounters with an object" (Esch 2005, p. 152), which was known and investigated in psychology in various ways and confirmed over and over again, shows us this. This can even lead to sympathy emotionally—solely through the occurrence of more frequent contacts and without the need for active cognitive processing or even conscious perception.

In marketing terms, this means: The more communicative contact points a customer has with a brand or company, the more favorable the attitude towards brand / company will be. And that solely through the number of contacts, completely independent of the type and communication content. Even non-advertising content marketing posts thus improve the image of their provider solely through an increased number of contacts.

For example, if a website with a variety of content marketing content appears more often on the results pages of search engines or if a website offers helpful content again and again, thus providing an opportunity to visit it, and if regular social media postings also create regular contact with customers, this will not only increase awareness (see Sect. 2.2.2.1.2), but also positively influence the image through the contact as an advertising effect—and possibly generate sympathy.—first of all even independent of the actual content.

Last but not least, the mere exposure effect (and other processes of the peripheral ELM route) also provides an explanation for why even purely entertaining or only very generally informative content marketing content can have an advertising effect.

Psychology, algorithmic reinforcement and content marketing strategy
Interestingly, experience in social media marketing shows that "regular postings" in most channels such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok or YouTube is an important success factor for online marketing. This is also a result of the social media algorithms that reward regular activities with higher reach (i.e. more frequent display of posts to more people). In this way, these algorithms disproportionately amplify the effect of content marketing content in the event of regular activity compared to less frequent activity. Also, content that elicits a lot of interaction in the form of likes, comments, etc.—and that is often not the advertising content, but well-chosen and designed content marketing content—leads, due to the social media algorithm, to future posts (and also the future advertising posts!) being presented to even more followers. So interactions on content marketing content increase the future reach and thus the advertising effect.

Analogously, an SEO effect on Google &Co. results not only from the isolated effect of each individual website/URL. Rather, a large number of (thematically complementary) articles or pages (page-level SEO) has a positive effect on the search engine ranking of the entire domain (website-level SEO). In this way, successful pages support the website as a whole and an overall SEO-successful website in turn supports the ranking of individual pages. Not least, all the pages of a website together also have an effect on the ranking of the home page for generic terms (not only the content of the home page itself is responsible for its ranking position, but the website as a whole). Google itself recommends offering not only transactional, but also informational search intents (as well as content marketing content) on e-commerce domains (Kunz 2021).

More extensive content marketing activities are therefore more than the sum of their parts. There is much to suggest that the advertising effect increases disproportionately with the extent of content marketing publications—on the one hand on the level of individual observation through psychological effects such as the repetition effect or the mere exposure effect, but also an overall effect onto the target group through reinforcement by means of the algorithms effective on the Internet in mind.

2.2.2.3 Advertising Effect: Trust

Do you trust the retailers you shop with and the brands you use? Of course, otherwise you would have shopped with a different retailer or brand. "As in many other social relationships (parent-child relationship, couple relationship, doctor-patient relationship), trust in the cooperation partner is necessary in economic situations" (Moser 2015, p. 327)—a purchase can hardly take place without trust.

Trust—that is, "the expectation of not being disadvantaged or damaged by the actions of others" (Lin-Hi and Suchanek 2021)—is therefore an absolute prerequisite for purchase decisions. And it acts through a chain of individual effects on the success of companies or brands, for example in the form of market share and relative price (Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001). Trust must be built up at the same time to the retailer, to the brand and to the product itself.

Can content marketing achieve a positive advertising effect by building and promoting trust? And how can trust be built up at all? To do this, it is necessary to consider the central factors that lead to trust: “With regard to the drivers of trustworthiness, it is shown that the cognitive dimension ‘competence’ and the affective dimension ‘benevolence’ are central” (Esch and Rühl 2015, p. 154) or “credibility in the literature is mainly seen as the product of perceived competence (‘expertise’, ‘expertness’) and trustworthiness (‘reliability’, ‘trustworthiness’)” (Moser 2015, p. 70). And that’s exactly what content marketing can do and achieve an advertising effect in this way.

2.2.2.3.1 Show Competence

In the section on image, we had already considered how content marketing can make it appear that retailers, manufacturers or brands are perceived as competent. This perception of competence now also acts as a central factor in building trust in them. And it also transfers to the trust in the products offered and advertised by them.

For example, if there is a checklist “What to pay attention to when buying a video camera” on the website of an online retailer, one would hardly assume that the products offered by him would not meet the points on the checklist (and hardly any customer will check this in detail—so that the effect of such a checklist is positive even if the own products only meet the checklist to a limited extent). Trust is created this way. Analogously, this checklist would lead to a manufacturer’s website to the assumption that this is also assumed to take into account the important criteria in the manufacture of its products. Trust is created in the manufacturer and his products.

Analogously, a large number of magazine articles or social posts by a tea retailer on cultivation areas, tea ceremonies, preparation methods, effects of different types of tea, sustainability issues, etc. can form an important basis for trust (because content marketing has shown that he is professionally able to identify good tea quality at his suppliers and to procure it for his customers).

2.2.2.3.2 Extend Benevolence

A provider may be perceived as competent—but is that already sufficient for trust to arise? No. Because if you do not believe that he is willing to use this competence and to behave benevolently according to the customer, then no trust arises.

For example, a tea provider may have appeared competent enough to recognize the good qualities at his suppliers and in cultivation areas—but then he only buys cheap bad goods for his own profit. Or the provider of the video cameras from the last section may have logistics competence, but then does not use it and annoys his customers with the delivery, as can be seen in reviews. So he has competence, but does not show goodwill—trust cannot arise.

This benevolence being necessary for trust can be understood as "the extent to which one partner is really interested in the other partner's welfare and willing to achieve joint benefits"[14] (Doney and Cannon 1997, p. 36). Sometimes it is also researched under synonymous or similar terms such as goodwill or warmth.

The interesting thing for content marketing: By definition, its content is already aligned with the interests and needs of the customers (and not directly advertising in order to create advantages for the provider; see also Sect. 2.3.1, 1.1). So they show benevolence towards customers just by their existence. The mere fact that a *content marketing corpus* exists therefore has a positive advertising effect (it contributes to building trust). The customer orientation is also reflected in the selection of topics for the *content marketing posts*, as long as the selection of topics is clearly focused on customer interests.

And so, for example, checklists should really contain all the criteria that are important to the customers—and not just the ones that are advantageous or pleasant for the company. And tips & tricks, for example in the form of household remedies, may at first glance make the company's own products superfluous, but they show goodwill and ultimately strengthen the provider.

This type of advertising effect therefore speaks very much in favor of really designing content marketing in the interests of customers, implementing content not superficially (or obviously created with little effort)[15] as well as not unnecessarily depriving the content of its actually desired effectiveness by means of advertising elements or too one-sidedly biased selection of elements.

2.2.2.4 Advertising Effect: Customer Satisfaction

"Customer satisfaction is often mistakenly used synonymously with the concept of attitude. In contrast to the attitude, however, satisfaction (dis-) requires

[14] In the original English: "The second dimension of trust, benevolence, is the extent to which one partner is genuinely interested in the other partner's welfare and motivated to seek joint gain."

[15] It also turns out in practice that only a large number, but content marketing articles that are superficial in content, have a significantly worse effect than a slightly smaller number, which are made more high-quality in content. This applies to the effect on people as well as on machines (e.g. search engines). Despite all the time and cost pressure in practice, quality should not be saved when creating content—this would be at the expense of advertising effectiveness.

the customer to have direct product experience of the buyer" (Meffert et al. 2015, p. 112). To explain customer satisfaction, the so-called C/D paradigm has established itself to a large extent in science (Moser 2015, p. 121).

> "Accordingly, customer satisfaction arises when a customer compares his current experience in using the product (actual performance) with his expectations (expected performance). If the actual performance corresponds to the expected performance, i.e. if there is confirmation of the expectations (confirmation), this leads to satisfaction. If the actual performance exceeds the expected performance (positive disconfirmation), this leads to especially high satisfaction" (Moser 2015, p. 121).

From a psychological point of view, therefore, various beliefs are reconciled with each other in order to determine satisfaction. And it is precisely at this point that content marketing can take over by contributing to positively influence this experience-expectation-comparison before and after the purchase: It can either change expectations or influence the experiences.

Thus, the expectation can still be changed before a purchase. This is done in content marketing, for example, by communicating via taxonomies (product groups) and thus damping (or building up new expectations) of (possibly widespread, unrealistic) expectations of a product or company from the outset.

But even after the purchase, satisfaction can be increased by content marketing, e.g. by improving the product experience. This can be done, for example, by content that makes it easier or more comprehensive for the customer to use a purchased product. A YouTube video or blog post that shows which types of coffee beans are best suited for which coffee drink and what to pay attention to when descaling[16] of coffee machines, will lead to a higher quality coffee experience and thus to increased customer satisfaction with a purchased coffee machine (to which a small card with hints to these content marketing posts was enclosed). So the topics of content marketing effect in the post-purchase phase in the sense of marketing on customer satisfaction, which then possibly leads to customer loyalty.

[16] This example "descaling coffee machines" once again shows the fine line between content marketing content and purely product-related information. If the content contains the advantages, procedures and tips for descaling coffee machines in general, this content is considered content marketing. However, if the content is focused on the descaling of a specific coffee machine or a certain brand, the content is still helpful and can contribute positively to the product experience and customer satisfaction, but would no longer be considered content marketing, but as advertising communication of the post-purchase phase.

Later objections or uncertainties about the suitability of a product or uncertainties whether a successful purchase was really the right one can still be reduced with content of content marketing. It should only be briefly mentioned here Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1957). If, for example, after a spontaneous impulse purchase of a piece of clothing, the customer is unsure whether this piece of clothing "really goes with my other clothes", content marketing[17] with current fashion styles or tips on trendy color combinations can help the customer reduce dissonances and develop better satisfaction.

2.2.3 Preparatory Content Effect (PCE): The Indirect Advertising Effect

In marketing, a large part of the advertising effects are achieved by means of advertising communication and the use of corresponding advertising media: product description and product images, Google Ads ads, product packaging, posters, newsletters, mailbox flyers, banners, window design and many more. While the previous section showed how, in addition, non-advertising communication of content marketing can achieve direct advertising effects, we will show further, indirect effects in this section: Content marketing works by amplifying the effects of existing advertising marketing communication or by removing barriers to the formation of an intentioned behavior.

We refer to such indirect content marketing advertising effects, which amplify the effects of existing advertising marketing communication, as Preparatory Content Effects (or abbreviated PCE).[18]

2.2.3.1 Amplifying the Effect of Advertising Media by Means of Content Marketing

Two central approaches can amplify the effect of advertising media: The importance of the arguments contained therein can be increased or the motivation to deal with the advertising medium cognitively can be intensified.

[17] Ideally, even the label of the product referred to the content marketing content for the post-purchase phase in order to achieve the effect mentioned here as often as possible.

[18] It should be noted that "preparatory" in the sense of "preparatory" does NOT refer to a temporal sequence, but only to a content-related sequence of effects. Thus, an advertising medium may first be received by a person and content marketing content may be temporally later—nevertheless, this content marketing can amplify the advertising effect of the previously seen advertising medium (ie prepare the advertising effect content-related).

2.2.3.1.1 Giving Importance to Advertising Arguments

Imagine that you read in the product description of a webshop or in a newsletter that the bicycle advertised there has a belt (a kind of “V-belt”) instead of a usual bicycle chain for the drive. This may sound interesting, but in comparison to other information about this bicycle, it may be a rather unimportant, less noticeable argument with regard to your purchase decision.

However, this advertising argument of a belt drive can be amplified in its effect and thus the probability of a purchase decision for this bicycle offer can be increased, for example because a content marketing post that dealt with different bicycle drives has shown the advantages of belts.

To explain such an indirect advertising effect, the taxonomies in which human knowledge is organized help again. Of course, the specifically advertised bicycle model also belongs, among other things, to the general taxonomy of “bicycles with belt drive”. And this can—in contrast to the actual product—also be the content of content marketing. For example, did you know that belt drives do not have to be oiled, wear less and tolerate salt in winter better than the usual chain drives? No? Then knowledge about the taxonomy “belt drive bicycles” has just been formed in your head. Ideally, however, a content marketing article does not only point to these factual data, but also shows the consequences: Bicycles with belt drives save time and effort or inconveniences (less maintenance than with chain drives) and they save money (fewer visits to the workshop and less frequent replacement of worn parts).

The (editorially conveyed taxonomy) knowledge thus causes the advertising communication to a specific belt bicycle to have more effect than it would have been without this knowledge (i.e. without the content marketing).

Not only positive advertising arguments have to be supported. Content marketing could also weaken the meaning of certain information in an analogous way, e.g. B. to weaken the weaknesses of one’s own products or the advertising of competitors with one’s own content marketing.

From a psychological point of view, this reinforcement or weakening of the effect of advertising communication can be explained with the model of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB, Sect. 5.1). TPB describes how human behavior arises from beliefs and attitudes. The expectancy-value model contained in this theory even provides a symbolic sum formula for how beliefs (about action consequences) influence the attitude (towards this action) and thus the intention to act. “Thus, the formation of beliefs about a behavior’s [in our case i.e. a purchase's] likely consequences and the evaluations of these consequences spontaniousely produce an overall positive or negative evaluation of the behavior." (Fishbein and Ajzen 2010, p. 217) and thus possibly to the action itself.

The effect of content marketing can be interpreted on the basis of this theory that content marketing content in the symbolic sum formula (Sect. 5.1.1) increases or decreases the importance of existing summands (the strength of conviction b_i) for the resulting attitude or even adds new summands e_i and uses taxonomies to do this.

Giving products meaning in the first place

Some products do not appear interesting to customers at first. The arguments in the advertising materials are of no importance to the person concerned. But content marketing can change that too.

For example, a customer could only find out through an editorial content marketing article about the medical effect of ginger the positive effect this has on health—and thus perceive an advertisement for a ginger-based medication later and have an effect on purchasing behavior. The content article would, for example, inform about the curative effect of ginger on the human body in general and cause a positive attitude towards ginger as a remedy—an attitude that is not related to the product in any way or directly relevant to purchase. However, with this preparatory content effect, advertising communication (e.g. already when selecting in the search in a webshop or in the presented product description of a ginger-based remedy) can have a much better effect.

The transaction-oriented advertising materials (e.g. product detail pages in the webshop, Amazon offers, packaging on the shelf, etc.) are still those that lead to a change in behavior (e.g. purchase). But the same advertising material would have a different effect if, in a previous (or also subsequent) step, content had not changed the original consumer attitudes and thus created a different (ideally better) starting point for the effect of the advertising material.

2.2.3.1.2 Increase Motivation to Deal with Advertising Materials and Arguments

The psychological construct of motivation plays an important role in both the Elaboration-Likelihood-Model (ELM) and the Heuristic-Systematic-Model (HSM) (both introduced in Chap. 4), as well as in the MODE-Model (Sect. 5.2), in terms of the formation of attitudes and human behavior. Motivation and its influence thus provide us with another approach to achieve a advertising effect with content marketing or to increase the advertising effect of traditional advertising.

In ELM, motivation to process something more intensively cognitively is a determining factor for how strongly the processes of the central or peripheral route affect attitude formation. Since, as we will see in more detail in Sect. 4.1, a much stronger and more sustainable effect can be expected via the central ELM route, it is of course desirable for marketing that advertising works via this central route. And that's exactly what content marketing can do by contributing to such more intensive cognitive processing of the advertising communication.

On the other hand, the MODE-Model deals with how attitudes then lead to actual human behavior. Which attitudes influence a certain action to what extent (see controlled and spontaneous processes in Sect. 5.2), the construct of motivation is again a central factor in this model. And from the perspective of the MODE-Model, content marketing can also influence purchasing behavior by non-advertising content by making the attitudes influenced by advertising more relevant for the (purchase) behavior—namely by changing the motivation.

But content marketing can not only motivate to deal more intensively with advertising, but also to increase the frequency of this. This can, for example, lead to the desired effects being achieved through the repetition effect or the mere exposure effect and content marketing has thus increased the advertising effect of the advertising.

For practical purposes, it is particularly helpful in terms of creating motivation to realize that the "perhaps the most important variable affecting the motivation to process a persuasive message is the personal relevance of the advocacy." (Petty and Cacioppo 1986, p. 81). So if content marketing creates personal relevance through editorial content, stories, etc., it changes motivation and strengthens the effect of advertising on attitude formation and the development of behavior (see also Sect. 8.4 and 8.6.1).

2.2.3.2 Weakening of Action Barriers and Strengthening of Intention to Act

Not everything that is assessed positively one wants to buy. And not everything that one wants to buy, one actually buys. Or, from a psychological perspective: Not every time one has a positive attitude towards a product, an intention to buy results from it. And if an intention to act/purchase does arise, this does not always lead to the actual execution of the action. Marketing therefore does not only need to bring a customer to a positive attitude, nor only generate an intention to buy.

Thus, a customer may well be positively disposed towards a product or service and its provider, and also assess the purchase and its consequences positively. Nevertheless, no intention to act arises, e.g. because the customer believes that such a purchase is unusual in their peer group or would even be negatively assessed in their social environment. And even if that were not the problem, she does not see herself able for any reason to carry out the purchase.

In the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB, Sect. 5.1), these two factors are referred to as perceived norms and perceived behavioral control . In addition to the attitude towards the possible behavior, they influence whether an intention to act and finally an action arise.

And it is precisely at these points that content marketing can achieve an indirect advertising effect by changing the subjectively perceived norms or strengthening the perception of one's own ability to act with regard to the desired actions of marketing. The intention or purchase intention generated by advertising communication would probably also lead to the execution of the purchase.

2.2.3.2.1 Effect by Influencing the Perceived Social Norms

"There is general agreement that the social environment can exert strong influence on people's intentions and actions. This influence is captured most frequently in the concept of social norm."[19] (Fishbein and Ajzen 2010, p. 129). We may sometimes feel like having a piece of meat (have a positive attitude towards a corresponding purchase behavior at this moment) and a positive attitude towards the result of a purchase (we would expect to have a good time), but if our social environment consists mainly of vegans who disapprove of such an action, we will not consume the meat. Whether we buy an electric car, a diesel or a gasoline car has to do with our social environment as much as the question of whether and which erotic toy to buy, which laptop brand is the right one or how often we should have our hair done at the hairdresser. As these examples show, the perceived norms have a great influence on our purchasing decisions.

Whether this perceived norm actually exists or only apparently exists, does not matter. So it's not just about explicit expectations conveyed to a person (called injunctive norms, Sect. 5.1.2). For example, the effect of social proof known in marketing and psychology, according to which the perception of the behavior of a large number of people alone directs our own behavior in the same direction, would be classified as a descriptive norm in the Theory of Planned Behavior. In online marketing, the indication of "already sold items" or a high number of positive reviews are two widespread methods of benefiting from this psychological principle in webshops.

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[19] In the original English: "There is general agreement that the social environment can exert strong influence on people's intentions and actions. This influence is captured most frequently in the concept of *social norm.*"

In the TPB model about the emergence of human behavior, these social norms go beyond the symbolic formula $N_I \propto \sum n_i m_i$. And this is where the explanation for the advertising effect of content marketing comes in: Content marketing can indirectly influence the perception of social norms and thus purchasing behavior with non-advertising content. New perceived social norms can be created in customers (new summands in the symbolic formula) or existing ones can be strengthened or weakened.

For example, it may not have been aware of the fact that superiors usually not only wish for low costs in corporate purchasing, but that they are also increasingly paying attention to sustainability—for example, long life of the purchased products—in more and more companies. In a whitepaper, a case study, a webinar or a blog post (typical content marketing formats in such B2B scenarios), this employee is now made aware that such a social expectation exists in a very large number of companies (ideally, by a statistic that even supports this statement, see also Sect. 8.2.2). Since the employee of course wants to meet the expectations of superiors, this content marketing post will have a greater effect on his behavior—content marketing has achieved an indirect advertising effect by changing perceived social norms.

2.2.3.2.2 Effect through Perceived Behavioral Control

Wanting is not yet being able to. However, it must be distinguished whether one really cannot do something or one could do it in principle, but one perceives it differently oneself. Only when we believe that we can also carry out an action (e.g. conclude a purchase and use the product in the desired way), the intention of action will also lead to the actual action.

From the perspective of the Theory of Planned Behavior, this is referred to as perceived behavioral control, for which the symbolic formula $PBC \propto \sum c_i p_i$ is given. In the case of "percieved behavioral control [...]the availability of information, skills, opportunities, and other resources required to perform the behavior as well as possible barrieres or obstacles that may have to be overcome." (Fishbein and Ajzen 2010, p. 55). On the other hand, there is the influence of actual behavioral control.

And this is exactly where content marketing comes in: It can achieve advertising effect by either really conveying necessary and missing skills and providing corresponding resources. Or by making customers perceive their own skills differently.

It is not always just a question of academic or professional skills. Already a content marketing post in the style of storytelling, which shows how easily a complex-looking product (or product group) can be used, can lead to a customer realizing that she can actually deal with it.

2.3 Sharpening the Definition of "Content Marketing"

With the model of advertising effect of content marketing introduced and explained in the last section, the preliminary exposure of the term content marketing from Sect. 1.1 can now be further sharpened as an improved definition and delimited against other terms and marketing disciplines.

Practitioners who are less interested in such a scientific theoretical question can easily skip this section and read on directly in Chap. 3 to the psychological background of advertising effectiveness or even with Chap. 7 to the design of effective content.

2.3.1 Definition "Content Marketing"

Clear definitions are of great importance for science and practice. Only if terms are clearly defined and used in the same or similar way by all communication partners, communication (and even scientific knowledge) is possible.

We therefore want to look at the currently existing definitions of "content marketing", discuss them and thus provide a new, more accurate definition taking into account the advertising effectiveness model presented above.

Definition of "Definition"

Before we start with the actual definition of content marketing, we first need to clarify what a definition is (the definition of a definition) and what requirements it must meet.

"For Aristotle, a definition is a statement in which the 'essence' of the object to be defined is given" (Dubislav 2015, p. 2), where we "the 'essence' of an object as the sum of those properties of the same which, according to the thought object, belong to the concept which we habitually associate with the object" (Dubislav 2015, p. 4). These properties are further distinguished in terminology between essential (engl. essential) and non-essential (engl. non-essential) characteristics (engl. characteristics) (Arntz and Picht 1982, pp. 57–59; ISO 704, 5.3.3).

The requirements for such a description of the essence in terms of properties can best be seen in the form of incorrect definitions. These include: circular definitions, incomplete (too wide or too narrow) definitions, negative definitions, redundancy in definitions (Arntz and Picht 1982, pp. 72–75; ISO 704, 6.4).

In addition, it must be taken into account that "concepts are not to be considered in isolation, but that they must be seen and treated in their respective context" (Arntz and Picht 1982, p. 75) and thus be integrated into a more comprehensive concept system. The way to do this is to "extract the actual basic concepts from the concepts used by everyone by decomposing them" (Dubislav 2015, p. 16).

In the sense of these requirements, the definition of content marketing should be given in this book.

One of the most commonly used definitions for content marketing is that of the Content Marketing Institute (CMI), which is given here again and then discussed:

> "Content marketing is a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience—and, ultimately, to drive profitable customer action" (Content Marketing Institute).

As good as this definition shows the essence of content marketing (see also Sect. 1.1.1) and it is one of the best definitions found so far, there are several problems:

1. Incompleteness caused by too one-sided target-focusing
   At the end of the definition of CMI, "to drive profitable customer action" is referred to the objectives that can be achieved with content marketing. However, only purely monetary goals are taken into account by the choice of words "profitable". Content marketing can also serve other purposes (e.g. in privat associations or NGOs, but also in companies!). Therefore, on the one hand, it should be generally said that "advertising effect to achieve superior goals of the content marketing driving organization", on the other hand, for the most common example of such an organization, namely companies, not only from profitable, but the terms marketing goals and value creation should be used.
2. Lack of definition/too wide definition
   CMI states "creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience". This formulation points in the right direction content-wise, but the current formulation would basically also apply to advertising communication—after all, this should also be communicated content-wise valuable, relevant and consistent for a clearly defined target group. Therefore, it is necessary to add a content-related delimitation, e.g. by "not directly promoting services (products, services, etc.) and providers" and "not directly related to the target groups to be advertised", which should be addressed content-wise.

3. Delimitation (media format)
   The definition of CMI would also apply to activities as printed magazines or for activities of a company TV, as long as the corresponding content is communicated there. The term content marketing is only used for activities “in digital media”, which is why this part needs to be supplemented for a clearly delimited definition.

If you take these points of criticism into account and let the knowledge of the content marketing advertising effect model flow in, a new, improved definition of the term content marketing results as follows:

Content marketing—Definition
Content marketing is a strategic approach in marketing in which the advertised services (products, brands, service, etc.) or their providers are not the main content of communication. An advertising effect is achieved essentially by communicating valuable, relevant and consistent content in digital media for a clearly defined target group and their interests, which essentially conveys knowledge, changes attitudes, establishes associations or generates motivation and thus contributes to the achievement of higher-level goals of the content marketing-driving organization by direct or indirect advertising effect.

2.3.2 Term Delimitation

Is content marketing in the end just marketing with lots of texts and pictures? Or is it journalism, only made by companies whose main business is not publishing? Is content marketing the same as corporate publishing or public relations?

The following sections are intended to help delimit the term and the marketing discipline of content marketing against other areas—in addition and based on the definition given in the previous section.

2.3.2.1 Delimitation Content Marketing Versus Classical Marketing

If one did not understand “content marketing” as a fixed, independent specialist term, but only in its literal meaning as “marketing using content”, one could (and this is still often misunderstood) assume that every “marketing with high-quality relevant content for the target group” would also be content marketing (see also in Sect. 1.1.2).

The problem with such an approach: Any form of communication consists definitionally of content. So every marketing communication that supplies the target group with high-quality content would also be content marketing. But high-quality, target group-oriented communication is the goal of every marketing communication—so there would be no difference between marketing and content marketing.

The delimitation between classical marketing communication or advertising and content marketing can therefore not only be made on the basis of relevance for a target group or the work process (creation of communication content as texts, pictures etc.)—this also applies to classical marketing communication. Rather, a delimitation is necessary on the actual substance of the communication—that is, the question of what is communicated content-wise.

Content marketing therefore refers to marketing using a very special type of content: In the content, it is **not** about directly advertising ommunication that is related to or represents products, brands or companies. Rather, it is **only** about content of customer interests—that is, editorial-journalistic, informative, helpful or entertaining content.[20]

In order to illustrate the difference between classic marketing communication and content marketing, some concrete examples should help: If, in an online shop, the product description is supplemented by extensive texts and new perspectives (use cases, benefits, etc.), this is certainly very useful—but still further advertising communication. Because product descriptions and product images usually deal with the product itself (properties, application possibilities, benefits for customers, etc.). Just expanding the content scope or improving the quality

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[20] If we did not make this distinction and allowed all possible content as part of content marketing, the logical consequence would be that there would be no difference at all between "content marketing" and "marketing". Because marketing always is communication and therefore always communicates any type of content. So if content marketing were really just "marketing with content", every marketing would also automatically be content marketing and vice versa—there would be no discipline of content marketing. "Content marketing" would only be a (unnecessary) synonym for "marketing". Therefore, a clear distinction and limitation of the type of content is essential for a separate discipline of content marketing.

This problem is not at all unusual when it comes to the formation of technical terms. And "nothing would remain in terms of term formation, but to critically review the terms we already use in everyday use, to gradually become our terms through exposure …", that is, a "term decomposition as it is appropriate in philosophy and in the descriptive sciences and in the humanities …" Dubislav 2015, p. 16.

of advertising communication (somewhat exaggerated: from "listing a few product features carelessly" to "convincing advertising texts") does not make it content marketing (but simply "better marketing"). And adding more pictures that no longer only show the bare product, but are now designed to be more attractive and possibly show the product in use, is also not an activity of content marketing.

Nor does a blog post that uses text and pictures to explain how a product's quality is ensured in production belong to content marketing. Even though that is certainly valuable marketing communication, the blog post is still about the product and its quality, it just presents this in more attractive communication. And the mere fact that this content is published in a blog format does not make it content marketing.

A post that makes it clear what the most important quality criteria are for this type of product and what to look out for when buying such products in general—these posts would be classified as content marketing. They do not advertise a single product and its quality, but provide customers with useful information about this type of product or product group, regardless of the company's own offerings (that these then be applied to the offered product by consumers in a second step is certainly desirable and part of the content marketing effect—but the product itself is not the content of the communication).

Even an editorial-journalistic report on how quality assurance works in general (and not just in this company/for this product) would be classified as content marketing. As would a report on Mrs. Miller from the Quality Assurance department. However, only as long as this editorial-journalistic approach is in focus: i.e. the person, their life, hobbies and, if applicable, a part of the report also their work in quality control in the center. However, if the person of Mrs. Miller (including her work) did not form the focus of the article, but quality assurance (which Mrs. Miller carries out) was in the center of the content, the boundary to advertising marketing communication would be exceeded and the article would no longer be content marketing. As you can see, the content focus plays a significant role in what is to be understood as content marketing and what as advertising communication.

Native Advertising

The distinction between content marketing and native advertising is not made, as just done for classical, advertising communication, via the content focus. Because the articles placed in native advertising are often just as editorial and not directly advertising as content marketing articles. The central difference is the type of publication: In native advertising, a publication takes place at an (attractive from the marketing or target group's point of view) location where a fee (e.g. CPM, CPA, etc.) is to be paid for this publication. Native advertising is therefore a marketing instrument defined by the publication channel for the paid placement of content, while content marketing is a content-defined, strategic approach to marketing.

2.3.2.2 Content Marketing vs. Journalism

Content marketing and journalism require similar craft skills and tools. Both are centrally focused on the interests of the recipients, provide relevant content and do not directly promote products, brands or companies. However, deriving an equation from this would be a mistake. So methods and even the resulting communicated content may be very similar to identical—the roles of journalism and content marketing differ significantly.

Journalism is seen from a systems theory perspective as an independent part of society: "Analytically, journalism is treated on the same level as 'politics', 'economics', 'science' or other systems of society" (Blöbaum 2016, p. 151). Content marketing, on the other hand, is part of marketing or companies and therefore system-theoretically subordinate to the 'economy' level.

In addition: This "perspective emphasizes the relative autonomy of journalism—without denying that journalists also work under pressure" (Blöbaum 2016, p. 151). Content marketing, however, does not have this autonomy, because it is used by organizations (often companies) to achieve their goals (in companies: value creation and derived objectives). And that is exactly where the central difference between journalism and content marketing becomes apparent: Despite similar or even identical content, journalism has a final obligation to society, content marketing to the organization (usually companies) operating it. The same applies analogously to the employees in these areas.

Last but not least, this is also reflected in the law: "Journalism enjoys constitutional privileges; journalists and their mass-media disseminated work products are protected in our democracy by a whole series of specific laws that also regulate, sanction and protect the concrete professional practice of journalism" (Fröhlich 2015, p. 110). This does not apply to content marketing employees.

Criterion for distinguishing "publisher"?

Is an article journalism if it is published by a publisher, while it would be classified as content marketing if the publisher is another company? A distinction between journalism and content marketing purely on the basis of the publishing organisation or company type may appear to be plausible at first glance, but is ultimately not fruitful. This is because the boundaries between trading companies and publishers are becoming increasingly blurred.

Many publishers now have their own e-commerce units, in which content is often very strongly aligned with the sales potential of the products advertised. Some of these are run more like an e-commerce company with a strong content marketing department (and the business model is also designed accordingly)—even if the company behind it is called a publisher and also—in other places—offers journalistic publications.

The boundary is certainly fluid here—but this approach is not sufficient to distinguish between the terms journalism and content marketing.

2.3.2.3 Content Marketing Versus Corporate Publishing

What is corporate publishing? Weichler and Endrös write: “Corporate publishing refers to the publication of magazines, books, newsletters, annual reports and other media by companies, organizations and clubs. With these, preferably coordinated media, customers are to be informed, entertained and bound. The main goals are the image building, the customer loyalty, the acquisition of new customers and sometimes also the sales promotion. In contrast to the publishing publishing, corporate publishing does not serve directly to the profit” (Weichler and Endrös 2010, p. 199). However, corporate publishing is not about every publication of a company with any content. “CP [Corporate Publishing] uses journalistic and mass media methods and techniques as well as journalistic presentation forms (e.g. news, commentary, interview, etc.) and formats (e.g. magazine, magazine, etc.)” (Bentele et al. 2015, p. 1045).

An important aspect of these definitions is that they do not specify the publication medium. Thus, print media are just as attributable to corporate publishing as online publications on the Internet. Only the journalistic approach and mass media methods distinguish corporate publishing on the one hand from marketing and on the other hand from public relations.

If one looks at content marketing from this perspective, it is a “publishing … by companies, organizations and private associations” as well as “journalistic presentation forms”. Content marketing is therefore clearly attributable to corporate publishing.

However, the relationship between the two terms would have to be discussed. If one were to go from the definition of the Content Marketing Institute in Sect. 1.1.1 , the online publication would not be defined as a requirement. From this point of view, corporate publishing and a cross-media content marketing could be equated conceptually.

However, both in our sharpened definition in Sect. 2.3.1 and in other definitions in the scientific literature, the publication via a digital online channel Internet is always assumed for content marketing. This also corresponds largely to the use of the term content marketing in practice. From this point of view, content marketing would have a very large overlap with corporate publishing or might be seen as part of it, but it is not identical, since the latter still includes all non-online published publications of the company.

At the same time, however, content marketing is also not fully embedded in corporate publishing in this respect. Even if there are great overlaps. So content marketing has other components that do not belong to corporate publishing (here, for example, the function of search engine optimization in online marketing could be named).

2.3.2.4 Delimitation of Content Marketing Versus Public Relations (PR)

The term public relations probably comes from the US PR pioneer Edward L. Bernays and was used by him for the first time in 1882, while the German equivalent public relations was first used by August Hinderer and Ferdinand Katsch in 1917 (Fröhlich 2015, p. 103).

However, the question of what is meant by PR cannot be answered so easily. If you look at the literature, you will not find a clear definition. Klaus Merten and Romy Fröhlich have summarized these different approaches in their articles "On the Definition of Public Relations" (Merten 2008) and "On the Problem of the PR Definition(s)" (Fröhlich 2015). Finding a clear definition is particularly difficult because "the phenomenon of PR has a comparatively strong *interdisciplinary* character" (Fröhlich 2015, p. 104). There is therefore a multitude of definitions from different perspectives.

The discussion on the definition of PR led by Merten and Fröhlich should not be repeated here. Rather, those aspects should be considered which can contribute to a meaningful delimitation of PR and content marketing.

Delimitation by communication content

"There is consensus, for example, on the fact that PR, like journalism, advertising and propaganda, is a form of *public* communication" (Fröhlich 2015, p. 110). This still has PR in common with content marketing, advertising and marketing in general. However, a delimitation can be made with regard to the content of this communication.

PR often has the company, its organizational units, its activities and its products as a communication object. PR tries to build a positive image of these by talking about them. Content marketing, on the other hand, does not talk directly about the company and its services.

Delimitation over objectives

> "If you are looking for functions of PR, you will quickly find them, because as functions of public relations for an organization or a person, above all 1) the increase in visibility, 2) the improvement of images, 3) the generation of trust, 4) the legitimation of entrepreneurial action, 5) the acceptance in public and 6) the enlargement of the scope of action are mentioned" (Merten 2008, p. 47).

On the one hand, "public relations for an organization or a person" is carried out, but typically not for individual products or product groups. However, promoting objectives with regard to products, product groups or brands is in addition to the focus on the organization but certainly a common goal of content marketing.

However, both overlaps and delimitations can be found with regard to the objectives of content marketing. The goal numbered 1 "increase in visibility" is also a goal that is to be achieved with content marketing. This becomes very clear in particular with regard to the effect of content on the online marketing discipline search engine optimization (SEO). The goals numbered 2 and 3 according to Merten can also be assigned to content marketing.

The objectives 4, 5 and 6 are rather original PR objectives, which are hardly to be found as direct objectives of content marketing (at best also as a result of a good image).

> "There is also a broad consensus that PR is a form of *persuasive* communication like advertising and propaganda. Unlike journalism, which is sometimes also assigned persuasive objectives, the intention to change behavior and/or attitudes in the recipients of corresponding messages is essential and intentional for PR—as for advertising and propaganda"(Fröhlich 2015, p. 110).

Content marketing as a strategic approach to public relations

The areas of content marketing and public relations ultimately reflect two very different types of approach. They are not on an equal footing. Because content marketing is a strategic, content-defined approach. Public relations is not a strategic approach in marketing, but rather a marketing instrument or an entrepreneurial task. However, public relations can apply the strategic approach of content marketing within the framework of its activities and in order to achieve its objectives.

Part II
Psychological Backgrounds

Content marketing is supposed to achieve something. It should contribute to the goals of marketing. And it does that by trying to change people's attitudes and behavior through communication. The content marketing effectiveness model (Chap. 2) has already shown and summarized these effects in an overview. Now we want to deepen and expand this knowledge of how content marketing actually works.

Fortunately, there is a wealth of psychological research on human behavior and the effects of communication on them that we can draw on here. Therefore, in the following chapters, the central theoretical models[1] and presents their importance for content marketing.

Some of the following chapters may initially sound like they are from a psychology book rather than a marketing book. But they give us an important, basic understanding of how human behavior (e.g. purchasing behavior) comes about, how marketing in general and content marketing in particular works. Based on this, content marketing can be designed to be much more effective and successful in practice.

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[1] In order to achieve an exact scientific classification, it should be clarified at this point that we base ourselves on the fundamental assumption that people neither behave purely randomly and sporadically nor, in the sense of blank stimulus-response machines, react exclusively to environmental stimuli according to fixed rules. We assume that people have a free will and, as a result, act willfully in principle. And: "Arbitrary behavior is goal-oriented. It is activated *in order to* create a certain situation [... and] almost all of our behavior is arbitrary" (Hoffmann and Engelkamp 2013, p. 40).

References

Hoffmann, Joachim; Engelkamp, Johannes (2013): Lern- und Gedächtnispsychologie. Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer (Springer Textbook). Available online at http://gbv.eblib.com/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=1206043.

3 Attitudes, Knowledge & Taxonomies as Basic Constructs

> "Preferences and dislikes make up a large part of our daily lives. Over the course of any given day, we make countless decisions about what to eat, what to wear, who to see, and what to do. Our conversations often involve discussions of our preferences and dislikes, be they movies, political candidates, foods, restaurants, sports teams, or other people. Our behavior as consumers involves a constant stream of purchase decisions that are heavily focused on these preferences and dislikes." (Fazio and Petty 2008, XY)

It is therefore not surprising that the onstruct of attitudes has a very long history in psychology and has become a fundamental element of this discipline. And so there is an almost unmanageable amount of research literature on this subject from over 100 years.

Attitudes are also central to the effectiveness of content marketing. In particular, these perspectives are in focus: What are attitudes (Sect. 3.1), how can attitudes (e.g. towards brands or products) be generated and changed (Chap. 4) and how do attitudes influence human behavior (and thus also the desired behavior of marketing, e.g. purchases; (Chap. 5).

3.1 Attitudes as a Fundamental Construct

The term attitudes found its way into psychology about 100 years ago and has since triggered an almost unnoticeable research activity (for the history of attitude research, see also Briñol and Petty 2012). Over the course of this time, the exact understanding of the term attitudes has also changed step by step. Today, "[…] most attitude researchers now adopt a fairly simple definition of attitudes […] an attitude is a person's evaluation of an object – favorability or unfavora-

T. Hörner, *Advertising Impact and Controlling in Content Marketing*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-40551-9_3

bility toward the object." (Fazio and Petty 2008, p. 3). However, these objects towards which people have attitudes are not only real, physical objects in psychology. They are also abstract objects, purely cognitive constructs, or similar. You can have a positive or negative attitude towards a person, towards a flower, towards electric cars in general or towards an abstract world view, towards a theory, towards feelings or towards the consequences of an imagined action.

Such an attitude spans between two poles: good and bad (or positive/negative or whatever you may call it). But attitudes are not a binary size, but they occur in different **extremity** (or in different **degrees**): An attitude can range from strongly positive to slightly positive, neutral, slightly negative to strongly negative.

And so consumers, B2B customers or target group members of NGOs have diverse attitudes: a strongly positive or neutral attitude towards sustainability, a negative attitude towards health consequences of ingredients, a positive attitude towards a car brand, a negative attitude towards intrusive advertising, a neutral attitude towards color or taste of a product and so on and so forth.

Image and attitude

At this point, the term "image" should be mentioned briefly, which is used very often in marketing practice and especially in brand management (branding).

We follow Meffert that the "term 'image' […] can be seen as largely identical to the attitude construct. The image is also described as a multidimensional attitude construct and can be understood as a differentiated and holistic image of an attitude object" (Meffert et al. 2015, p. 118). Image is therefore a kind of combination of different attitudes.

The importance of attitude strength

The degree or extremity of an attitude (how positive or negative) must be clearly distinguished from the so-called **strength** of an attitude. This attitude strength has nothing to do with the positive-negative assessment, but with its durability, i.e. how stable and resistant the respective attitude is. Stability in turn "refers to the degree to which an attitude remains unchanged over an extended period in the course of normal life, even if it were never challenged." and resistance " refers to an attitude's ability to wighstand an attack." (Krosnick and Petty 1995, p. 3).

The strength of attitudes is of course of particular importance to marketing. If a strong (i.e. more durable) positive attitude can be generated through marketing communication or, for example, through experience with the product, this means a longer-lasting advertising effect that also influences behavior over a longer period of time, because strong attitudes do not change quickly and easily.

In addition, strong attitudes (and it should be said again here: that does not mean "strongly positive"—that would be the extremity—but strong in the sense of durable, powerful) have more influence on behavior than weaker attitudes, especially when people do not actively and consciously deal with a decision, but make quick or unconscious decisions (see also the MODE model in Sect. 5.2).

It is therefore worth considering how marketing and, in particular, content can lead to strong attitudes, as these are more valuable for advertising effectiveness and achieving marketing objectives. At this point it should be pointed out that Sect. 8.2 deals with how content can be made more effective through good arguments, or the Elaboration-Likelihood model in Chap. 4 or the fact that in this the effects on the central route create stronger attitudes than the effects on the peripheral route.

Now that we know what attitudes (with their extremity and strength) are, we need to ask ourselves next how attitudes arise in the first place. It is not meant here how they can be influenced from the outside (e.g. through marketing communication), but only how and from what purely cognitive (layman's formulation: how in the head) attitudes arise.

Psychological research shows us that attitudes "are based on or generated by three general classes of information: (1) cognitive information, (2) affective/emotional information and/or (3) information about previous behavior or intentions" (Zanna and Rempel 2008, p. 9). Especially point 1 plays an important role for the focus of this book, because information (meant are not only factual information, but information of any kind) can be conveyed well through content marketing. But emotions (point 2) can also be generated through content marketing.

3.2 Attitudes as a Result of Beliefs

When people observe their environment, they take in information from various sources. But this perception does not act directly on the attitudes. Rather, the construct of beliefs, which arise from the perceived information, is between perception and attitudes. Beliefs have to be seen as more informative-attribute-related as opposed to the more affective - that is, emotionally - understandable attitudes.

A person often has many beliefs about an object, for example a particular product. This can be exemplarily from the belief "the shelf is white", "this shelf has the right size", "the shelf fits well with my other furniture" and "the shelf is a bit more expensive" over "the shelf is offered by my favorite webshop", "the shelf is visually appealing" and "the delivery time is quite long" to "the shelf is praised in reviews" (and usually many many more).

Somewhat more precisely defined, beliefs are characteristics that are assigned to a certain object -be it a thing, a person, a company, a brand, a product (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975, p. 14). They are therefore to be understood as relational, because they establish a connection (in the above example, for example, "is", "has", "fits to" etc.) between the object under consideration (the shelf) and a cognitive concept (for example, "white", "visually appealing", "expensive" etc.).

These beliefs are associated with a certain probability expectation. So the belief "shelf is white" may be highly probable, while "the shelf is durable" or "the shelf is praised" has a lower probability (not quite as certain). So Fishbein and Ajzen write: "Beliefs refer to a person's subjective probability judgements concerning some discriminable aspect of his world attribute." (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975, p. 131). Beliefs are defined as "the subjective probability of a relation between the object of the belief and some other object, value, concept or attribute." (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975, p. 131). Or put more simply: "In general, we form beliefs about an object by associating the object with various properties, qualities and attributes" (Fishbein and Ajzen 2010, p. 96).

An important aspect here: Beliefs are not to be understood as objective, fact-based knowledge that is independent of the person concerned. They are always personal, subjective beliefs that do not have to be universally true or universally correct. And "it is important to realize that […] a person's beliefs are not completely logical or rational." (Oskamp and Schultz 2005, p. 97).

3.2.1 How Beliefs and Attitudes Interact

" Just so, beliefs and attitudes do not exist in isolated separateness, but they are connected with other beliefs in an organized system." (Oskamp and Schultz 2005, pp. 92–93). The various beliefs and attitudes therefore influence each other reciprocally.

What does this connection between beliefs and attitudes look like in concrete terms? Here too, psychology has a concrete model to offer, which we would like to briefly introduce. The psychologists Fishbein and Ajzen have established a clear connection between more factual—even if not necessarily true, subjective—beliefs and the resulting affective (positive/negative) attitudes in the context of their Theory of Planned Behavior (more on this in Sect. 5.1). They see "an attitude [...] as corresponding to the total affect associated with their beliefs"and for " the relation between beliefs and attitudes, our conceptual framework thus suggests that a person's attitude toward some object is related to the set of his beliefs about the object but not necessarily to any specific belief." (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975, p. 14).

They assume that "this attitude towards an object […] arises from the weighted sum of the beliefs and opinions that a person has about this object" (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975, p. 223). For this connection, psychologists even provide a symbolic formula (Fishbein and Ajzen 2010, p. 97):

$$A \propto \sum b_i e_i$$

On the left side of this formula is A for Attitude, that is, the attitude towards a considered object. On the right side, all beliefs about the object are added up as b_i (b stands here for belief, i numbers all these beliefs). This summation is weighted with the evaluation e_i (e for the evaluative aspect). This evaluative component of each belief can be positive or negative and of different strength (or more precisely: the object has the attribute i with a certain probability). The attitude towards the respective object is now seen as proportional (the sign $\propto$) to this weighted sum over all beliefs.

In the above shelf example, the attitude towards the respective product would arise from all the beliefs that the customer has about this shelf: The matching size is a positive and important factor, the offer by the favorite webshop is positive, but not quite as important, the long delivery time is a negative factor of medium importance and so on and so forth. In the end, a belief about the shelf or the possible purchase of this shelf arises.

An important finding for content marketing: The more and the stronger (more probable) positive beliefs there are about an object or the less and the weaker negative beliefs there are, the greater or smaller the value of the summation is—in other words, the more positive or negative the overall attitude towards this object is. And that's exactly what provides starting points for content marketing and its advertising effect: Create and change beliefs.

3.2.2 Types and Origins of Beliefs

Belief is not the same as belief. It can be based on very own experiences, on received information or, for example, on other beliefs. We would like to briefly address the different types of beliefs.

Primitive Beliefs
A large part of all beliefs of a person are so-called primitive beliefs. "Such beliefs are the person's 'basic truths' about the world, about other people, and about himself or herself. Examples would bei 'My name is …' and 'Water is wet'." (Oskamp and Schultz 2005, p. 93).

Descriptive Beliefs
Another large part of the beliefs of a person is formed by direct observation. Fishbein and Ajzen call these descriptive beliefs (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975, pp. 135–143). This can be, for example, the belief that "the ball is red", that "Mr. Meier is tall" or that the "model XY has comfortable seats" can be derived from a test drive in the car dealership.

Informational Beliefs
Another type of beliefs are informational beliefs (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975, pp. 133–134). They do not arise from direct sensory impressions of the object concerned, but come about through external sources of information about the object concerned. "They may be acquired indirectly by accepting information from friends, teachers, the media, and other outside sources." (Fishbein and Ajzen 2010, p. 96). It is immediately clear that this type of beliefs is of particular importance for content marketing, because that is exactly what content marketing content does: it conveys information (and thus creates beliefs).

These informational beliefs have one peculiarity: Beliefs do not automatically arise directly from information received by a person. The connection of an object with a property (the belief) is not directly caused by an received information. For example, if the Times Magazine shows a picture of Paul Newman wearing shoes with platform soles, the belief is created first that "the Times Magazine says that Paul Newman wears platform shoes". Whether the belief "Paul Newman wears platform shoes" then results from this, depends on various other factors (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975, pp. 133–134). An important such factor is, for example, the medium through which the recipient receives the information. Or more precisely: The beliefs and attitudes towards this medium influence whether and how original beliefs about the object represented therein arise from the media content. Analogously, this also applies, of course, to content marketing.[1]

[1] This is a great danger to the effectiveness of content marketing: If content marketing is designed incorrectly or too much like advertising, or infected with advertising elements,

Derived , Inferential Beliefs

But beliefs can also lead to other beliefs. They are then referred to as inferential beliefs or from the syllogistic structure of the belief system. The emergence of such derived beliefs can be explained by syllogistic, i.e. deductive, logical models or with probabilistic, i.e. probability models (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975, pp. 143–188; Oskamp and Schultz 2005, pp. 95–97), but this should not be pursued any further here.

For example, from the beliefs e.g. “Company Schmidt has a good price-performance ratio” and “Company Schmidt takes back against money compensation without problems in case of product defects” as well as “Employees of Schmidt also sometimes advise against a product that does not fit the customer” etc. then the derived belief that “the company Schmidt GmbH is very fair to customers” results.

This resulting formation of beliefs does not necessarily require a rational-cognitive processing. It can also happen automatically and unconsciously on a probability basis (heuristically). But even if “the process of derivation does not have to follow the rules of formal logic, it is tendentially internally consistent” (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975, p. 145).

Behavioral Beliefs

The term of Behavioral Beliefs must be clearly distinguished from the types of beliefs just presented. While Primitive, Descriptive, Informational and Inferential Beliefs are a classification of beliefs based on the way they arise, Behavioral Beliefs have a completely different focus of observation. They define themselves over the object to which the relevant belief refers. Behavioral Beliefs are called beliefs that refer to the consequences of a possible behavior. They play a special role in the Theory of Planned Behavior (Sect. 5.1).

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this leads to a fundamentally more skeptical attitude towards this content marketing channel. In turn, this leads to the fact that other—quite good, non-advertising, editorial—content of this sender is initially assessed more critically, i.e. the actually intended creation of certain, advantageous for the company, beliefs is limited by content marketing. This explains why already some badly designed or too much advertising-infected content marketing posts can reduce the advertising effect of the entire content marketing activities. This should be avoided in practice in the interest of efficient content marketing.

3.3 Knowledge, Taxonomies, Associations

Attitudes and resulting behavior, as we have seen in the last section, are influenced by beliefs and thus by knowledge[2] . So, for example, a person who knows that plastic pollutes the world's oceans and, as microplastic, partly even enters our food chain through agriculture and has negative effects on animal and human health, will then have other attitude and possibly a different behavior towards products packaged in plastic than a person who does not have this knowledge.

But what is "knowledge" after all, and how is it represented in the human psyche or in memory? The psychology of learning and memory deals with such questions and thus also provides us with important basic principles for understanding the effectiveness of content marketing.

3.3.1 Semantic Knowledge as Cognitive Concepts

Psychology shows us here that people cognitively structure perceived objects and knowledge in so-called mental concepts and store them in memory. "This means that they abstract from the individual examples and only preserve what is characteristic and/or typical for all experienced examples" (Hoffmann and Engelkamp 2013, p. 84). These cognitive concepts are to be understood as categorical summaries of individual phenomena and are then linguistically provided with a term.

So while each individual example of a flower looks different from all other examples in the real world, as humans we have a mental concept that summarizes all existing flowers in their variety and diversity. We give this mental concept the linguistic term (terminus) "flower". It represents this abstract, mental concept of a flower in communication and can be used again for each individual real flower (by the way: the same mental concepts can also be assigned different terms—e.g. flower, flower, fleur, …, which all mean the same thing).

C formation as a prerequisite for human communication and marketing
The theoretical model of conceptual formation presented here is ultimately a psychological basis for understanding the world, communication between people, and ultimately the self-evident prerequisite for marketing to work at all.

[2] For a more precise distinction between beliefs and knowledge see, for example, (Abelson 1979) as well as (Griffin and Ohlsson 2001).

An example shows this quickly: If a person learns (psychologically: gains knowledge, learns) for example in a YouTube video or from a newspaper advertisement that a cordless screwdriver has made work much easier for a person in comparison to a manual screwdriver, then at first he has only seen that this one cordless screwdriver (from the video or advertisement) does. In the first moment this does not help him at all, because exactly this one, which was used for the video recording, he will not be able to get. But now the conceptual formation leads unconsciously to the fact that this person of course transfers the findings of this one cordless screwdriver to the mental concept for all cordless screwdrivers of this type (or even to the concept of all cordless screwdrivers). He now assumes—without ever thinking about it—that every arbitrary example of this type causes this relief, which was shown by means of a specific example.

However, these psychological processes are so fundamental that no human being is aware of these processes at all.[3]

However, this psychological theory becomes interesting for content marketing when different such mental concepts are interrelated, including in the form of taxonomies and associations, which will be presented in more detail in subsequent sections.

However, this cognitive concept formation takes place differently than is often assumed spontaneously (and that also has implications for marketing communication): Objects are **not** summarized into concepts according to their properties (round, red, 4-legged, large, …). The mental concept of a chair is thus not formed by the fact that it includes all objects that have a seat and 4 legs. The term "chair" is not determined by its observable properties.

It is rather the case "that the original cause for object summaries lies in the behavioral experiences that are made when dealing with the objects" (Hoffmann and Engelkamp 2013, p. 79). We call all objects and phenomena that make us satiated as food—regardless of the properties of these edible objects. Objects with which one can cut something are drawn as a knife (a blade) or as a pair of scissors (two opposing blades). Or objects with which one can come to other places without great physical effort, we assign to the concept "means of transport". Or—again regardless of their individual appearance—to the concept "car" if they can be controlled individually and have four wheels.

[3] Although these processes are normally not conscious, this happens when the marketing communication is so unclear that it is not immediately clear whether a certain statement refers to a single object or to the entire cognitive concept (for which this single object is only used representatively). For example, in some tourism advertising, one wonders whether a certain statement only applies to a certain beach or to all beaches of a certain country. Such ambiguous communication due to unclear assignment to a mental concept can then impair the effectiveness of communication.

Interestingly, children often answer exactly with such a behavioral experience when asked about terms (that is, the concepts they designate). If you ask for a chair, they say “a chair is something to sit on”—and not “a chair has a seat and usually 4 legs” (a pure property description, as adults say later).

The same applies to the taxonomies to be introduced in the next section as hierarchically ordered concepts: “For example, if it is only about quenching thirst, water, lemonade, milk or beer are equally suitable and form the concept of interchangeable drinks among themselves. But if the right drink is sought for asparagus, it is necessary to distinguish between different white wines, so that, for example, Pinot blanc, Sauvignon blanc and Chardonnay are grouped together according to taste as the concept of dry, fresh white wines” (Hoffmann and Engelkamp 2013, p. 81). Note: In this example, it was not a specific property of the respective drink that led to this classification, but only behavioral experiences (e.g. how the wine tastes).

Behavioral experiences are therefore of particular importance to people. It is therefore worth considering not only communicating factual information when designing content marketing content, but also integrating content on the concrete use and other behavior related to the discussed object or topic into the content—especially if it is about explaining new facts or products to the reader Sect. 8.4).

3.3.2 Taxonomies – the Hierarchical Structure of Knowledge

Now learning and memory psychology provides us with another important insight: people do not simply have a large number of equally valid, side-by-side conceptual thoughts, but the concepts are brought into hierarchical order, so-called taxonomies[4] (Hoffmann and Engelkamp 2013, pp. 81–82). So the concept of roses is a subgroup of the concept of flowers, which in turn is a subordinate concept of the mental concept of plants.

Object properties and taxonomies

Each mental concept is also assigned certain properties by a person. “Even if not common features, but the functional equivalence is the reason for the formation

[4] The term taxonomy is derived from the ancient Greek τάξις (táxis) for order and νόμος (nómos) for law.

of concepts, so provide common features but favorable conditions for an effective representation of concepts. Three types of features are preferred represented: action-relevant characteristics, distinguishing and discovering features "(Hoffmann and Engelkamp 2013, p. 84). Phenomena or objects that you can roll, play with them, they throw etc., we order in a first step the mental concept "ball". This concept is then, quasi in the second step, as properties, for example, "spherical" (preferably slightly oval) and "elastic" assigned.

Interesting for content marketing is now how we deal with these properties in the context of taxonomies and their hierarchical structure in memory. So properties of concepts that are higher up in a taxonomic hierarchy are automatically valid also for all objects and phenomena that belong to a subordinate mental concept. The subordinate concepts then receive in addition complementary properties that distinguish the concepts at the same level from each other.

Let us return to the question of the formation and influence of attitudes: In the formation of attitudes and thus in the resulting behavior formation thus enters in addition to the knowledge of the respective object itself also the knowledge of all superordinate taxonomies.

The Importance of Taxonomies for Content Marketing
What was just said is an important mechanism for shaping and advertising effectiveness of content marketing. It shows the way how content that is not directly advertising and does not deal with concretely to be advertised products, brands or companies, can still have an advertising effect on these: by content marketing dealing with the higher-lying taxonomies (e.g. the product group as a whole), providing information for this and imparting knowledge that then influence the attitude to the advertised objects via the hierarchy of cognitive taxonomies (as said, without that these to be advertised products would be mentioned at all).

This is one of the fundamental psychological mechanisms of content marketing advertising effectiveness. And it also provides important approaches, methodically-targeted to find suitable content and topics for content marketing (see also Chap. 7 and 8). Here is a first short example: You would not deal with the towels you offer in content marketing and write about their properties (that would be advertising communication). The products you offer in an online shop would not even be mentioned in the content marketing content. But you would look for those taxonomies in which your (ultimately to be advertised) towels are classified by people, e.g. taxonomy of bathroom products or the taxonomy of products for use in body care. But towels could also be classified in the taxonomy of sports towels or beach equipment—or certain towels in the taxonomy of cotton products, the taxonomy of vegan products or guest towels. And above all this is the taxonomy of textiles on an even higher level. And to these cognitive taxonomies you would then create content marketing content, create beliefs for this and thus change the attitude to the products offered and advertised by you.

3.3.3 Interconnected Knowledge and Associations

Associations are semantic relations between different mental concepts beyond a hierarchical order. They can occur in a great variety of association types. As essential classes of associations, contrasts (e.g., warm-cold), similarity (e.g., house-hut), inclusion (e.g., rose-flower), content-related references (e.g., book-reader) and part-whole relations (e.g., car-wheel) can be considered [5] (Stasio et al. 1985, p. 6; Chaffin and Herrmann 1984). This variety of association types and the further fact that mental concepts are not only included in one, but in various taxonomies at the same time (which in turn have their own associations), ultimately lead to the fact that all mental concepts are networked in memory.

"The totality of all concepts and the associations between them form the structure of semantic memory, so to speak the structure of our knowledge" (Hoffmann and Engelkamp 2013, p. 94). And this semantic memory or the beliefs contained therein influence attitudes and actions, for example in the sense of the Theory of Planned Behavior as beliefs.

An important finding is that when a mental concept is called up in memory, all associated mental constructs are automatically activated as well. So it is not the singular activation of individual objects, but always a network-like activation of all existing connections. This is called the Spreading Activation Theory of Memory (Anderson 1983).

So if in marketing Beck's beer is associated with a green sailboat with the vastness of the sea and adventures, these mental concepts are also activated in the memory network when the cognitive concept "Beck's" is called up. When the cognitive construct "Krombacher" is called up in the corresponding memory network, the concepts of peace, relaxation, nature would be activated more. This example shows very well how associations and memory networks are created or

[5] In the end, the hierarchical taxonomies discussed in the last section are just a special type of association.

strengthened by advertising communication, which then have an effect on image and attitude towards a product. Important for marketing: it also works exactly the other way around (nature and relaxation activate the mental concept “Krombacher” if it is associated).

It is therefore not surprising that a large part of marketing activities is aimed at creating or strengthening desired associations in the semantic memory of customers. This is particularly true for brand management, as brand image can be described by the type and strength of associations with the brand, by their representation, their number, uniqueness, direction, relevance and accessibility (Esch 2005, pp. 71–73).

An important task of content marketing—not only in brand management—and its advertising effect is now to design the association network appropriately. For example, a healthy and happy protagonist with beautiful teeth could be shown in a story. The story also shows that he rinses his mouth with coconut oil [6]—this creates the—desired by marketing—new association between the taxonomy coconut oil and happiness/good health/attractiveness, which is then also called up cognitively when viewing advertising materials of all products of this taxonomy.

Strength and situation-dependent activation of associations

Associations are not simply to be understood as binary (“association exists/does not exist”). And they are not always activated to the same extent.

So when a mental concept is activated in the semantic memory, the associations associated with this concept are always activated at the same time, but to different degrees depending on the situation. An example: Almost everyone has an association between the mental concept “car” and the mental concept “accident”. So if you see a car, this association is always activated. However, how strongly this happens in a particular situation depends on various influencing factors. This can depend on internal variables of the person (for example, a very risk-averse person will activate this association more strongly than a more risk-loving person) or the associations are influenced by external circumstances (so the association car-accident will probably not be activated even by a very risk-averse person if the car is in a romantic picnic at sunset—while a stronger activation of this association takes place when the same person sees the same car in city traffic or on the motorway).

This should also be taken into account in marketing and content marketing, for example by creating content specifically for target groups and possibly for different target group segments as well as for various individual characteristics and motivations (and not only for people who are similar to oneself) in order to achieve the widest possible effect.

[6] According to experts, coconut oil removes bacteria in the mouth that are responsible for damage to tooth enamel due to bactericidal and fungicidal properties of oil.

3.3.4 Knowledge of Behavioral Consequences is Crucial

In marketing, it is often assumed – often unconsciously – that a lot of product-related knowledge conveyed would also automatically lead to the fact that its purchase is then more likely. And so many advertising materials (and also a large part of today's content marketing) are shaped by this assumption: They convey a lot of factual knowledge.

However, many psychological studies show that this relationship, knowledge leads to a certain behavior, does not exist in this generalization at all. When reviewing relevant research literature, it becomes apparent: "Knowledge does not consistently influence behavior, and when it does, the effect of general knowledge tends to be small and mediated by more proximal antecedents of the behavior." (Fishbein and Ajzen 2010, pp. 243–244).

How can this apparent contradiction between our everyday assessment and such empirical study findings be explained?

The answer lies essentially in the type of knowledge considered. In the mentioned scientific studies, it is often the case that on the one hand the existence of knowledge is queried and then correlated with the behavior or intentions. The problem with this: Many of these studies only ask about general factual knowledge and then find no direct connection to behavior. An example of this could be a study in which, on the one hand, the amount of existing knowledge about osteoporosis was queried and, on the other hand, the behavior "intake of calcium products" was queried—and a correlation between more knowledge about osteoporosis and more frequent intake of calcium products could not be found. A typical result for such empirical studies (Fishbein and Ajzen 2010, p. 243). The decisive point here: In the questionnaire, only general factual knowledge about osteoporosis was queried—but not specifically behavoir-related and behavior-relevant knowledge, i.e. whether a person also knows how the intake of calcium affects osteoporosis. So a large part of the respondents definitely had good knowledge about osteoporosis in general, but may have had too little knowledge about what the consequences of calcium intake are with regard to this disease. If, in the questionnaire of the study, behavior-related and behavior-relevant knowledge had been queried instead of pure factual knowledge, a connection between this (behavior-relevant) knowledge and the purchase or purchase intention would probably have been found.

This is also an important finding for content marketing: It should not just convey general factual knowledge, but knowledge related to behaviors and their consequences (see also Sect. 8.4).

4 Changing Attitudes

Marketing and content marketing are supposed to change human attitudes. An important theoretical framework for such a change in attitude is provided by the Elaboration-Likelihood-Model (ELM), which is widely used in psychology, as well as the Heuristic Systematic Model (HSM), which is similar to the ELM.

Earlier research in the last century (see also Sect. 2.2 on the history of advertising research) had already shown that advertising can have an effect through a very large number of factors. This large number of influencing factors had led to the fact that in research up to the late 1970s "the literature on attitude change was in a state of disarry, to say the least." (Petty and Wegener 2000, p. 41). This was also the cause for the development of the Elaboration-Likelihood-Model as one of the now widely used and most frequently cited (Schuhmann et al. 2012, p. 52) psychological models. It is to be classified as a relational advertising effectiveness model and belongs to the today widespread two-process models.

The ELM is based on an assumption about the general nature of people. "The assumption is, that peope have neither the ability nor the motivation to evaluate everything carefully." (Petty et al. 2005, p. 82). There are too many sensory stimuli and information for a person to be able to consciously think and process all of this information all the time. Not all information can be taken into account in the formation of attitudes (or rather only a small part of it).

In addition, it is to be assumed that "people want the right attitudes and beliefs because they normally turn out to be the most helpful in getting through life" (Petty et al. 2005, p. 83). However, this does not mean that attitudes and opinions would be correct from an objective point of view, but only that attitudes should be consistent and (subjectively) correct or consistent from the respective person's point of view with other attitudes and his or her knowledge. Even distorted or one-sided attitudes can be perceived as (subjectively) correct in this sense.

T. Hörner, *Advertising Impact and Controlling in Content Marketing*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-40551-9_4

In such situations (a great variety of sensory stimuli and information as well as the desire to have the right opinion), we often rely on something we call "gut feeling" or "intuition." The psychologist Gigerenzer even speaks of a special type of intelligence: the "intelligence of the unconscious" (Gigerenzer 2007, 2013). We perceive a few, relatively simple signals (e.g. the sender of a communication and whether we spontaneously consider this person competent or whether something simply pleases us spontaneously, etc.) and rely on such indicators or heuristics without further active evaluation of the actual information.

The Elaboration-Likelihood-Model provides a framework that takes both conscious thinking and processing as well as the use of simple signals and heuristics into account and combines them in one model. It postulates two different types of influence of attitudes by processes of a **central route** and a **peripheral route**.

The difference between both routes can be summarized as follows: "The central route is characterized by extensive cognitive processing of the message, whereas the peripheral route is characterized by minimal, if any, cognitive processing." (Schuhmann et al. 2012, p. 52). The influence on the central route therefore takes place through conscious, rational thought processes concerning the information content, while the peripheral route unfolds its effect without intensive thinking processes on other grounds (e.g. the mere number of arguments—even if these arguments are not thought through or even perceived in detail).

The typical graphical representation of the Elaboration-Likelihood-Model is shown in Fig. 4.1. It shows the two routes of the ELM (on the left the central route, on the right the peripheral route).

It is important for understanding the ELM and a frequent cause of misunderstanding that the two ELM routes are not distinct, i.e. mutually exclusive, clearly and distinctly delineated paths of action. There is **no** decision made as to whether the effect takes place via the central **or** the peripheral route. It is **not** a question of **whether** an effect takes place through intensive mental activity or not. Rather, an effect always takes place on both routes, only the overall effect is **differently intense** as a result of processes of one or the other route—depending on the intensity of cognitive activity and motivation for this. The real effect will therefore lie somewhere between these two as a simultaneous effect of both routes. The two routes of the ELM model are therefore better seen as two poles of a continuum (Schuhmann et al. 2012, p. 52; Petty and Wegener 2000, pp. 44–48). They have to be understood as effects of different intensities of thought, but have no real cognitive correlate (Schuhmann et al. 2012, p. 59). The same variable (e.g. a characteristic of an advertising medium) can trigger both a central and a peripheral process. Thus, (more or less) conscious thought would be devoted to the same aspect of an advertising medium as it simultaneously affects other signal

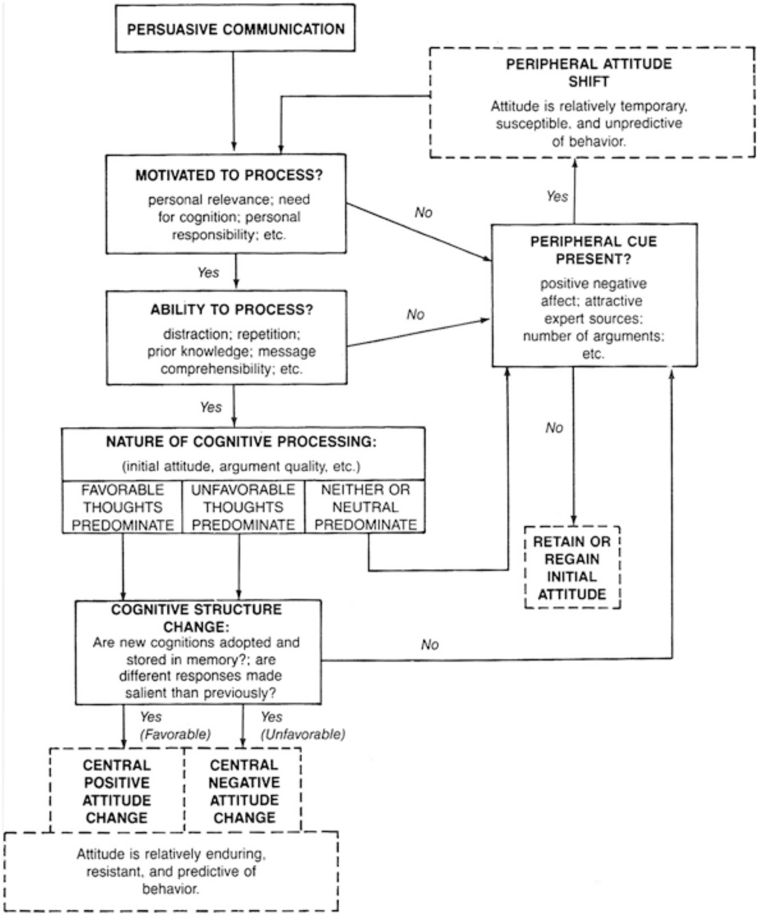

Fig. 4.1 Graphic representation of the Elaboration-Likelihood-Model (ELM) (Petty and Cacioppo 1986, p. 4)

stimuli (possibly unconsciously). The overall effect of a single variable is therefore the result of all processes triggered by it simultaneously in the ELM continuum, which is called the “Multiple-Roles Postulate” (Petty and Wegener 2000, pp. 48–52).

It is therefore **not** the case that a certain one of the routes to be discussed in more detail below is less likely to ***occur***, but only that a certain route is less likely to be responsible for the change in the relevant attitude[1] (Petty et al. 1993, pp. 337–338)—a seemingly small, but technically central difference.

For content marketing, it is decisive: Not only the content of a content marketing post, which is actively and consciously designed, and the information contained therein, which is actively processed cognitively, have an effect on the attitudes of the customers, but also other factors such as the spontaneous attractiveness of the design, the number of arguments, etc. And especially when a customer does not invest any cognitive effort (i.e. does not read, listen or watch actively, consciously and intensively), these second-mentioned factors play a particularly large role in the content marketing advertising effect.

4.1 The Central ELM Route

If the recipient is on the one hand able and on the other hand motivated (see also Sect. 4.3), to deal intensively with the information offered to him cognitively, "the effects on the attitudes can therefore be seen as the result of a complex and largely rational-cognitive assessment of the topic-relevant statements of an information offer" (Bongard 2002, p. 337).

Important—especially for effective content marketing—is the fact that these more cognitively demanding processes of the central ELM route also lead to stronger attitudes (see also Sect. 3.1) than is the case with processes of the peripheral route. The attitudes thus created are more easily accessible, more stable over time, more resistant to competitive information and have a greater influence on behavior (Petty et al. 1995). It is therefore desirable and helpful for content marketing that attitudes arise more on the central ELM route or are influenced by it.

Such cognitive processing (or, in other words, more practically: intensive thinking and conscious weighing of information, e.g. from advertising media or a content marketing post) requires energy and effort. It is about "[…] paying

[1] Petty et al. describe this fact as follows: "Note that the ELM does not hold that a given peripheral process (e.g., invocation of a heuristic; Chaiken 1980) is less likely to ***occur*** as the elaboration likelihood is increased, but only that the peripheral process is likely to account for less variance in the attitude adopted. Because central and peripheral processes affect attitudes with different probabilities along the elaboration continuum, attitudes are sometimes influenced in part by both central and peripheral processes" Petty et al. 1993, pp. 337–338.

careful attention to the relevant information in the message, relating that information to previous knowledge stored in memory (e.g. is the message consistent or inconsistent with other facts that I know?), and generating new implications of the information (e.g. what does this mean for my life?)." (Petty et al. 2005, p. 84).

If this cognitive energy is expended, the resulting or influenced attitudes are mainly based on the information received itself (i.e. in content marketing on the content of a post). In particular, "good arguments" play a key role in the central route in the creation of strong attitudes. Because "people carfully attend to the arguments presented, examine the arguments in light of their relevant experiences and knowledge, and evaluate the argument along the dimension they perceive to be central to the merits of the object." (Petty et al. 2005, p. 85). The better the arguments presented are, the more attitudes are influenced by them or the stronger attitudes develop. Due to this central importance, we will discuss the question of what a good argument is in more detail in Sect. 8.2.2 and thus give suggestions for convincing content marketing in practice.

4.2 The Peripheral ELM Route

Very often it is simply not possible or practicable for people to think about every available information, to consider every single aspect in detail and to think through every argument as to how it would have an effect on the central ELM route. Often we do not have the time or energy for this in our everyday lives, and the sheer number of communication offers flooding in make this impossible. That is why we have developed as humans mechanisms to develop assessments without thinking through all the details (Petty et al. 2005, p. 86). These mechanisms reflect the processes of the peripheral ELM route.

On this route, "recipients process the information offer with only a significantly reduced mental effort. Accordingly, affective associations and simple heuristic principles become increasingly relevant for the assessment of the media offer, without having to deal with it in more detail" (Bongard 2002, p. 340). The effect and attitude formation therefore takes place more through feelings, associations or context features, e.g. the properties of the media offer or the communication situation. "The content of the information offer loses importance" (Bongard 2002, p. 340).

They are simple cues that now have an effect. A first example of this is the assessment of the competence of the information source. Depending on how competent the recipient perceives the sender of information, the offered information—regardless of the actual content—has different effects on the attitude. In this case, “one type of peripheral process occurs when a person retrieves from memory a particular decision rule that can be used to evaluate the message (e.g. ‘Experts are usually correct, so I’ll go along’). This is referred to as heuristic processing (Chaiken, 1987).” (Petty et al. 2005, p. 86).

Other peripheral cues are, for example, the pure number of arguments (the mere number has a positive effect regardless of their content), the attractiveness of the information source (e.g. attractive people as an information source) or other simple affective reactions. “Some cues will do this because they trigger relatively primative affective states that become associated with the attitude object. Other cues work, however, because they invoke guiding rules or inferences.” (Petty and Cacioppo 1986, 33/35).

In contrast to the stronger attitudes that are formed according to Sect. 4.1 via the central route, attitudes that are “formed or changed by way of the peripheral route are less accessible, persitent, resistant, and predictive of behaviour than are attitudes formed or changes by way of the central route.” (Petty et al. 2005, p. 86). Thus, weaker attitudes are formed by means of the peripheral route.

4.3 The Route Probabilities

It has already been emphasized several times that, with intensive cognitive activity, the processes of the central ELM route are more likely to affect attitudes, and with low cognitive activity, processes on the peripheral route are more likely to affect attitudes. But what influences how actively a person engages with communication content (or not)? How does one decide whether to think more or less consciously?

Two central factors have an influence here: the will and the ability. Or, to put it more precisely: the motivation to deal with the content and the ability to do so (Petty and Wegener 2000, p. 53). The following applies here: “Both motivation and ability [for cognitive processing, note by the author] are necessary conditions, but only both together constitute the sufficient condition for intensive ‘elaboration’” (Bongard 2002, p. 330).

In addition to this central ability and willingness, other moderating variables can be found in ELM research, which influence the probability of active cognitive engagement (elaboration). On the one hand, these are characteristics of the communication medium itself (such as characteristics of the content, the information source or characteristics of the transmission channel), on the other hand characteristics of the respective recipient (such as need for cognition/need for cognition, the state of excitement, cognitive processes such as stability of attitudes, etc.)

(Schuhmann et al. 2012, pp. 54–58). The existing know-how on the relevant topic and other diverse facts also have an influence.

Motivation

"Perhaps the most important variable affecting the motivation to process a persuasive message is the personal relevance of the advocacy." (Petty and Cacioppo 1986, p. 81). It can be assumed "that when people think that a message is on a topic of high personal relevance or importance (i.e., the message is relevant to a person's important outcomes, goals, vlaues, groups, possessions, and so forth), they engage in greater message scrunity than when the message is perceived to be of little relevance or importance." (Petty et al. 1995, p. 97).

And this is where content marketing can take effect by strengthening the motivation to engage more intensively with communication content (of content marketing itself or of advertising media) (Sect. 8.6.1). This can strengthen the effect of the content marketing substance itself (e.g. by making the relevance of the following information clear at the beginning of a blog post or video) or the reinforcement of the advertising effect of an advertising medium (e.g. by increasing the motivation of content marketing to use this advertising medium, e.g. a webshop product description, more consciously and intensively). The creation of a higher relevance for customers therefore leads to a more intensive cognitive processing and as a result to stronger attitudes and finally to a higher advertising effect on this path.

Involvement, personal relevance and cognitive activity

The motivation for cognition and the personal relevance triggering it, which is addressed here from a psychological point of view, are also closely related to the term involvement, which is often used in marketing together.

> "There are a large number of definitions for involvement. However, there is broad agreement that high involvement is associated with higher personal relevance, more personal consequences and the triggering of more personal connections than with low involvement" (Petty et al. 1983, p. 136)

A high level of involvement therefore leads to stronger attitudes and thus to a higher advertising effect (greater influence on behavior and longer-lasting effect).

Ability

Wanting to deal with something does not automatically mean that one can deal with it. The ability to deal with something cognitively is to be understood very broadly:

it ranges from the need for sufficient time to be available, the presence of necessary prior knowledge for the understandability of a communication to possible distractions (Petty et al. 1995, pp. 96–97). Non-psychological aspects (e.g. technical aspects such as screen quality or correct HTML display of a website or sufficient bandwidth for videos in content marketing) also belong to these factors of ability.

Many of these factors are of course not directly changeable through marketing activities. But content marketing is quite capable of influencing a part of it and thus promoting a cognitive activity and information processing (Sect. 8.6.2).

Recipient characteristics

There are people who like to think, have an inner drive to do so, while others don't like it and do it less often. This is described in psychology as the Need for Cognition (NFC) construct. It has nothing to do with a particular communication or its content, but is a pure personality trait that, however, has an influence on the route probabilities in the ELM (Jarvis and Petty 1996; Petty and Cacioppo 1986, pp. 101–108).

There are a variety of other examples, such as health factors, etc. But they should not be pursued here, as they are hardly influenced by content marketing.

Properties of Medium/Communication

The communication medium itself or its contents can also influence how intensively it is dealt with. For example, the complexity of the communicated message has an influence on the intensity of information processing (excessively complex leads to lower processing motivation) (Hafer et al. 1996). Likewise, the sender of a communication can influence whether and how intensively someone will deal with it. Another factor is, for example, the number of sources from which the recipient receives a certain information (if there are several sources with the same information, this makes it more worthwhile to deal with it intensively) (Harkins and Petty 1981; Petty and Cacioppo 1986, pp. 96–101). And "For example, if a person was unable to realize the full implications of a message with just one exposure, a few additional exposures might be beneficial for message elaboration.[2] (Petty et al. 2005, p. 98).

[2] However, the finding that repeated exposure of a message can be useful must not be misinterpreted as "the more, the better" in practice. Because repetition can also lead to negative effects from "boring/again" to "obtrusive". Here it is always necessary to weigh up different effects well.

In short: The design of a communication (from the perspective of this book: content marketing) also has a direct effect on whether and how intensively it is thought about, i.e. with what probability the processes of the two ELM routes contribute to an effect, whether the content-related arguments are even perceived and processed cognitively and how strong the advertising effect is in the end.

4.4 The Heuristic Systematic Model (HSM)

Approximately at the same time as the ELM, which was just discussed, the Heuristic Systematic Model (HSM) was also developed by Shelly Chaiken (Chaiken 1980, 1987). It has gained great attention as a model for the persuasion of people.

While the ELM, as we have seen in the previous sections, speaks of two routes and refers explicitly to attitudes, the HSM speaks of information processing and somewhat more generally of conviction. However, it recognizes, analogously to the ELM, two types of information processing processes: the systematic process and the heuristic process, which both resemble the central and the peripheral route of the ELM. So the systematic process is based on the active, conscious processing of information and then contributes to the effect when there is a high motivation for cognitive engagement with the information. The heuristic processes are activated analogously to the peripheral ELM route when little cognitive effort is expended, and the convincing effect of these HSM processes reflects the effect of simple, evaluation-relevant cues (Chen and Chaiken 2000, p. 74).

Such parallels and the fact that both models, ELM and HSM, make similar predictions about human behavior in many areas often lead erroneously to the assumption that they are just different names for the same phenomenon (Johnson et al. 2005, p. 628).

We will forego a more detailed presentation of the HSM here, but briefly mention central differences that will later play a role in the design of content marketing.

So the HSM speaks of a sufficiency principle. This assumes that people want a certain level of security and (self-)confidence with regard to situations and decisions in order to make a decision. However, if they find that this is not the case with them, they will try to achieve this by processing information. For this purpose, less demanding, heuristic processes are given preference at first. But if these are not sufficient to reach the desired level of security themselves, increasingly systematic information processing will be carried out until sufficient confidence has been built up in their own decision.

On the other hand, the HSM postulates a bias hypothesis. According to this, heuristic processes can influence the somewhat later systematic information processing (Chen and Chaiken 2000, p. 75). Information is not interpreted neutrally and always in the same way in the active, systematic processing, but in one direction or the other, depending on the preceding heuristic cues.

5 How Behavior Arises and Can Be Influenced

From the perspective of marketing, it is not enough to deal with attitudes and want to change them. Because if only the attitudes of customers changed, but not their behavior, that would be uninteresting for a company. Because in the end, short- or long-term purchasing behavior is decisive for the success of marketing and the whole company.

How the psychological construct of attitudes is related to human behavior and action arises from attitudes, is dealt with by a very widespread model of psychology: the Theory of Planned Behavior[1] (TPB; Theory of Planned Behavior; (Ajzen 1991)). There is an almost unmanageable amount of research activity in the last 50 years.

In addition to the TPB, it is above all the MODE model that determines the scientific discussion on the relationship between attitudes and behavior. We want to deal with both models as the basis for a content marketing advertising effect.

5.1 The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

People do not behave randomly and simply by chance. The Theory of Planned Behavior assumes this as a basic assumption. This does not mean that human behavior must be rational-logical or arise from this. But it comes about in an

[1] The Theory of Planned Behavior is an extension of Icek Ajzen, originally developed by him with Martin Fishbein Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA, Theory of Reasoned Action; Fishbein and Ajzen 1975), which is often still cited under this name in the literature.

T. Hörner, *Advertising Impact and Controlling in Content Marketing*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-40551-9_5

explicable way from the underlying factors of this action (Fishbein and Ajzen 2010, p. 34).

With such arbitrary action[2] people want to achieve or achieve something that is not yet the case: They have a goal and the motivation to achieve it. For example, they eat because they want to still their hunger, they get on a train to reach a certain place, or they buy a gift because they want to please someone. "The anticipated state of affairs, the goal, determines the behavior to be carried out, and not the given stimulus situation (although situations can contribute to the formation of goals)," (Hoffmann and Engelkamp 2013, p. 41).

The Theory of Planned Behavior now differentiates between an executed, real action and an intention preceding the action (engl. intention), which can best explain human behavior from a theoretical perspective. "In a given situation, it is assumed that a person holds or forms a specific intention which influences his subsequent overt behavior"[3] (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975, p. 301). Before we actually buy the chocolate, for example, and thus carry out an action, we first develop the intention to buy this chocolate. And "the stronger the intention, the more likely it is that the behavior will be carried out"[4] (Fishbein and Ajzen 2010, p. 21).

But it is not only the expectations of consequences of an action and the attitudes towards them that influence the intention alone. So an action alternative may appear to be positive: The perceived social expectations (what should and can one—really or only apparently) can prevent the formation of an intention (or possibly also support it). Such a perceived social expectation (engl. Perceived Norm, see Sect. 5.1.2) resulting from beliefs, in this case normative beliefs (engl. Normative Beliefs).

As another factor, the perceived behavioral control (see also Sect. 5.1.3) acts. It is the assessment of a person whether they see themselves as capable of carrying out the relevant action.

[2] "Arbitrary" is to be understood here in the sense of targeted action, but not as commonly used in colloquial speech as "arbitrary" or "random". To distinguish between arbitrary and involuntary behavior: "Voluntary **behavior** is directed at a goal. It is activated *to* create a certain situation. **Involuntary behavior** is activated *because* a certain situation exists. Almost all of our behavior is voluntary" (Hoffmann and Engelkamp 2013, p. 40).

[3] In the original English: "In a given situation, a person is assumed to hold or to form a specific behavioral intention which influences his subsequent overt behavior."

[4] In the original English: "The stronger the intention, the more likely it is that dhe behavior will be carried out."

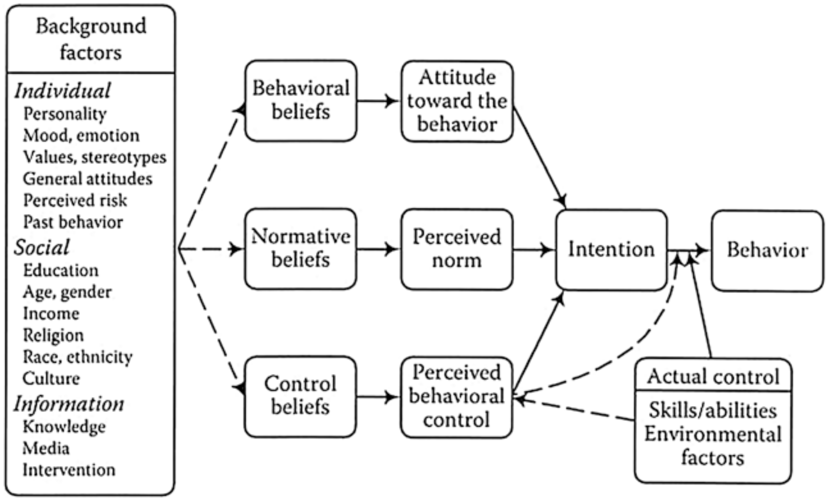

Fig. 5.1 Graphic representation of the Theory of Planned Behavior (Fishbein and Ajzen 2010, p. 22)

And last but not least, the actual control over an action can prevent this.

The Fig. 5.1 shows the just described relationships once again in graphical form before the different factors are introduced in more detail and their meaning for content marketing is shown.

5.1.1 The Expectancy-Value Model

How does an intention to act arise fundamentally? For this, the TPB (or the predecessor TRA) is based on the psychological construct of attitudes and beliefs, which we had already looked at in more detail in Chap. 3.

So people form their attitudes to all possible (real and cognitive) objects. And so they of course also form an attitude to possible actions that they can carry out. So an action alternative that is available to them is assessed as positive or negative (or with a certain degree of extremity, e.g. weakly negative, very positive, …) (from the marketing perspective, whether, for example, a purchase as an action is expected to have positive or negative consequences for the respective customer in general).

This attitude arises from a model of the TPB a variety of beliefs, the Behavioral Beliefs. So the beliefs could lead to behavioral consequences, such as. B. “this chocolate will make me happy”, “chocolate makes me fat”, “the sugar in the chocolate is bad for my health”, “the cocoa in the chocolate has a positive effect on my health”, “the money paid for the chocolate, I’ll probably regret later” etc., depending on their individually estimated importance in total to a positive or negative attitude to the action “chocolate purchase”.

Fishbein and Ajzen call this relationship as a central part of the Theory of Planned Behavior the **Expectancy-Value-Model** and give it even a symbolic formula (Fishbein and Ajzen 2010, p. 97):[5]

$$A \propto \sum b_i e_i$$

People have a variety of beliefs (in the formula the e_i) with respect to the properties (eg. B. results) of a possible action. On the one hand, these can be positive or negative. On the other hand, these beliefs may be stronger or weaker (the value of b_i), ie a certain result can be expected more or less likely. So the belief that “after the purchase I have less money in the account” would be very strong, while “I could hurt myself when using the purchased screwdriver” could be considered unlikely. “It can be seen that the evaluation of each attribute contributes to the attitude in direct proportion to the person’s subjective probability that the object possesses the attribute in question, that is, in direct propotion to the strength of the belief.”[6] (Fishbein and Ajzen 2010, p. 97).

These relationships have been verified in many studies. However, it must be emphasized that the human psyche does not naturally perform mathematical formula calculations or actual mathematical exact summations. The given formula is to be understood purely symbolically and, according to current knowledge,

[5] Note: In the original conception of the Theory of Reasoned Action Fishbein and Ajzen give the formula with an equal sign instead of the proportional sign, thus $A = \sum b_i e_i$ (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975, p. 223). With their—also used in this book—new writing but they make it clear that it is not a mathematical-logical representation of reality, but the symbolic, emblematic representation of the relationship. In addition, it should be noted that this formula does not only occur in connection with the Theory of Reasoned Action (from which it is often quoted, but mainly considered with respect to attitudes to their own behavior), but is already postulated earlier by Fishbein, for. B. in Fishbein 1963.

[6] In English original: “It can be seen that the evaluation of each attribute contributes to the attitude in direct proportion to the person’s subjective probability that the object possesses the attribute in question, that is, in direct propotion to the strength of the belief.”

accurately describes the processes in the human psyche, but only in the form of a model.

Symbolic formula, but not rational-logical weighing

A hint appears to be important at this point: The formula just given is often misunderstood, as it seems to indicate a logical consideration or conscious weighing by humans. But that would be a misunderstanding.

The symbolic formula given in mathematical form "should not mean that people form attitudes in a 'rational' manner by conducting an unbiased review of all relevant information and integrating it according to formal rules of logic. On the contrary, the expectancy-value model recognizes that beliefs—although often quite accurate—can be biased by a variety of cognitive and motivational processes and that they may be based on invalid or selectively chosen information, be self-serving, or otherwise fail to correspond to reality "[7] (Fishbein and Ajzen 2010, p. 99). Nor is it assumed that a person forms attitudes and a conscious calculation of any kind. The model is to be understood here merely as a modeling of this real (not purely mathematical-logical) psychic process (Fishbein and Ajzen 2010, p. 100)

Knowing what consequences result from a behavior is therefore a necessary (although not sufficient) condition for a person to develop any goal-oriented behavior at all (Fishbein and Ajzen 2010, p. 243). In order to be able to determine the behavior "appropriate to an intended goal […] we must know or be able to remember which behavior in the past allowed us to achieve this goal. […] Only with the knowledge of which behavior produces which effects can the behavior be determined in turn, which allows a targeted effect to occur" (Hoffmann and Engelkamp 2013, p. 41). The expectancy-value model of the theory of planned behavior shows us how this knowledge (or beliefs as subjective knowledge)[8] then become attitudes, which in turn lead to an intention to act. Based on this theoretical model, it is therefore the goal of content marketing to create desired beliefs that lead to the desired behavior in several steps.

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[7] In the original English: "This is not to say that people form attitudes in a ‚rational' manner by conducting an unbiased review of all relevant information and integrating it according to a formal rules of logic. On the contrary, the expectancy-value model recognizes that beliefs—although often quite accurate—can be biased by a variety of cognitive and motivational processes and that they may be based on invalid or selective information, be self-serving, or otherwise fail to correspond to reality. "

[8] For a more precise distinction of the psychological terms beliefs and knowledge, see, for example, Abelson 1979 as well as Griffin and Ohlsson 2001. In addition, it should be noted that these two terms are used outside psychology with sometimes quite different meanings (e.g. in the sense of subjective belief versus objective truth in philosophy).

The expectancy-value model in marketing
In one example, the possible purchase of an e-bike could be associated with the beliefs that this would provide more freedom of movement, that shopping would be made easier, that social recognition would be obtained, that it would be necessary to lay extra electrical outlets in the garage, that the bank account would be depleted, and much more. Each of these positively or negatively rated attributes has a certain, subjectively estimated probability. The beliefs and their probability of occurrence (strength) now lead in their totality to attitude A, whether the purchase of the e-bike is to be assessed positively or negatively—one of the main factors for the intention to act of a purchase.

However, not every possible course of action is known or known to every customer. But this is particularly annoying for companies if these courses of action actually speak for an action desired by marketing. And this is exactly where content marketing can be used and achieve an advertising effect.

A customer's attitude towards the purchase of a particular e-bike model may so far only arise from the price (how much money she would have less for other things after a purchase), the optics (her own feeling of well-being and effect on others), the acoustic strength (how long the e-bike can be used), the possible charging cycles of the battery (sustainability) etc. (just to name a few very few factors by way of example). The customer knows all these factors and they go into the formation of the behavioral attitude.

Now she is reading a content marketing article as part of her research and it only becomes clear to her through this that the weight of the wheel is also important for her (because she always has to carry it in the basement) and the number of charging cycles is much more important than previously thought. The content marketing article has therefore led to the fact that with a light wheel with a battery that can withstand many charging cycles, another factor and another factor now play a more important role in the formation of the attitude towards a purchase and make it more likely. Content marketing has achieved a advertising effect (at least if the relevant provider also offers such models or wants to promote their sale; otherwise the provider would not have published this content marketing article in the first place).

It's all a matter of goal
Riding an e-bike is more environmentally friendly than driving a car. This is certainly a conviction that many readers share. The conviction that riding an e-bike in the rain is more unpleasant than driving a car, but certainly also many. But have you ever thought about the amount of chemicals in the batteries of the huge number of e-bikes, that these batteries

only last about 5 years and then have to be disposed of as a huge landfill? While reading the foregoing sentences, some of you potential bicycle buyers have just formed new convictions, perhaps for the first time learning about these environmental problems with e-bikes.

So is such content marketing useful? Certainly not if you are a dealer of e-bikes. Because the additional convictions have not immediately changed your attitude towards buying an e-bike, but at least made it somewhat negative (or less positive)—explicable by new (negative) summands in the formula of the expectancy-value model.

But what if you are a manufacturer of classic bicycles without electric drive? Then you wanted to promote their sale and prevent people from buying (not manufactured by you) e-bikes. Or you want as an environmental protection association to bring people to buy more classic bicycles without electric drive, in order to avoid future problems with batteries, their chemicals and their disposal. Then the mentioned content marketing contributions would be quite helpful to achieve your goal.

In short: The expectancy-value model and the above example show us that a certain content is not suitable for content marketing in and of itself or not, but that topics and content must always be aligned with the goals of the respective company (see also the distinction between content marketing and journalism in Sect. 2.3.2.2).

Content marketing can pursue two approaches in terms of content: On the one hand, it can strengthen or create new positive convictions (for the attitude towards an action) or also weaken convictions that act negatively on the attitude towards action. From the perspective of the expectancy-value model, both are of equal value and lead to a more positive attitude towards action.

For example, a customer could have a negative attitude towards silicone baking molds and kitchen utensils, which may result from the conviction that everything made of plastic is harmful to health and he knows that silicone is a type of plastic. Therefore, he also does not buy silicone baking molds. To change this buying behavior, the customer's attitude must be changed from negative to at least neutral. This could succeed if, for example, this consumer learns that silicone is not produced from petroleum like other plastics, but from silicon (which is obtained from sand). So his conviction "silicone is harmful to health" could even dissolve completely and in the formation of the expectancy-value model, a negative summand is less included. The affective attitude towards the purchase of silicone baking molds can thus swing from negative to positive.

Content marketing would therefore publish a blog article or video on the topic "Are silicone molds for baking harmful to health?" or even less directly an article such as "How are silicone molds produced?" or "What is silicone anyway?" and thus achieve an advertising effect for the relevant products.

However, some convictions cannot be dissolved completely. But they can be weakened in a similar way by new information and experiences. In this case, one would not change the number of summands included in the sum, but one would lower the factor b_i, that is, the strength of the conviction.[9] A conviction with a negative effect would still exist, but it would have a less relevant effect on the attitude.

Another approach to prevent unwanted beliefs from entering attitude formation in the first place through content marketing would be to prevent them from happening in the first place (before they, as just shown, would have to be "neutralized" again). So it is a matter of taking precautions so that no negative beliefs about one's own marketing goal can arise from other sources of information. So, for example, some consumers may never have thought about whether the air blown out by vacuum cleaners has an effect on health. As long as the customers do not think about it and do not receive any information about it, it is not a problem. However, such consumers could learn from any other source (press, environmental protection association, doctor, competitor, etc.) that, for example, there would be a health problem due to fine dust (completely independent of whether this is objectively correct or not—it would be a subjective belief that would negatively influence an attitude as a belief). To prevent this, a content marketing article could, for example, deal with how vacuum cleaners actually work and show that only sucked-in room air is blown out again and that the release of fine dust can be minimized by the use of microfilters. If this article is read, other sources would then be evaluated more critically and the conviction "vacuum cleaners are fine dust blowers and therefore unhealthy" would not arise at all for vacuum cleaners with microfilters. The advertising effect of content marketing would therefore be the avoidance of negative belief formation.

Give information relevance for attitude formation and action

Many people have the conviction that "microplastics are a global environmental problem" and that "microplastics must be avoided". But these beliefs often have no effect on the purchase of sunscreen. Why? Because many people do not even know that microplastics are contained in many sunscreens. In attitude formation according to the already mentioned symbolic formula $A \propto \sum b_i e_i$ the negative conviction about microplastics therefore does not enter the summation at all, because no connection between this and the consequences of buying behavior is recognized.

But as soon as a content marketing article has shown how sunscreens work, the health risks of cosmetics and the connection between microplastics and sunscreen, the corresponding conviction will be included in attitude formation and influence behavior.

Content marketing can therefore have an effect by bringing two already existing convictions into connection with each other through additional knowledge.

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[9] Psychologically speaking, one lowers the subjectively perceived probability that the relevant assessment of the consequences of the action is true. Or more colloquially: The consumer is no longer so sure that this health hazard actually applies or occurs.

5.1.2 Perceived Social Norms

"According to the theory, there are two major factors that determine behavioral intentions: a personal or 'attitudinal' factor and a social or 'normative' factor"[10] (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975, p. 301). Similar to the object-related attitudes (with the TPB the action alternatives are to be understood as these objects), this normative factor is also based on beliefs, which are not object-related, but normative—often also called social norm.

"In general, social norms refer to what is acceptable or permissible behavior in a group or society"[11] (Fishbein and Ajzen 2010, p. 129). However, within the TPB the term social norms is defined more narrowly and only related to behavior: "we consider norms as perceived social pressure to perform (or not to perform) a given behavior"[12] (Fishbein and Ajzen 2010, p. 130).

Almost everyone of us has (hopefully) the conviction that society expects us not to steal in stores (but to buy). Or we are convinced as a member of a clique that this expects us to buy certain brands (or to avoid them). We could also be convinced that when visiting a restaurant with friends, who are all vegetarians, it is also expected of us not to order a meat dish (although our purely action-related attitude would actually be very positive and we would like to order meat, so the relevant intention to act would be quite positive). In addition to large, more abstract groups and concrete, manageable groups, social pressure can also come from individual persons: if we are, for example. B. are convinced that one person expects us to buy her a birthday present (and we buy it, although we actually evaluate the purchase negatively overall).

Similar to object-related beliefs, all of these normative beliefs regarding an action in sum lead to the perceived social pressure (engl. Perceived Norm), that is, an overall assessment of whether the respective action is to be judged as socially positive or negative. And also here, TPB assumes a weighted sum of the different beliefs. So we could be convinced of the positive expectation of a person for an action, while assuming that a certain group of people is opposed to it or

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[10] In the original English: "According to the theory, there are two major factors that determine behavioral intentions: a personal or ‚attitudinal' factor and a social or ‚normative' factor."

[11] In the original English: "Generally speaking, socail norms refer to what is acceptable or permissible behavior in a group or society."

[12] In the original English: "That is, we view norms as perceived social pressure to perform (or not to perform) a given behavior."

that this action is desired or undesired in society. The overall perceived pressure is then proportional to the sum of the weighted beliefs (Fishbein and Ajzen 2010, p. 137):

$$N_I \propto \sum n_i m_i$$

Where N represents the social pressure, n_i the different normative beliefs and m_i the motivation to meet the respective expectation.

In their original formulation of the Theory of Reasoned Action, the term "subjective norm" was still used for this area of influence on a person's action. "This was the perception of a person that important others prescribe, desire, or expect the performance or non-performance of a specific behavior"[13] (Fishbein and Ajzen 2010, p. 131). With the progress of research, Fishbein and Ajzen have further developed the TRA framework here. In the chapter "Perceived Norms and Their Determinants" (Fishbein and Ajzen 2010, pp. 129–152) they make it clear that the concept of perceived social pressure (engl. Perceived Social Pressure) does not only consist of expectations and wishes of others, which are now called "injunctive norms". Rather, the mere perception of the behavior of others also leads to a perceived social pressure, even if this is not associated with any expectations of other people towards one's own behavior. If many other people behave in a certain way, this can be perceived as a social requirement to behave in the same way oneself (although none of the other people would really expect this or communicate it in this way).

In content marketing, the perception of social expectations can now be influenced, e.g. by showing the behavior of many others, pointing to expectations (e.g. of the usual behavior) in a certain social group or by strengthening or weakening typical social expectations through communication content, in order to promote the formation of a desired behavior by marketing.

5.1.3 Perception of Behavior Control

If a person's beliefs speak in favor of performing a certain action and this is also perceived as socially desirable, there is still a third influencing factor: the perception of a person as to whether they also see themselves as capable of performing

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[13] In the original English: "It was a person's perception that import others prescribe, desire, or expect the performance or nonperformance of a specific behavior."

the relevant action. In other words, their beliefs about their own resources and abilities as well as the perceived barriers and obstacles. “The more people believe that they have the required resources and opportunities and the fewer obstacles or impediments they anticipate, the greater should be their perceived control over their performance of the behavior.”[14] (Fishbein and Ajzen 2010, p. 170).

Again, Fishbein and Ajzen give a symbolic formula in which the overall perceived control over one’s own behavior performance is proportional to the sum of the weighted individual factors, i.e. the relevant beliefs (Fishbein and Ajzen 2010, p. 170):

$$\mathrm{PBC} \propto \sum c_i p_i$$

In this formula, c_i is a belief that a certain factor will be present, and p_i is its expected strength in promoting or hindering the action.

In reality, there will be many possible such factors. Does the person have time for the action (or more precisely: does she believe—does she have the belief—that she has this time or can take it)? Does she believe that she has the knowledge or necessary experience to carry out the relevant action? Is she convinced that she has the financial resources for it? And so on.

And here too, content marketing can contribute to the development of a desired behavior by, for example, conveying necessary knowledge and skills, by changing skills in the perception as important or unimportant for the relevant action, etc.

5.1.4 Actual Control

Even if the formation of an intention to act can be explained by the three factors mentioned in the last section (attitude towards the action, social pressure and assessment of the ability to act), this does not automatically mean that the relevant behaviour actually takes place. In contrast to the three psychological factors, this is then due to the actual possibility of implementation, which may simply be prevented by environmental factors.

[14] In the original English: “The more the required ressources an opportunities individuals think they possess, and the fewer obstacles or impediments they anticipate, the greater should be their perceived control over their performance of the behavior.”

It seems important to point out the difference from the last section, the perceived control beliefs: while it was about a subjective perception of whether the relevant action appears executable to the person, the factors of actual control are not subjective perceptions, but quite real obstacles. So one may subjectively feel able to buy a certain product on the Internet, but then the technical connection to the Internet breaks down or the webshop is not fully functional on the used terminal (e.g. very old tablet).

5.2 The MODE Model

In the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) we have found that human behaviour is influenced to a large extent by the respective attitudes of the relevant persons, and the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) and the expectance value model have given us theoretical frameworks to change these attitudes.

The MODE model by Fazio (1990) now deals with the question of whether and which attitudes are activated at all when an action arises and what influence their strength has on the respective attitudes. Motivation plays an important role here, which is not taken into account in the TPB model (while other factors are included there, which in turn are not contained in the MODE model). TPB and MODE therefore complement each other as two models with different perspectives on the relationship between attitudes and behaviour. And also from the MODE model, further starting points for the design of effective content marketing and the explanation of its advertising effect can be derived.

The MODE model postulates two classes of attitude-action processes. They are called automatic or spontaneous[15] processes (engl. spontaneous processing) and planned or controlled processes (engl. deliberative processes). "The basic difference between the two types centers on the extent to deciding on a particualr course of action involves conscious deliberation regarding the alternatives or a

[15] The terms "automatic" and "spontaneous" should be used here very consciously and not "unconscious", which must be clearly distinguished for the sake of accuracy. Attitudes can be activated without conscious activity and have an influence on behavior. This can happen unconsciously—that is, without the relevant attitude or its influence coming to the attention of the person concerned. Attitudes can also be activated automatically—without triggering this consciously—but the person concerned can be very aware of it. Therefore, "automatic" and "unconscious" must be understood and used here as two clearly different concepts.

spontaneouse reaction to one's perception of the immediate situation."[16] (Fazio and Towles-Schwen 2000, p. 97).

The MODE model is concerned with under which conditions spontaneous or controlled processes contribute to human action on the one hand, and how significant the two process types are for the emergence of action on the other. MODE's action is influenced by motivation as the central determinant (hence the name MODE, which stands for "**M**otivation and **O**pportunity as **DE**terminants").

5.2.1 Controlled and Spontaneous Processes

> "There is no question that some social behaviors are planned and intended. In fact, people sometimes decide how they intend to behave and then carry out that intention when they encounter the situation. Conscious processing is characterized by considerable cognitive effort" (Fazio 1990, p. 88).On the other hand, "attitudes will guide behavior in a spontaneous manner, without the individual actively considering the relevant attitude and without the individual's necessary awareness of its influence"[17] (Olson and Fazio 2009, p. 21). Therefore, no thinking is required and attitudes also work without the relevant person being aware of these attitudes or their influence at all (Fazio et al. 2008). This is called the automatic activation of these attitudes (and occurs especially for strong attitudes, as we will see later).

Controlled processes

In the more cognitively demanding and conscious processing process, on the one hand, the positive and negative characteristics of the object under consideration are considered, e.g. of a physical object, an alternative course of action or a purely cognitive construct, etc. Costs and benefits are evaluated and attitudes are actively formed. The controlled processes of MODE therefore resemble the central route of ELM or the expectancy-value model quite closely (but are not equivalent to them in terms of content).

From the perspective of marketing, a consumer would therefore actively think, reflect and weigh up and thus consciously form an attitude, e.g. towards a

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[16] In the original English: "The basic difference between the two types centers on the extent to deciding on a particualr course of action involves conscious deliberation regarding the alternatives or a spontaneouse reaction to one's perception of the immediate situation."

[17] In the original English: "Briefly, however, the model postulates that attitudes can guide behavior in a spontaneous manner, without the individual actively considering the relevant attitude and without the individual's necessary awareness of its influence."

product. In the sense of the TPB presented in Sect. 5.1, he would think about the results that a possible action—e.g. a purchase—would lead to or what consequences it would have. In this way he forms an attitude towards this action (the purchase) and then carries it out or not.

Spontaneous processes

However, many purchase decisions (or more generally: actions) do not take place in the way just described, through active cognitive processes (conscious thinking), but are triggered by the spontaneous processes of the MODE model. In these, no active processing takes place, but without active thinking a behavior is formed from attitudes.

Whether a particular attitude then has an influence on the behavior in such an automatic, often also unconscious process, or not, is dependent on the accessibility of this attitude in memory[18] .

Since MODE defines attitudes “as an association in memory between a given object and one’s evaluation of that object”[19] (Fazio 1990, p. 81), the strength of this association also determines its accessibility. Or, in other words: The stronger an attitude is (not to be confused with its extremity, see Sect. 3.1), the more likely it will have an automatic or unconscious effect and influence a behavior without active thought.

Or, from the perspective of marketing: Strong attitudes can trigger actions even without cognitive activities (or prevent them), weak ones less or not at all. Therefore, it appears desirable to generate strong positive attitudes through marketing activities (which, with regard to the ELM, means striving for an effect via the central route and effective good arguments there in content marketing).

In addition to influencing behavior, “accessible attitudes can orient attention, influence categorization of the attitute object, and bias visual perceptions of the

[18] The MODE model assumes that attitudes are stored as memory contents. They are understood “as an association in memory between an object and one’s own evaluation of the same” (Olson and Fazio 2009, p. 20). However, it must be pointed out that there are also other definitions in psychology. Although they all understand attitudes as some way of connecting positivity or negativity with an attitude object, they differ in detail as to how this is done. For our focus on the advertising effect of content marketing, this discussion of whether attitudes are memory contents or something else should not be pursued any further and reference should be made to the relevant psychological literature.

[19] In the original English: “An attitude is viewed as an association in memory between a given object and one’s evaluation of that object.”

object."[20] (Olson and Fazio 2009, p. 22). Strong attitudes could therefore also lead to, for example, certain advertising communication or certain product properties not being perceived at all or being perceived even more intensely. Another starting point (e.g. reinforcement of the effect of advertising media), how Content-Marketing can unfold advertising effect.

And "in addition, they have the potential to influence the processing of information related to the attitute object. That is, the more accessible the attitude is, the more likely it is that new information about the object will be interpreted in a attitute-conform manner" (Olson and Fazio 2009, p. 22). In marketing, for example, this means that communication content is repeatedly interpreted by the respective customer into an already existing attitute direction.

However, the two processes presented—conscious/controlled or automatic/spontaneous—are not to be understood as either-or for the formation of an attitude. "The MODE model […] also explicitly postulates the possibility of processes that are neither purely spontaneous nor purely deliberative, but instead are 'mixed' processes involving a combination of automatic and controlled components."[21] (Fazio and Towles-Schwen 2000, p. 103)—and for most behavior, attitudes will also be involved in both processes to different degrees.

5.2.2 Motivation and Ability

In which cases are attitudes now consciously activated and thought through? And in which cases do they influence behavior through automatic activation? The MODE model sees two central influencing factors here: the motivation to deal intensively with the relevant action, and the question of whether the relevant person even has the opportunity to do so.

> "When people are sufficiently motivated and have the cognitive capacity to do so, they can retrieve or construct their attitudes toward an object in an effortful manner. When motivation or cognitive capacity is low, attitudes can only be retrieved if

[20] In the original English: "accessible attitudes can orient attention, influence categorization of the attitute object, and bias visual perceptions of the object."

[21] In the original English: "In addition to delineating two distinct classes of attitude-behavior precesses, the MODE model explicitly postulates the possibility of processes that are neither purely spontaneous nor purely deliberative, but instead are 'mixed' processes involving a combination of automatic an controlled components."

> they are automatically activated. According to the MODE model, such automatic or spontaneous activation is reserved for strong attitudes."[22] (Fishbein and Ajzen 2010, p. 264).The relevant constructs are always to be understood very broadly. So "motivation" can come from a variety of motivational reasons and the "opportunity" is to be understood here as a very broad concept, from lack of time to limited mental ability to distraction or fatigue (Olson and Fazio 2009, p. 24).

Content marketing can influence both constructs with its content: It can create or increase the motivation to deal intensively with an action (e.g. potential purchase), thus making controlled processes more important for behavior formation. For example, this also gives weaker attitudes a greater influence on behavior formation or customers are motivated to cognitively engage with product information, advertising or other content marketing content.

[22] In the original English: "When people are sufficiently motivated and have cognitive capacity to do so, they can retrieve or construct their attitudes toward an object in an effortful manner. When motivation or cognitive capacity is low, attitudes can become available only if they are automatically activated. According to the MODE model, such automatic or spontaneous activation is reserved for strong attitudes."

6 Content Effects Regarding Machines

In the last chapters, a lot has been said about the psychological effects of content marketing. But in order to be able to have such a psychological effect, the content marketing contents must first reach and have to be known by the consumers. But how many consumers this is the case for, is partly influenced by this content itself. Because it not only affects people, but also machines, e. g. the algorithms of search engines or social media networks that influence its dissemination. Since, in addition to the psychological effects, such effects on Internet algorithms must also be taken into account in the design of content in order to achieve the greatest possible effect of content marketing as a whole, the most important machine effects should be briefly illuminated here.

6.1 Effects on Search Engines (SEO Effects)

> "Search is a fundamental activity of life. All organisms are searching for food and reproduction, and Maslow's classic hierarchy of needs theory says beforehand that once man has fulfilled the physiological basic needs, he tries to satisfy social and psychological needs in order to belong and to know our world. These higher-level needs are often informative, which in turn explains why information resources and communication facilities are so highly developed in developed societies" (Marchionini 2006, p. 42).An important tool for searching for information resources are today's search engines like Google. These search engines read the content of content marketing (as well as all other content of the Internet) mechanically, evaluate it algorithmically and thus try to determine which content is best suited for a search query entered on, for example, Google.com—or increasingly spoken to smartphones or voice assistants. The results the searchers finally receive depend heavily on the information provided to the search engines on websites and how this is prepared (in content and technology) post.

T. Hörner, *Advertising Impact and Controlling in Content Marketing*, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-40551-9_6

What results the searchers finally receive depends heavily on the information provided to the search engines on websites and how this is prepared (in content and technology). So while we have mainly looked at the direct psychological effect of content marketing posts on people in the previous chapters, we now need to look at how (the exact same!) Content marketing posts affect machines, in particular search engines like Google, and how it can support advertising effectiveness in the sense of business marketing.

An interesting and important development can be observed here: In the early days of Google, purely statistical "tricks" (e.g. the pure frequency of a search term on a website) and so-called backlinks[1] played a central role. "A […] significant change began in 2013. According to the analysis of renowned companies such as SEOmoz or Searchmetrics, the importance of backlinks for ranking is slowly declining. The importance of good content is increasing" (Lammenett 2017, p. 180, 2021). Nowadays it can be assumed that content of high quality is one of the central ranking criteria and often a prerequisite for success in search engines. And more and more often it is not the words used, but the content actually expressed by these words and its quality that play the central role. This development at Google (and other search engines) made content marketing an increasingly important discipline for search engine optimization.

Good content has a large, rapidly growing impact on the mechanical algorithms used by Google & Co.—and thus on the placement of Internet content into the search results of these search engines. This can be done, for example, by a blog post on the proper care of musical instruments, which a consumer finds in Google and thus comes to the website of a music dealer for the first time (and memory content is created for domain name, website and possibly brand/company logo located there). Or a teaching video available on YouTube for musicians, which always shows the logo of a brand or the domain name of a music dealer on the one hand is purely editorial video but finally refers to the provider on the other hand. In an e-book download, the title page, the imprint, an advertising page at the end and possibly a short info in the header/footer of the document would do something similar, whereby no active advertising is carried out there, but the sender of the content is well communicated.

[1] Links from other websites to the website to be ranked in Google. In its early days, Google was able to achieve better search results than competitors by analyzing such links on the Internet and introducing or calculating the resulting Page Rank, thus securing its market position.

But not only the individual posts have an effect. Rather, numerous individual posts support each other and the entire corpus the domain as a whole, especially when it comes to generic keywords.

Content—not keyword placement

The goal of search engine optimization (SEO = Search Engine Optimization) is to get a website onto the front pages of search engine results pages. A huge number of criteria and tips are mentioned in the literature to achieve this. In contrast to the past, however, the actual content of a page has become increasingly central to good rankings.

So it is not, as is wrongly assumed over and over again, only a matter of "inserting the right keywords in the right places", i.e. of placing certain words in the meta title, the headings and subheadings, the alt tags of pictures, in the text, etc. Much more important and to be given priority is the actual content of the page (expressed in words). It is significantly more about what is said content-wise on a website than about which wording and expressions are used for this exactly.[2] The optimization of the keyword usage in the kind mentioned above does indeed support the rankings, but it can hardly achieve this supporting effect without fundamentally good content (optimization according to the motto: content first, keyword placement second).

So the key is to provide comprehensive, high-quality content on a page (URL) assigned to a search term. The search intention behind the search term must be covered and fulfilled there as best as possible. Ultimately, this is the same or at least a very similar claim to the content that is required for high-quality content from the perspective of human users. Search engine optimization therefore has a lot in common with high-quality editorial work.

Content marketing is therefore central to a good findability of a website in Google. In particular, for know-search intentions (knowledge, information) or do-searches (i.e. searches on how to do something or make it), websites are very important—and typical for the topics in content marketing. And even Google recommends that in addition to transactional search queries (which relate to products and purchases), know-how and do-search intentions should also be satisfied on shop domains (or in other words: also offer content marketing beyond shopping content) in order to get a better overall visibility of the entire website on the search engine result pages.

[2] In order to illustrate the difference between words or keywords and the substance expressed by them as well as the way search engines deal with them here again, an example is given here. Thus, when searching for "hurt in the body center", Google is quite able to direct the search results to stomach pain, even if the actually searched words do not occur at all in the text of the recommended search results.

6.2 Effect on Social Media Algorithms

A hardly noticeable number of posts are posted daily in social media networks. Much more than that, even an intensive user could not see all of them. Therefore, algorithms have to select automatically which posts of a certain user are to be displayed in her feed, which are to be highlighted and recommended to her, and how the posts are to be sorted. And so it happens that sometimes only 1%, 5%, 10% and rather rarely more than 20% of the followers actually see a published post.

However, the extent of the potential advertising effect of content marketing in social media depends on how many followers actually get to see the posts at all (see section on presentation in the controlling Sect. 10.4). Therefore, one should also deal with the factors that make an algorithm show one's own posts to as many people as possible for an—in terms of advertising effect—efficient content marketing. In this book, of course, no comprehensive and complete explanation of social media marketing can be given, but the most important points will be briefly mentioned.

Interactions received
In practically every social media network there are some types of interaction, e.g. likes, comments, but also pins, video views, etc. They are one of the most important influencing factors on social media algorithms.

Followers who often interact with posts of a certain account publishing them will see more posts from this account in the future than users who react little to posts. Or, in other words: The better posts are motivating for interaction and the more successful this realy is with more followers, the more followers will see future (!) posts. The reach has increased and with it the potential for an overall advertising effect.

In short: Social media content must also be designed to motivate interaction (e.g. ask questions to motivate comments, e.g. ask for rating, e.g. emotional content that typically leads to more interaction, e.g. voting, etc.) in order to achieve the greatest possible advertising effect.

Hashtag Use
The use of hashtags is common in these social media networks. A targeted and conscious use can help to increase the reach of posts. Hashtags affect both the search functions and—depending on the social media network—the feed algorithms.

Posting frequency

Roughly speaking, one could say: Active accounts tend to achieve a better reach. So if someone only posts once a week, they will reach fewer followers with this than the same post will in a more active account that posts something every day.

> **How often to post? What is good engagement?** Unfortunately, there is not one number when it comes to the typical posting frequency. And even benchmarks for engagement are often to be considered under "it depends". The typical key figures differ, for example, depending on the industry, company size and channel under consideration, etc.
>
> For example, the typical number of posts published in 2021 ranges from 1.9 posts per week (Instagram, Tech &Software industry) to 5.4 (Fashion on Facebook) and 6.7 (Fashion on Instagram) to 9.2 (Nonprofits on Facebook) and even 53.5 for media on Facebook (RivalIQ 2021).
>
> Analogously, the engagement on Facebook in 2021 for the Food &Beverage industry was around 0.05% on Facebook, but about 1% on Instagram (RivalIQ 2021).
>
> And all these values often differ again between smaller companies and large brands even in the same channels and industries.
>
> In other words: There is not one benchmark value. But you can definitely find benchmarks on the Internet, for example by searching for "benchmarks social media" in Google and looking at a few search results.
>
> But the best benchmarks are always the key figures of your own controlling: You always try to improve your own already achieved values, i.e. to increase the engagement on your own posts even further and to increase the range even further—no matter what external benchmarks say.

6.3 Preparing other Advertising Campaigns (Retargeting)

Many online advertising instruments from the field of paid advertising offer retargeting, similar or lookalike audiences or matchlists as a method for targeting (i.e. the selection of those persons who will see or play the advertising medium).

The idea behind it: If a user has already been on the company's own website but has not bought anything, this shows that she is nevertheless interested or belongs to the target group. Or from the perspective of content marketing: If a website visitor has visited content marketing articles on natural plant protection in the garden, follows a fan page that offers tips for hobby gardeners, or has activated such a voice app on a smart speaker—then this person is certainly to be counted as the target group of a plant and garden webshop. In other words, it could pay off to advertise to this person with paid ads.

This is exactly how content marketing can help to carry out effective (or more effective) paid advertising campaigns: by finding and selecting the right people to advertise through its content and posts.

Part III
Designing Effective Content Marketing

How to design efficient Content Marketing supporting marketing objectives? The advertising effect modell in Chap. 2 and the psychological backgrounds in Chap. 3, 4, 5, 6 provided us the theoretical backgrounds for this. Now we will suggest methodical approaches for content marketing practice, for finding suitable topics (Chap. 7) and their effective implementation (Chap. 8).

7 Structured Approach for Topic Finding

As repeatedly stated in this book, topics and content of content marketing do not advertise products, brands and companies in a direct way. The selection of content marketing topics is rather guided by the interests of the customers. Content Marketing informs, helps or entertains in a more editorial-journalistic way. But this does not mean that every customer interest is a suitable basis for a content marketing topic.

So, while a part of the customers of a garden equipment supplier may not only own a garden, but also regularly do sports, it does not make sense to publish a training plan for sports as a garden equipment webshop. Similarly, a bicycle provider is unlikely to provide tips on securing against computer viruses (although almost every bicyclist also has a PC and problems with viruses). And a provider of solar power plants will certainly not offer posts in social media with tips on stain removal in the household in its content marketing (although almost everyone could use it).

Of course: All of the above mentioned topics (sports training plan, tips against computer viruses, stain removal) are generally suitable for content marketing. But the examples just mentioned show clearly that, in practice, the question of whether something is a reasonable content marketing topic can not be decided solely on the basis of whether a topic the interest of (any) target groupand is editorial (i.e. non-direct-advertising). The topics must also be matched with the company and its range of services, so that, for example, the garden equipment provider at least has something to do with the garden in the broadest sense and the bicycle provider has something to do with bicycles.

Would a weather report be a suitable content marketing topic in the above example? And ist a weather report suitable for all three companies mentioned by way of example, because both garden and bicycle and solar power have to do with weather and sun?

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https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-40551-9_7

At first one might be apt to simply say "Yes". And it is also true: The topic of weather is a editorial, non-advertising topic, it hits target group interests and fits the respective products.

But an online marketing atuned to high advertising effectiveness and user experience would certainly find a simple weather report to be a technically easy to implement, but nevertheless unattractive content marketing topic: There are weather reports on the Internet in great variety—why should one specifically visit the websites of a bicycle, garden or solar cell provider or respond to weather posts in social media?

In addition, the topic must be further adapted to the respective case: It is necessary to consider which role the weather exactly plays for the respective target group and what is particularly interesting about the weather for this and offers an additional benefit (keyword: added value, in the sense of delivering more value).

It would be interesting and effective (e.g. for awareness, image, etc.) for gardeners to have a "do I need to water today or will it rain enough", for cyclists a "weather light & clothing planner" or a "power planner based on the expected duration of sunshine" would be helpful. This would give us suitable, attractive and advertising-effective content marketing topics in all three cases.

In summary, therefore, it is necessary to find topics from exactly the same area of life in which the products and services offered by the respective company are used for content marketing, and to specify these topics partly in a more general way and then to adapt them to the company's own range of services, so that they offer the target group a concrete (really nameable!) value-added.

The following sections of this book are intended to show helpful methods in this sense of how suitable topics for the content marketing of a company can be specifically worked out in practice.

7.1 The Life Area Association Method

Idea finding is often carried out in companies by means of brainstorming. This method, first presented by Charles H. Clark (1958, 1972), and now very widespread, allows participants in the first brainstorming phase to produce as many ideas as possible. This method of classical brainstorming is certainly also suitable for creating a large number of topic ideas in content marketing at first.

However, with the life area association method presented below, a different (and partly based on brainstorming) structured approach is proposed, which is better adapted to the needs of content marketing and finding effective topics. It can be a good help in practice to find such topics.

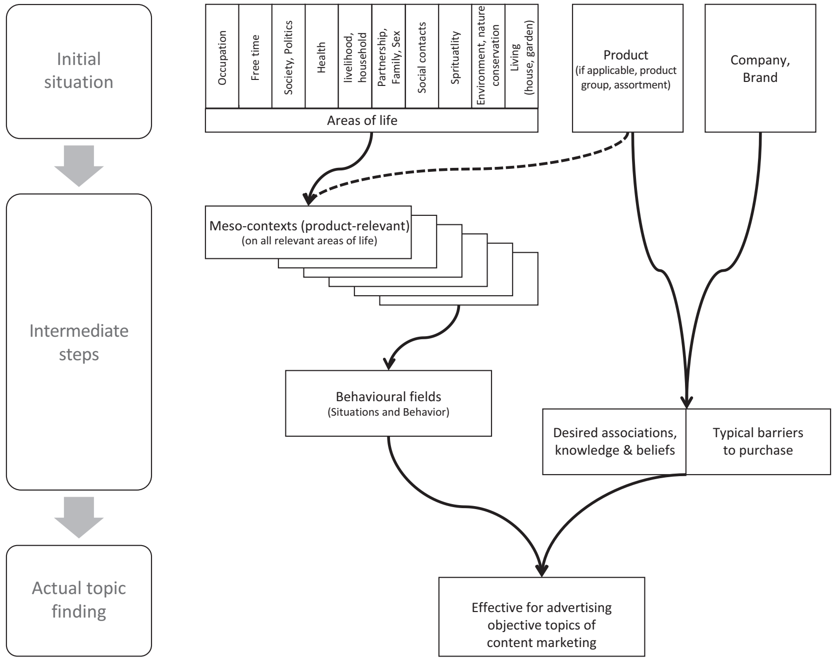

Fig. 7.1 Topic finding: the life context association method

As outlined in Fig. 7.1, this method consists of several steps. First (left-hand path in the figure), the contexts in which the products offered (or the brand, etc.) play a role are identified on the basis of the most important areas of human life. Within these contexts, behaviour fields that are important to customers but not directly related to the company's own products are then determined in a second step.

Independently of these two steps just described (right-hand path in the figure), the wanted associations, knowledge to be formed or wanted beliefs about the product, brand and company are collected (which should then lead to desired attitudes and behaviour) and typical purchase barriers are identified (oriented towards the TPB).

In a third and final step, the results from the two previous intermediate steps are then brought together and content marketing topics that are effective in advertising are formed from their combination.

Table 7.1 Typical life areas from the social sciences

Career	Partnership/family/sexual life
Finances	Social contacts (friends, acquaintances)
Free time (hobby, sport, voluntary work, …)	Spirituality (religion, church)
Society/politics	Environment/nature conservation
Health	Housing (house, garden)
Livelihood/household	

It is crucial for an advertising effect of content marketing that both content marketing topics and products offered take place in the same contexts. That is why the life context association method first of all identifies various such contexts and the topics of interest to customers within them.

The highest level of observation are the macro contexts, which are often referred to as life contexts in the social sciences. A overview of central life contexts of people, as they are typically used in the social sciences, can be found in Table 7.1.[1] They are also the starting point for our topic finding method.

A supplier of tools will now usually classify its products in the life area of leisure and/or work, depending on which target group(s) it wants to address.

Within these macro-contexts there are then various meso-contexts. These can be different areas in which tools are used in the life area of leisure: e.g. the hobby workshop, the garden shed, the car workshop garage etc.

And it is precisely these meso-contexts that need to be found as diversely as possible now. The challenge here is to not only find the usual contexts that come to mind immediately as an entrepreneur, but also to leave the usual limits in one's own marketing. Methodologically, therefore, meso-contexts must be found for each life area (and not just the most suitable ones at first). In the tool example: While the life area of work, for example, includes the meso-contexts "working on site with the customer" or "maintenance & servicing of the work tool", the meso-context "injuries while using the tool" could be relevant for the life area of health, the meso-context "workshop costs" for the life area of finance, or the meso-context "workshop power consumption" for the life area of environment/nature con-

[1] The list of life contexts mentioned resulted from an evaluation and consolidation of relevant social science research. Key sources: Baus 2015, p. 20, Deck et al. 2011, Görtz 2004, Henrich and Herschbach 2000, Mohr 1986.

servation. In the life area “partnership/family”, the regular argument of spending too much time in the hobby workshop or the recognition for the self-made gifts given again and again could be such a context, while the context of club life falls into the life area “social contacts”.

Within these meso-contexts there are then a multitude of possible situations (micro-contexts) in which people of the target group can be found. These then provide us with suitable topics for content marketing in their multitude.

Target group definitions versus target group behaviour fields for content marketing

The approach of a life area segmentation and content marketing as a whole are of course closely related to the common target group segmentation in classical marketing. A target group is understood to be “the totality of all effective or potential persons who are to be addressed by a certain marketing activity” (Kirchgeorg 2018a). For its basic determination, one usually proceeds in three steps: First, market segments are identified, which are then evaluated according to potential, approachability, stability and other criteria in a second step. Finally, in a third step, final target group segments are identified by company-related evaluation factors (such as objectives, available resources, legal framework conditions, etc.) (Meffert et al. 2019, pp. 334–335). Another segmentation of target groups then takes place usually according to behaviour-oriented criteria (e.g. price class, media use, brand loyalty, etc.), psychographic criteria (e.g. interests, attitudes, motives, etc.) as well as sociodemographic and geographic criteria (Meffert et al. 2019, p. 223) and (Freter and Naskrent 2008).

A **target group definition and description** therefore refers on the one hand to the market and its structure, on the other hand to the characteristics and purchase behaviour or production-oriented behaviour of persons.

What is usually not included in a target group definition and in personas of classical marketing, however, is the behavior during product use (in particular beyond the main use, e.g. when a tool is not used by the buyer himself, but the use is giving away) as well as behavior in other, non-product-related situations in the same context (e.g. tidying up and cleaning the workshop). But it is precisely these contexts that are important for topic finding and the development of content in content marketing.

Content marketing therefore expands on the target groups of marketing, but understands them more broadly in their everyday behavior and goes into more detail on situations and behavior (than is necessary for a classical target group analysis). Such extended knowledge about the target group should then be included in an extended target group description specifically for content marketing.

For example, the segmentation of the target group of a supplier of plant protection products by behavior-oriented criteria such as the place of purchase (specialist trade or large market, webshop, e-marketplace or buy button in social media) is just as important as the segmentation according to personal attitudes (concern about chemistry in the environment/sustainability, price-sensitive buyers, etc.). That the hobby gardener in the life area “social contacts” annually receives great recognition from her acquaintances for her tomato cultivation and serves wonderful tomato dishes again and again at evenings with friends in the garden, is also interested in garden design and the optical arrangement of the beds or the children like to help with gardening—that was previously practically not considered in a target group definition for such a plant protection agent provider. But it is precisely this perspective on the environment (the contexts of one's own product) and the situations and behavior there that are important for topic finding in content marketing.

For this reason and to clearly distinguish it from the requirements for a classical target group description, the term "target group behavior field" should be introduced here.

Target group behavior fields refer to situations and behavior in macro-, meso- and micro-contexts of products, brands (or other services) and should extend the classical target group definition for content marketing.

The persona method, which is often used in marketing and represents abstract target group descriptions through fictional (but not entirely invented!) persons, making them more usable in practice, can be a good starting point for content marketing. But now the content must be expanded to focus on the various areas of life, meso-contexts and situations. It therefore makes sense to have classic personas for marketing in general, but to expand them specifically for the content marketing area.

Example of the concrete use of the life area association method

At the beginning of the method, you should clearly define which service or which advertised object is actually meant to have an effect by content marketing. This could, for example, be a specific product (or service), a product group or a range of products. But it could, for example, be a service of the company (however, for the sake of simplicity, we will always only speak of "products"—but this always includes all the mentioned possibilities).

Example

Let's take as an example that you sell everything related to houseplants, balconies and gardens in an online shop. You now decide to use the life area association method for the product group of clay flower pots to promote this product group and ultimately make more sales in the long run. ◀

The starting point for the first step of the life area association method is the overview of the central areas of life in Table 7.1. Take each of these areas of life and think about in which meso-contexts the product or product group occurs there. Try to find at least one, but preferably five or ten different contexts for each area of life. You can also do this in a workshop in which the areas of life are visualized, for example, by posters and the contexts are collected by the group, with each participant receiving one "creativity point" per mentioned context, plus extra points for each processed area of life.

Note in this step that the areas of life can be relatively widely interpreted and they do not have to remain too closely related to their names. So certainly wellness belongs to the area of health, just a personal well-being or a high quality nutrition. Whether you then for example classify the common lunch break with colleagues still as a context in the area of work or in the area of social contacts, is not decisive.[2]

In addition, you should—in order to later find as many different topics as possible—pay attention not to collect specific topics for individual content marketing articles in this step, but rather environments, spheres and frames.

Example

In our flower pot example, it is certainly easy to find contexts in the area of leisure/hobby at first, after all, the target group often has houseplants as a hobby, and repotting plants (a possible context) is a recurring activity on the terrace. However, you should not be satisfied with such simple and quickly found contexts.

So in the area of hobby the context of crafting or do-it-yourself (DIY) can be found—and in this context flower pots (as material for the DIY) can play a role. And a short inquiry in Google for "common hobbies" provides us with further suggestions for contexts in which flower pots could play a role: solving puzzles (e.g. knowledge about flower pots), board games (e.g. games with/from flower pots, flower pots for children to play) and photography (e.g. staging of flower pots as motif, special photo effects that can be achieved with flower pots, such as image through the hole at the bottom). It is precisely these contexts in which flower pots are not used in their typical way, which later lead to attractive topics for content marketing and thus make new customers aware of you (i.e. achieve an advertising effect).

Analogously, all areas of life are now being processed. What do flower pots have to do with spirituality? They play, for example, a role in a plant meditation or serve as decoration in spiritual rooms (e.g. churches, etc.).

And in the area of health? You can hurt yourself on flower pot shards, but it can also not only be about your own health, but also about the influence flower pots have on the health of the plants.

The Table 7.2 shows an exemplary result when these considerations are applied to all areas of life (the contexts are certainly only exemplary and can never claim to be complete—this would not be necessary for this method as a topic finding method). ◄

[2] The aim within the framework of this practice method is not to make a scientifically exact classification of contexts in areas of life, but the areas of life should only serve as a creative stimulus to come up with new ideas and previously perhaps not considered contexts.

Table 7.2 Example contexts product group flower pots

Area of life	Contexts
Profession	Healthy office air through potted plants, optical office design B2B: Material procurement (e.g. service providers around flowers, balcony, garden)
Leisure—Hobby	Crafting/DIY with flower pots, balcony design, puzzles, games, photography
Society, politics	Flower pots as a donation for social purposes, laws and judgments on flower pots
Health	Injury from shards (of flower pots) but also: the health of plants in flower pots
Household, livelihood	Care of potted plants in difficult to reach locations, potted plants and dirt in the home, replanting of plants
Partnership, family	Potted plants as a gift/expression of love
Social contacts	Visits from acquaintances/friends to one's own home (or to theirs), exchange with other plant enthusiasts, giving away one's own plants
Spirituality	Meditation with plants, decoration of spiritual spaces
Environment, nature conservation	Old flower pots as waste (disposal), breakdown of clay for flower pot production
Housing	Decoration (of different types of housing), potted plants when moving

You should also make use of taxonomies (Sect. 3.3.2) from time to time in order to find additional contexts within the areas of life. For example, the area of life Housing/Gardening could be further broken down by plant areas (taxonomies vegetable cultivation, fruit cultivation, flower beds, hedges, lawns, etc.) or by activities there (planting and shaping, plant care, recreation and wellness, celebrations, grilling—with family or with friends, etc.).

Important for practice: The finding and assigning of contexts to areas of life is not carried out scientifically exactly. The only thing that matters is that, through such a method, one can come to a large variety of ideas more specifically.

In the next step, each individual context from step two will now be considered separately. You will consider in which very specific situations consumers can be within the respective context. Consider (and use tools such as Google and others for this) for one situation after the other, what might be important for a person in this respective situation, what (e.g. which information) would be useful to her in this moment or how the situation could be improved for her. This will give you perfect starting points for topics of the content marketing.

It is important for the advertising effect that you do not simply choose any topic that comes to mind (that would be more journalism than content marketing, see also Sect. 2.3.2.2), but that you take into account the cognitive effects you actually want to achieve in these considerations. For this purpose, you have previously defined clear goals for content marketing from your marketing goals as preparation, identified the suitable advertising effect paths for this using the advertising effect model of content marketing (Sect. 2.2) and, with the psychological background knowledge from Chap. 3, 4, 5, the associations, the necessary knowledge, helpful beliefs, motivation or behavioral barriers to be eliminated.

Example

The procedure in this step will be illustrated using a few selected contexts from the flower pot example. Analogously, this can be done for the different other contexts.

A naturally eye-catching and well-fitting context is the repeated repotting of plants. If the company's own brand is to be associated with a competent image here, this is possible through a corresponding and extensive selection of topics.

- Situation: Person has to decide in which pot to replant.
  Example topic: "The right pot size when repotting"
  Goals: Offer customer benefit and show competence with expertise.
- Basic consideration: Flower pots belong to the taxonomy "plant containers". There are several of these (not just flower pots).
  Situation: Person is unsure which plant container to use for which case.
  Example topic: "Which plant container for which case?" (article shows competence by presenting pots, tubs, boxes, bowls, etc. and their respective uses, and helps customers make a decision).
- Situation: Person is faced with the decision of having to choose from different types of pots (e.g. in the purchase process).
  Example topic: "Plastic, fiberglass or clay flower pot—what is suitable for what?"
  Basic consideration behind topic finding: The taxonomy "flower pot" has different sub-concepts, for example, differentiated by material. The desired competence is shown by not only comparing the usual plastic and clay

pots, but also other materials that are rarely used for flower pots. In addition, the large variety of the company's own product range is indirectly associated.

As another context for topic finding, the do-it-yourself context (DIY) is to be considered by way of example. These can be topics that are still relatively close to the usual use of flower pots, e.g. "Decorate flower pots creatively with the napkin technique" (situation: person does not just want to have gray-ochre flower pots in the apartment and therefore wants to do something about decoration and design). Such a topic would, for example, pay off in terms of customer satisfaction, as it is perceived as a service, and support image objectives (customer orientation: "we not only want to sell, we also support you in using the product"). If a packet of napkins can then be chosen as a free gift in the shopping cart of the webshop (e.g. from a certain order value) as a promotional marketing activity, content marketing and promotional measures to increase the shopping cart value would reinforce each other.

However, if completely new target groups are to be addressed as marketing objectives and, for example, brought to the website via Google or the image strengthened as "a company for creative solutions", topics could also be added beyond the usual use of flower pots, e.g. "flower pot as a DIY candle holder", "flower pot as a creative lampshade" or "flower pot crafting with children". Just enter "crafting with flower pots" in google.com as a search term—you will be surprised at the many uses of flower pots.

Analogously, topic finding would take place in the other context areas, e.g. "Disposing of clay and plastic pots correctly (including reuse tips)" in the context of environmental protection/sustainability (customer situation: old pot is broken and is to be thrown away; target: help customer to achieve their sustainability goals and create associations of the webshop with the topic of sustainability), e.g. "Which pot plant fits whom?" (Meso-context friends visit, situation: choose pot plants as a gift or as a souvenir), e.g. "Clay pot fallen down? This is how you get the carpet clean again easily" or "Avoid water stains when watering plants" in the context of household and problems with pot plants there (both topics show the service orientation of the company).

Even in the context of food (depending on the person in the life context of household/kitchen, hobby/cooking, family/children, etc.), attractive topics can be found on flower pots. Just enter "flower pot dessert" in Google to find ideas for such topics. ◄

You can (and should) always apply the life area association method just presented in a target group-specific way. For example, in the context of pot plant decoration, younger students will encounter situations more often in which costs play a role and tips for content marketing are helpful in this regard. An older target group, on the other hand, is more likely to encounter situations in which weight also plays a role due to age and is pleased to receive corresponding tips. Customers in big cities may live in smaller apartments that are more common there and may value combining flower decoration and vegetable plants in a space-saving way. They could be grateful for hints on how to pot flowering but simultaneously edible plants in the apartment.

7.2 The Personified Product Method

Another creative approach to finding situations and topics for content marketing is the personified product method.[3] In this method, the life story of a product is told from the perspective of the product itself in a creative and imaginative way.

To do this, you put yourself in one of your products and try to imagine how its "life" (almost as a fictional person) unfolds and how the product experiences this. How does the product experience its birth (its production)? How does it feel the first contact with the customer (and how did this come about)? How will its further life develop? Where is it with the customer during its lifetime and what does it experience? What do both (product and customer) do together and what problems do they have in their relationship? Is the product a "lifetime partner" only in the garden or kitchen, on business trips or in the office? Is it a partner for fitness and health, for the enjoyable moments or whenever the customer is bored? Is it only in the dark room and comes into play at the right moment or is it constantly together with the customer? What does he do when he is not busy with the product? And what do your product and the customer actually feel in all these situations?

Write stories as novels, short stories, fairy tales or sketch them as comics. Or write the script for a play or a film (or a TV series).

But always pay attention to the details of the experiences and design your story accordingly. Do not stay too factual. Also narrate subjectively on the experiences of the product. And very important: Also describe the feelings of product

[3] Note: The text in this section is based on the text published in Hörner 2019, pp. 131–133.

and customer in detail (as is done with a good novel or a good film for the most important protagonists).

A spade for the garden will certainly not only be used for autumnal digging or mowing the lawn. He will tell how he was also used to hit a rat in the garden, to scrape ice in winter from the terrace (and he accidentally scratched the marble, which is why his owner was angry at him), or he will be equipped with a lamp to be used for creative garden decoration.

Use the opportunity of this method to simply “be bonkers” and be creative. This can be really fun, especially in groups, and can lead to good results. Free yourself from the everyday, marketing-centered thinking that you probably have in your job. With this method, it is not important to have a marketing strategy, your personal idea of what the customer should do with the product, or an apparent objective objectivity, but only a realistic view of customer behavior—even unusual, rare behavior.

With this method you will then get a good picture of what your customers do, what needs they have and what role your product plays in their everyday lives or in a certain area of life. And: where he might ask other people something or just need help, a tip or something else. These are the first starting points for your content marketing and it will especially lead to defining a certain environment for it.

Carry out this method preferably with several products from your range. You will then probably find similarities quickly and find many contexts in which your range moves again and again. These contexts and situations of the protagonists of your story then also provide the topic areas for your content marketing. Just a few examples: e.g. dealing with pests in the garden (remember the rat that was hit), the different work throughout the year or tips for garden design (think of the poor spade that had to function as a decorative light and couldn’t sleep all night).

7.3 More Tips on Finding Topics

It is very helpful to always think in taxonomies (Sect. 3.3.2) and associations when finding topics. These can be helpful either directly, used in other methods or as input into the online tools presented in Sect. 8.2 to get even better results.

However, when using tools, one should not only stay with the input of very obvious terms or the warehousing classification and thus unnecessarily restrict oneself. Instead of, for example, when it comes to the “Medion 2 garden chair”, only thinking of “garden chair” or “garden furniture” and only entering these terms in tools to find content marketing topics (which probably many competitors do), other taxonomies such as “seating furniture”, “garden designs” (garden chairs can be part of the garden design) or even “relaxation” (a garden chair belongs to the taxonomy of relaxation products) should be used to come up with more ideas.

In addition to these hierarchical taxonomies, however, numerous other associations also play a role (Sect. 3.3.3). For example, contrasts and opposites of cognitive concepts can be used to find topics. With a humidifier, for example, there is the contrast of evaporator versus evaporator versus nebulizer—which in turn provides approaches for various content marketing topics (e.g. “Advantages and disadvantages of different humidifier technologies”, “Health aspects (or: power consumption) of evaporators versus evaporators”, …).

Other associations are based on content-related references. This can, for example, be the reference to the use. With the humidifiers, a reference to the users could lead to topics such as “For whom are humidifiers useful?”. Or for the garden chairs this could lead to social context an topics like “Meet friends in the garden” or “Summer coffee party”. Another content-related reference would be the place of use, which could then lead to topics such as “Regulating humidity in large rooms” or “Damage humidifiers the building fabric?”.

Even a part-whole relation can serve as an association for structured topic finding. For example, evaporative humidifiers have some kind of filter mat or slats as an important part. This could lead to the content marketing topic “How and how often to clean the slats of an evaporator” (note the difference here to a possible other text “How and how often to clean the slats of the Air Diffuser XY 23”—but which would not be part of the content marketing, but rather of the advertising communication and the service marketing, since it speaks directly about the product—in contrast to the former topic, which has a higher-level taxonomy as content).

Practice tip: finding taxonomies and associations
Taxonomies and their hierarchies come in very diverse forms and are best found through **classic brainstorming**. But there are also helpful online tools that can support this.

Openthesaurus.de
Taxonomies as super- and sub-terms as well as first other associations can be found well with the tool openthesaurus.de. You enter a term and immediately receive associated terms, as can be seen in the example of “garden” (Fig. 7.2).

However, openthesaurus.de is not a product database and therefore cannot provide direct information on product categories (e.g. garden chair, humidifier, etc.). But it is very helpful for general German terms.

Fig. 7.2 Example Openthesaurus for the example term garden

WordNet

The tool WordNet from Princton University at http://wordnetweb.princeton.edu/perl/webwn is just as helpful, also appears to be more complete. But this should not be a problem for topic selection in content marketing, especially not in combination with translation tools like linguee.de (which is mentioned here because it not only provides a translation, but also various possible translations). Superordinate terms can be found under "Hypernyms" and subordinate terms under "Hyponyms" in WordNet.

7.4 Topic Selection and Prioritization

The methods discussed in the last sections and others can produce a large number of topics that, in principle, fit the customers of the respective company and are relevant to them content-wise. They are all suitable for content marketing.

However, in practice you will now have a very large number of possible topics. But it will already be hardly possible to implement all these topics at once because of limited time, personnel and financial resources. It is therefore now a matter of ensuring an optimal use of resources and filtering out those topics for the editorial plan that are most effective in terms of advertising.

When filtering, the different modes of action from the advertising effectiveness model of content marketing (Chap. 2) can provide us with a good framework. Depending on which objectives are currently in focus in your company, the selection of topics is based on the respective advertising effect. The following sections show this. However, they certainly do not claim to provide a complete overview of selection criteria, but should provide a framework from the perspective of advertising effectiveness, which must then be supplemented individually.

Prioritization by search volume

In order to achieve an advertising effect, the content must of course reach as many people as possible. The more people are therefore interested in a topic or searching for it, the better.

To assess the potential of a topic for initial awareness, the search volume[4] in Google search, hashtag search in social media, searches in YouTube, typical search terms in podcast directories etc. can be very helpful. So it is a matter of finding the typical search terms for topics and then estimating which of them are used particularly often on the Internet in order to prioritize such topics.[5]

> **Practice tip: tools for estimating search volume**
> It is not possible to make a absolutely exact determination of the search volume for certain terms. But there are various tools that can help you estimate the order of magnitude of the search volume. We would like to introduce some of them here.

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[4] Search volume is thenumber of times a search term is used for a search, for example in a search engine like Google. The indication of a search volume always refers to a certain period of time, often to a month, but in the case of shorter-term trends also to a week. Search volume can be offered as an absolute number of searches carried out (most tools, such as the Google Ads Keyword Planner, usually only give very rough rounded values)—or it is given as a relative number (e.g. in Google Trends in relation to the number of all searches).

[5] An important note must be made here: When looking at Google search volume, it is not only important to look at the amount of the search volume. So generic search terms often have a very high search volume, but from an SEO perspective it is very difficult to achieve a good search engine ranking for them. Often it is then moresound approach to focus on three, five or seven other search terms, which may have lower search volumes each, but in total with the same effort generates better placements and more clicks (and thus subsequent awareness). This SEO finding should also be taken into account when prioritizing topics for websites.

Keyword planner from Google Ads (Google search volume)
If you have a Google Ads account, you will also find the Keyword Planner in it. In this you can enter lists of keywords and receive an estimated search volume as "searches per month". You can even narrow down by region or device (mobile, desktop).

Please note: You will only receive more accurate values if you have also spent some money on ads. As long as you don't do that, the Keyword Planner will only give you a very rough estimate of little-medium-much.

In addition: Never interpret the numbers output as 100% exact search volumes, but rather as (but definitely based on reality) rough values.

Google Trends (Google search volume)
Google Trends (trends.google.com) does not provide absolute numbers for search volumes. But on the one hand you can compare several search terms with each other, on the other hand you get time series over several years and can recognize developments. In addition, you can not only receive results for individual search terms, but also for whole topic areas (i.e. for all search terms belonging to this topic area in total).

Social Media Tracker (hashtag and term frequency)
Social media monitoring tools and hashtag trackers show how often a certain term or hashtag was used in social media posts. This is not the search volume, i.e. the number of search queries for a certain term or hashtag. Nevertheless, the frequency of hashtag use in posts can already serve as an indication of which topics are currently more important and which are less important for a target group.

Tools suitable for data collection, some of which are free of charge and some of which are subject to a fee, include BrandMentions, Talkwalker, Hashtagify, Ritetag and others, which can be easily found by a search for "social media monitoring" or "hashtag tracker" in a search engine.

In addition to searches, links can also create new awareness. If a topic is particularly well processed compared to other websites, other websites often set links to their own content marketing posts. However, this usually requires that, in comparison to others, their own content is perceived by the link creators as the best offer on the Internet for this topic, i.e. the best checklist for the topic, particularly good and comprehensive explanations, attractive how-tos etc. in blogs or on other pages of the website. Or, with regard to the topic prioritization considered here: The worse a topic has been processed by others in the past, the higher the chances that other websites will set a link to themselves, thus increasing their own awareness.

However, awareness must not only be created for the first time, but also deepened (see also Sect. 2.2.2.1.2). For this, in addition to the search volume, the focus must also be on the entire portfolio of topics (the content marketing corpus). Here it is not only about placing individual, separate topics, but also about placing complementary and consecutive topics in order to give customers repeated occasions and topics for contact. This applies to the posts of a website magazine just as much as to the series of social media posts or podcast episodes. It is always about showing potential or existing customers that one has something interesting, helpful and entertaining to offer for the various situations and needs in the respective context. This motivates users to use the company's media and content marketing posts again and again (whether by direct call, for example, of the website, by more clicks on the Google search results page or, for example, by following the social media channel). And from this more frequent use, a strength awareness and possibly a more intense customer relationship arises psychologically.

Prioritisation by desired Associations

As already said in Sect. 2.2.2.2, the image "is the perception [of the consumer] through the consumers" and "corresponds to associations and knowledge structures represented in memory" (Moser 2015, p. 378). That is why the desired associations were already used as a factor for generating topic ideas in the life area association method.

If the goal of content marketing is to contribute to the marketing objectives of creating an image for a product, brand, or company, the prioritization of topics for the editorial calendar ultimately follows the question of how the desired image of the image differs from the image in the minds of customers (deviation of corporate image from corporate identity). Topics that cover gaps or deviations—in other words, create or change corresponding associations—are then to be prioritized.

For example, if a provider of lamps and lighting fixtures is not yet known for sustainability, but wants to promote this brand image, he can do this (in addition to a range of other measures) through content marketing. The gap is then closed not only by articles with tips on saving electricity in the area of light, how-tos for operating existing garden lights with solar cells or for disposing of lamps. Stories in which a nature conservation group in the vicinity of the company's headquarters is introduced (which may even have been sponsored by the company) or reports on sustainability on other continents (e.g. initiatives to replace kerosene lamps with solar lamps in Africa) are also suitable topics that promote a desired brand image through suitable associations and lead to a prioritization of such topics.

Other prioritization criteria

In addition to the two prioritization criteria discussed in more detail so far, further criteria for the prioritization of topics and content can be derived from the objectives of content marketing and its advertising effectiveness model (Sect. 2.2). For example, topics can be prioritized that are particularly suitable for building trust. Or topics that support and amplify the effect of a current advertising campaign. If the problem of unsuccessful purchases lies in the social environment or in the lack of skills, then the corresponding topics should be implemented priority.

8 Designing Effective Content Marketing Posts

The topic of a content marketing post, the selection of which we dealt with in the last chapter, generally and briefly summarizes what the article is all about. But how this basic topic is then implemented in terms of content substance and how it can be optimized with regard to advertising effectiveness is what we deal with in this chapter.

The same topic can be implemented in quite different ways: It could be presented in a very superficial or brief way, it could be elaborated or even very extensively and in detail. The content could only take up selected, individual aspects of the topic, the most important of which are addressed or all aspects are presented in detail. The topic could be a factual, factual execution, it could be entertaining, a practical guide, an opinion piece or any other style. And of course, the type of topic implementation also depends on which content formats are available in a given channel (text, image, video, audio available? Possible and meaningful length? Etc.).

8.1 The Accurate Content Substance for a Topic

What content should a content marketing post contain? What are the sub-topics that should be considered and integrated into the article? This is oriented on the one hand to the customers and their diverse interests in this topic, on the other hand again to the desired advertising effect of the respective content marketing post.

Of course, it is not possible to provide a complete guide here on how to work on topics in a editorial way (there are professions and training courses for this,

T. Hörner, *Advertising Impact and Controlling in Content Marketing*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-40551-9_8

e.g. as a journalist or editor, etc.). But we want to give some suggestions specifically from the perspective of online marketing.

You will therefore find some tips in the tip box below that can help you to work out a topic in terms of content and to find interesting questions or relevant content areas for a topic.

▶ **Practice tip: tools for finding suitable content** Two tools will be introduced here briefly, with which you can get various questions and content areas for entered keywords.

Answerthepublic.com

In answerthepublic.com you can enter a keyword, select language and country, and then get a variety of questions about this keyword as well as terms that are content-related to the entered keyword via prepositions (Fig. 8.1).

Keyword.io

The Keyword.io tool also provides suitable term combinations for a given keyword. The special thing about it: You can also distinguish between different data sources, e.g. Google, YouTube, Amazon, Wikipedia, etc.

Question-answer portals

On portals such as https://www.blurtit.com/http://de.answers.yahoo.com or answers.com, Internet users ask each other various questions and give each other answers. Once you have researched what questions are asked about which topics, this can be very inspiring in terms of content.

Discussion forums and groups

There is an online discussion forum or social media group for almost every topic. Sign up there and observe which content aspects of a topic are discussed there. These are also contents that you should consider when implementing a topic as a content marketing post.

When using the mentioned tools, also keep in mind to not only enter the main term of your topic, but also taxonomy terms and associations. This way, you could find content ideas for the product mango, if you also enter taxonomies like “fruit”, “tropical fruit”, but also “mango ice cream” (taxonomy “ice cream flavor”) or “baking ingredient” (mango for topping fruit cake).

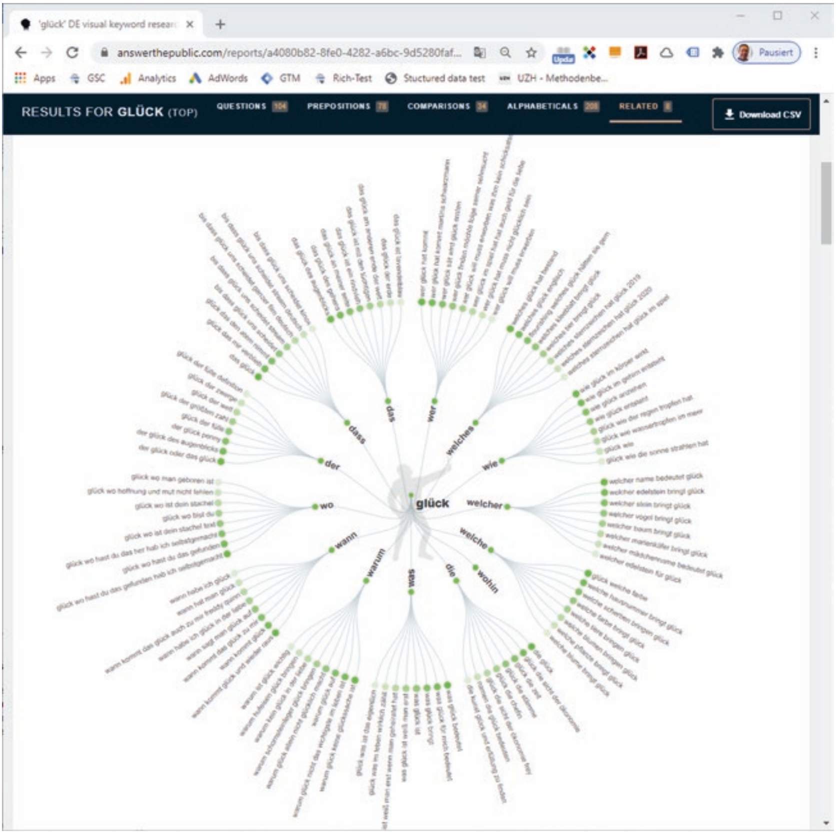

Fig. 8.1 Excerpt from the result of answerthepublic.com

Prioritize content
Just like with topic prioritization, you often can't integrate all possible content about the respective topic in a content marketing post. You also have to prioritize here and possibly select.

This happens again based on the objectives of content marketing and the desired advertising effect.

Take, for example, a bicycle retailer. As part of her content marketing, she wants to create a blog post "E-bikes—what speaks for and against them". This topic was specifically selected havinga specific advertising effect in mind: The retailer has a higher profit margin when selling e-bikes and therefore wants to convince customers to buy (more expensive) e-bikes instead of a classic bicycle. She has already researched and created a good editorial article that neutrally highlights the advantages and disadvantages, but overall is “pro e-bike”.

However, she now wants to further optimize the content. Because she has the e-bike models “Drive 365” and “Welgo Diana” in her range, which she would like to sell more than other models (for example, because her margin is particularly high, because she has particularly many of them in stock, or because she has specialized in such models in order to differentiate herself from competitors or similar). For this content optimization, she now follows the advertising effect model (Sect. 2.2) of content marketing and its psychological background (Chap. 3 and following).

Now the two mentioned e-bike models cannot be advertised as substance of content marketing, since it is not advertising-related by definition. However, the two mentioned models fall into a common taxonomy “e-bikes with particularly strong battery”. The retailer has found an approach and decides to deliberately add knowledge about this taxonomy and associations to the article.

So it no longer just lists—as is the case with so many posts on the Internet—as advantages only the lower effort with e-bikes (for example, with headwind) and shows that these are sportily motivating, enable keeping up with others or facilitate higher weight (for example, child trailer uphill). Now she adds a sub-section “Advantages of strong batteries”[1] and shows there that strong batteries further increase the mobility radius, especially in mountainous terrain offer longer periods of use, even greater weight is no problem and it is no longer so quickly a problem if you forget to plug in the charger. So she creates positive knowledge and a positive attitude towards the taxonomy of “e-bikes with strong batteries”.

And the retailer now decides not only to convey knowledge (about advantages), but also to create further associations and feelings about this taxonomy. She relies on the knowledge from her target group analysis that, for example, just older buyers the topic of family is very important and evokes positive associations. That is why she adds a short video to the blog article, which is published on YouTube, in which the short story of a grandmother is told in a storytelling

[1] From a technical HTML/CSS and SEO perspective, this could be, for example, under the H2 heading “Advantages of e-bikes” then an H3 heading “Advantages of e-bikes with strong batteries”.

format, who visits her astonished family, although they live on a steep mountain road (and the visitor does not look exhausted at all despite the steep climb)—thanks to the particularly strong battery. Positive associations with the topic of family arise.

The retailer goes one step further: she wants to reduce the effect of negative beliefs. Because she had to, in order to make the contents of the article customer-oriented, neutral and editorial-journalistic (and thus also promote her image as a fair retailer), also address the disadvantage of energy consumption and electricity costs with e-bikes—which of course is particularly negative when strong batteries are used. To weaken this, she relies on taxonomies again. But this time she does not look for higher-level taxonomies, but looks at how the taxonomy electricity can be divided into lower subgroups (in the hierarchy lower taxonomies). This is how she comes across eco-electricity and cheap electricity, for example, and decides to include these as content in the blog article on advantages and disadvantages of e-bikes, for example as a "tip for reducing costs and sustainable electricity consumption".

In total, the trader has not only posted another post about advantages and disadvantages of e-bikes compared to traditional bicycles on the Internet, of which there are already very many there. Rather, she has created a post that achieves better advertising effectiveness in terms of her marketing goals. And at the same time she even offers Google more comprehensive, deeper content that could also give her an advantage in terms of SEO or Google ranking and thus multiply the advertising effect.

8.2 Contents as Cognitively Processed Arguments

Content affects us as humans in two ways: on the one hand when we think about it, on the other hand through more unconscious effects. Or, to put it more precisely using the Elaboration-Likelihood Model from Chap. 4: effect is created on the one hand through more intensive cognitive processing on the central ELM route and with less cognitive processing by means of processes of the peripheral route—with stronger attitudes being created on the central route, which is desirable for marketing.

It is above all strong arguments that are responsible for advertising effectiveness on this central route. But what makes a good, convincing argument and how more advertising effectiveness can be generated through good arguments in content marketing (but just as in advertising marketing communication), the following explanations should show.

The problem of good arguments in psychology

Unfortunately, the ELM research, which emphasizes the importance of arguments, does not give much insight into what a good argument[2] actually is. Even the creators of the ELM pointed out in 1986 that although there were a number of research approaches to when an argument was convincing, only accompanying factors such as the number of repetitions or the importance of the sender were usually examined. The question of when an argument is convincing itself or what makes the respective argument a good argument would hardly be researched (Petty and Cacioppo 1986, p. 31).

Petty and Cacioppo deliberately avoided this question and for their research only separated strong from weak arguments theoretically, but merely empirically through pretests (Petty and Cacioppo 1986, p. 32). And even several decades later, Corner and Hahn still complain about the continuing research deficit when they write in 2009: "The absence of such a theory has been repeatedly noted in the social psychological literature on persuasion" (Corner and Hahn 2009, p. 200).

When explanations for "good arguments" are made from the tradition of advertising research or psychology, arguments are mainly considered purely relational, i.e. the argument quality is only dependent on the perceiving person, not on the argument itself and its structure. This view of psychology is certainly important, but also only a limited point of view. Therefore, many psychological works have the problem that the terms are often not distinguished between the argument itself and its (relational) effect or between the argument quality and the argument effect.[3]

8.2.1 If and when an Argument is Convincing

What is a good and convincing argument? In addition to psychology and marketing, other research traditions can also contribute interesting insights. So philosophy has been concerned for millennia with the question of what a good argument is.[4]

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[2] In ELM research, the terms "strong argument" or "argument quality" are usually used.

[3] The further philosophical question of whether an argument only has an existence in the thinking of a person (and is therefore only relational) or whether an argument is an independent entity that is not dependent on human consciousness, should not be further elaborated here, as it would hardly contribute anything to the actual question of this book and lead to a very fundamental philosophical discussion.

[4] The philosophical discussion of good arguments focuses to a large extent on the question of arguments for the scientific process of cognition and less on advertising persuasion. However, the insights gained there can also be transferred very well, since in both cases it is not a fundamentally different form of argumentation, but only different argument contents.

Philosopher Stephen E. Toulmin has presented a model for the question of strong arguments—or more precisely: for the structure of such arguments (Toulmin 1958, 2008). This model is widely recognized and also suitable for argument-based marketing (Deighton 1985).

Messages and arguments—understanding these conceptions

From a media theory perspective, media—and thus content marketing publications in these media—first transmit a large number of **messages** to recipients. This is their basic characteristic and the central task of media (in which marketing communication also takes place).

Now "a message can be described as consisting primarily of a series fo belief statements, each linking some objects tu an attribute, such as another object, a concept, an event or a goal." (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975, p. 458). But these statements or the resulting messages are not yet an argument.

Only a series of such statements that claim to hold a conclusion rational (but not necessarily objective) for true, is in turn also called **"argument"**[5] . And only such a series of messages can then change attitudes via the processes of the central ELM route and act as persuasive communication.

However, it should also be taken into account that messages and arguments can not only be conveyed in textual form or factually. If a protagonist is seen in a YouTube film who looks happy, this sends as much of a message as the purely visible use of fresh (instead of industrial) food. And a series of such (not necessarily textual, but also optical and partly emotional) messages can lead to a conclusion and is an argument in our sense, too.

According to Toulmin's model, a good argument needs at least three elements: In addition to the actual statement (the claim), there is an evidende (a proof) and a warrant (a justification). To these three indispensable elements, further elements can be added to the argument to make it even stronger.

In order to argue convincingly, it is therefore not enough to simply make a statement, for example, to say "E-bikes have a positive effect on the well-being of older people". Rather, there is "one distinction to start with: between the claim or conclusion whose merits we are seeking to establish (C) and the facts we appeal to as a foundation for the claim—that I shall refer to as out data (D)." (Toulmin 2008, p. 90). We could therefore extend this example to "E-bikes have a positive effect on the well-being of older people because they increase their radius of action despite physical limitations". It is immediately clear that such an argument is already much more convincing because evidence is added to the claim.

[5] "An argument is a series of statements with the claim that part of these statements (the premises) support a sentence of the series (the conclusion) in the sense that it is rational to hold the conclusion to be true if the premises are true" (Beckermann 2014, p. 4).

However, this is still not a perfect argument. The facts in the proof (evidence) on which the claim is based are not sufficient on their own—the argument is still incomplete. Because in addition to making a claim **(claim)** and providing facts **(data, evidence),** both still need to be related. “At this point, therefore, what are needed are general, hypothetical statements, which can act as bridges, and authorise the sort of step to which our particular argument commits us.” (Toulmin 2008, p. 91): the justification **(warrant)**. “Our task is no longer to strengthen the ground on which our argument is constructed, but is rahter to show that, taking these data as a starting point, the step to the original claim or conclusion is an appropriate an legitimate one” (Toulmin 2008, p. 91).

For our example just mentioned, this could look like this, for example: “E-bikes have a positive effect on the well-being of older people because they increase their radius of action despite physical limitations, as a new study by the University of XY demonstrates”. A university study (warrant) is therefore used to establish the connection between the better well-being (claim) and the justification used for this (the increased radius of action; data, evidence).

Such arguments lead (in content marketing, but also in general) more likely to a change in attitude and stronger attitudes. When designing content marketing content, therefore, attention should be paid to this principle of argumentation at appropriate points. However, for attractive content marketing, it is also important in practice to find out that the mental structure of an argument is decisive, not its implementation (e.g. the formulation as a long text is not necessary).

For example, whether the above good argument for e-bikes, as made here in this book, is implemented as a worded sentence, the argument is recognizable as part of storytelling in a video from story elements, it is shown in the form of a graphic or infographic or an image , or another preparation is chosen, is not decisive for the quality of the argument itself (although with poor implementation for its comprehensibility).

It is therefore worth checking a content marketing post once more before it is published to see if central arguments are available in Toulmin’s structure and, if necessary, to supplement elements for advertising effectiveness.

What can be used as a warrant?

Since the warrant or justification is a central part of good arguments, we would like to briefly observe how such warrants can be constructed in practice.

A frequently used type of warrant is the **reference to an authority**. This can be a scientific authority (e.g. university study, quotation of a scientist, etc.), a recognized expert, a social figure or even the own authority of the person or institution publishing the content. Crucial to such warrants, however, is that the relevant authority is not only known to the authors (i.e. you as the organization publishing the content), but especially by the recipients (in marketing: the target group) it is recognized accordingly.

Also the **appeal to logic** is used often as a warrant. This class of warrants also includes calculations or formulas. This type of warrant is effective in a society strongly shaped by technical and natural sciences. Nevertheless, it is important to ensure the traceability of the logical argumentation especially for the people in the target group. Just because you see the logic as an author, this is not necessarily the case for the recipients.

A warrant can also refer to **general knowledge** and **common experiences**. So "as more and more people are orienting themselves towards sustainability" is general knowledge or "as every mother has experienced" is a common experience that can be relied upon—as long as the recipients are among those who have this knowledge or these experiences themselves.

In addition, general attitudes, such as **values, social norms, laws, etc.,** can serve as warrants. "As is common in our society" would be an example of such a warrant—at least as long as the recipients also recognize this social norm (which may no longer be the case in another generation).

Finally, **examples** "that demonstrate that" can be used as warrants, even if they are weaker and less effective than other warrants.

Further elements of good arguments

In his book on good arguments, Toulmin introduces further elements, such as backing, which in turn secures the credibility of the warrant, as well as modalities and rebuttals.

So it is important to provide support for the warrant and to include possible counter-arguments in the argumentation. The effectiveness of including such potential counter-arguments directly in one's own argument, which results from the philosophical approach according to Toulmin, is also confirmed by psychological research (Hastak and Park 1990).

For those interested in the question of good argumentation, it is definitely worth taking a look at "An introduction to reasoning" (Toulmin et al. 1984) or "The uses of argument" (Toulmin 2008) for more details and background information.

8.2.2 Relationally Effective Arguments

However, the sole focus on the argument structure as the justification for a "good argument" from the last section cannot be maintained once arguments are used in a real communication process, perceived by real people and processed cognitively by them—as is of course always the case in content marketing.

Media effects are always relational. This means: The substance or the argument itself is not effective on its own, but the interplay of these contents with the recipient. The effect does not originate from the argument itself, but from the respective different cognitive processing by the recipients, that is, by very individual people.

Already Watzlawick recognizes in his communication model (Watzlawick et al. 1969) that communication is never purely factual-rational. “It is emphasized that in human communication [and thus also the communication of arguments; note by the author], it is not only about the factual exchange of information, but that sending and receiving information is interest-oriented” (Röhner 2016, p. 29). And in a similar way, (Schulz von Thun 2011, pp. 25–43) develops his communication square, in which, in addition to the actual factual content (here: the fact-oriented argument according to Toulmin), an appeal to the receiver, a self-revelation of the sender and a relationship aspect are always communicated. All this demonstrates that it is not about the factual-rational, not about exactly the same effect of information and arguments for all people in the sense of an identical, machine-like processing.

Finally, both the ELM and Toulmin (who speaks of “audience”) point to this relational effect. Their cause lies in the fact that the arguments in the content meet different prior knowledge, existing beliefs and attitudes, etc. with each individual recipient. So it may well be that a consumer already has the belief that minerals in mineral water have a positive effect on health. At the same time, however, he has the belief that mineral waters are more expensive the more minerals they contain, and in addition the taste suffers. Another consumer, on the other hand, has since long developed the belief that there are also cheap mineral waters with minerals, but he sees (perhaps because of the small quantities in a single bottle) no importance for health. This second consumer has never thought about the question of taste and therefore has no belief about it. But both exemplary consumers have developed a negative attitude towards mineral waters with many minerals in total (their respective individual beliefs)—but for different reasons.

The decisive conclusion for content marketing: It is not enough to provide only one argument (to find “THE best argument”). Rather, content must be structured in such a way that this—the same content—offers suitable arguments for each individual recipient (for example, in our example for all very different mineral water consumers). Different intended effects on existing, individual beliefs (and thus the attitude) must be triggered by the same content. Content must therefore argue in a variety of ways (and not just in the way that would make sense and be effective for the author himself). So you should realize that you are not developing content for a target group of similar people, but for a large number of very individual people who may need different arguments.

The sender-receiver model according to Shannon and Weaver—unsuitable for human communication (and content marketing). And: How communication really works.
Unfortunately, the sender-receiver model of communication by Shannon and Weaver (Shannon and Weaver 1975, c1949) is still used unreflectively when communication is considered, according to which in a communication a sender (source) encodes a message in such a way that it can be transmitted over a communication channel (medium) and this signal is transformed back into an understood message by the receiver.

This model, which is strongly influenced by mathematics and technology, is quite justified when it comes to technical transmission of information. However, it is unsuitable if it comes to human communication (even if it is—especially in popular science books and unfortunately also partly in scientific papers—used again and again for this purpose).

The problem underlying this false use of the sender-receiver model is that in this an information source (the sender) has a message to send, which is then encoded appropriately for the transmitting medium in a signal and this is transmitted (possibly under the influence of interference). The receiver site decodes the received signal back into the original message, so that it reaches the receiver.

But the process that a communicating person has a thought, then transforms it for transmission in a medium (whether as spoken words for the medium "air" or as words, drawn sketches or similar in a book or on a website) and on the other hand another person again makes a back-transformation to understand the statement, appears to be very similar. On closer inspection, it is not at all.

The starting point of the Shannon-Weaver model is, after all, some kind of information that is to be transmitted. Shannon explicitly names "a sequence of letters", "light intensity at different points" (e.g. with TV signals) or a signal that changes over time (e.g. the sound with radio). This information must be encoded for a transmission medium, e.g. in electrical signals for telegraph performance or electromagnetic waves for radio transmission to a receiver.

It is quite different with human communication. Here, messages to be transmitted have meaning in many ways. They want to convey facts (factual meaning) clearly, always contain a relationship aspect between the communicators, reveal something of the personality of the communicating person and—directly or indirectly—transmit appeals and expectations (see, for example, (Schulz von Thun 2011, pp. 25–43)). These complex messages of a person then have to be encoded in a symbol system, for example letters, sounds or gestures. It is immediately clear: This encoding of content-including messages by a sender into a symbol system and the result of this encoding is what the Shannon-Weaver model is only the starting point for (there called "sender"). What is meant by "encoding in human communication" is preceded to what is meant by "encoding in the communication model" by Shannon and Weaver. Only when the encoding is carried out in the sense of human communication and the message is available in the form of a symbol system, the sender-receiver model of Shannon and Weaver can be applied to these symbols from the starting point. And so the terms “sender”, “message” and “encoding” mean completely different things in both cases.

Even the developers of the sender-receiver model of communication were already aware of this and Shannon himself deliberately excludes the question of the meaning of a message (which is central to models of human communication) from his sender-receiver model: “messages have *meaning* … these semantic aspects of communication are irrelevant to the engineering problem” (Shannon 1948, p. 379). Only later authors often overlooked this fact when they adapted this model to human communication.

Much more suitable for the consideration of human communication is the model of Ballstaedt (Ballstaedt 2019, p. 23). The decisive difference: Here a message is not “transferred” or “carried” from the sender to the receiver. Rather, a message is encoded in a message of signs (of any symbol system) and finally emitted. But this encoding is influenced by knowledge (linguistic knowledge, world knowledge, situational knowledge, personal knowledge, experience) as well as motives and intentions of the communicators.

So NO transmission of the actual message takes place in the media, but ONLY of symbols that represent this message—more or less well. The recipient of a message (now deliberately no longer called “receiver”) now interprets these received symbols. But that is neither a passive “receiving” nor an “exact reproduction” (decoding) of the original message (as would be the case in a technical transmitter-receiver system according to Shannon and Weaver).

Much rather, an active interpretation of the symbols takes place on the basis of one’s own motivation and intention and the knowledge of the receiver. But since knowledge and intention always differ from sender to receiver (because we are different people with—more or less—different backgrounds), this interpretation will always lead to a—more or less—different message than originally intended by the sender (hopefully at least to a very similar one).

What is decisive for successful communication is that sender and recipient have at least a common knowledge and a shared intention with regard to the content of communication. If this is not the case, communication either does not take place at all, is faulty or leads to the typical communication problems.

The **quality of arguments** (engl. “argument quality”) is based on this relational perspective of human communication on two factors: the argument strength (engl. “argument strength”) and the argument valance (engl. “argument valance”).

The **argument strength** is, according to Areni, the subjectively perceived probability by the receiver that there is indeed a connection between the statements made in the argument and possible consequences with regard to one’s own attitudes (Areni and Lutz 1988). The logical-linguistic evaluation of the argument is thus supplemented by a heuristic evaluation, which in turn is influenced by existing knowledge, existing beliefs and the individual attitudes that exist in the respective person. The same argument can therefore have a different strength for each individual, which is not determined logically-rationally (not even consciously), but with heuristic principles (a little sloopy: with thumb rules and from the gut).

The second factor, **argument valence,** is, however, the assessment or importance of these consequences for the recipient[6] (Areni and Lutz 1988). An argument is therefore all the stronger, the more important the resulting consequences are for the respective person. This also relates to attitudes and evaluations of the respective recipient of communication.

Consequences for good content marketing

What does this all mean for content marketing? First of all, it offers us the insight that there can be no "absolutely and generally perfect" or "the absolutely and generally best arguments" for content marketing contents. Or, as it can be formulated in the language of marketing: Content marketing and, in particular, convincing arguments must always be developed appropriately and for the target group in order to be effective. Therefore, always consider with regard to the statements in your content whether the (possibly also individually different) persons of the target group really have the knowledge to be able to understand the underlying arguments in the same way as you do.

An example for the clarification based on a warrant that must also be comprehensible and accepted by the respective target group: "…, as every mother knows from her own experience" is, if it is about experiences that really every mother knows, certainly a good warrant that can strengthen an argument. However, only if the target group really consists exclusively of mothers who can also hark back on the respective experience—otherwise the warrant would be worthless and the argument in the content is weaker for other recipients (other women who are not mothers, men, etc.).

However, we can also derive further recommendations for content marketing from the relational effect on higher levels: on the level of a content marketing post and on the level of the entire content marketing of a company.

So there are also very different people within a clearly defined target group with very different ways of thinking and attitudes. While one part of the target group is more inclined to accept logical explanations, others are more convinced by good examples and others are more convinced by the reference to an author-

[6] "That leads to the characterization of argument quality as comprised of two separate components, argument strength and argument valence. Argument strength is defined as the audience's subjective probability that the attitude object is associated with some outcome or consequence. Argument valence is the audience's evaluation of that consequence" (Areni and Lutz 1988).

ity (e.g. scientific study). The same argument therefore has a different relational effect even within the target group to be addressed. You can encounter this in a content marketing article by providing a certain statement not only in one, but **several different ways** as an argument. For example, in one place in a blog post you could refer more to a survey result or the quote of a scientist, in another place argue (in addition) similar again with reference to logic or generally accepted values. That way you create the possibility of achieving the greatest possible effect of your content with very many different people in your target group.

And you can also do something similar on an even higher level, namely your overall planning of content marketing: Again and again, look for posts (blog articles, YouTube video, social media post, etc.) that complement each other from the perspective of relational argument strength and address different people.

> **When two ways are not alternative, but correct at the same time** Again and again there are discussions in practice of the type “but I would do it this way” versus “so from my point of view it is better differently” etc. And in the end one opinion prevails. With the knowledge of the relational effect of content, you can now use such discussions positively: For you it is not about which point of view is “the right one”, but about collecting as many points of view as possible (and checking which of them are also widespread in the target group) and subsequently improving the content if necessary so that different points of view are represented in it—in order to reach more potential customers and not only those who have the same way of thinking as you as an author. Because when writing (or creating a video or choosing a photo, etc.), it is ultimately not about including something from your point of view into the content, but about creating content so that this addresses as many different people in your target group as possible—or, to put it another way, with a view to Ballstadt: to create media content in such a way that as many—individually different—people develop similar thoughts when interpreting (your communication) in a way you wanted while creating the media.

Secondly, the argument value provides good suggestions for the design of content: If, for example, relevant consequences strengthen an argument (and thus an attitude) for a person, then it makes sense to make them clearer for the content recipients.

Suppose a blog article provides an overview of the types of computer mice that are available. It is also shown that there are ergonomic mice. Such a post may be interesting, for example, for a manufacturer or dealer in order to make potential customers aware of themselves (awareness, for example, through SEO), to demonstrate their own competence (image building) or to promote the sale of ergonomic mice with higher profit margins.

This content article would have a much better effect (especially with regard to the latter goals), if not only generally pointed out that ergonomic mice offer health benefits, but specifically the argument value is strengthened by showing consequences, for example by means of hints to “save yourself weeks of tendonitis pain” or “as a freelancer avoid income losses due to unnecessary diseases of the wrist and arm”. In this way, content recipients are made aware of possible consequences that they had not considered or considered to be less important so far, the argument value and thus the effect of the argument increases, the attitude towards ergonomic mice is influenced and thus ultimately the purchasing behavior is changed.

So check your content marketing posts again and again to see if specific consequences are actively demonstrated next to your statements. This will increase the quality and effectiveness of your content.

And you can also use the question of the argument value as a criterion for content optimization when planning the topics for content marketing. For example, check your editorial calendar again and again to see if it contains content articles that occasionally address such consequences (positive and negative) in terms of content. For a florist, topics could be “healthier sleep through air-purifying plants” or “feeling better with …” just as suitable as for an office supplies provider posts on “working more efficiently …” or in the form of “XY is easier to handle”. Even if individual products are not specifically advertised in such posts as content marketing, it is possible to deal with product groups (respectively taxonomies) and also to mention individual products as examples in an editorial style (and possibly then to link directly to the online shop).

Personalization in online marketing—the psychologically accurate way

The findings from this section on the relational effect of content also support the online marketing trend towards more personalization, individualization and more precise, person-related targeting—after all, statements and arguments are better targeted to the existing constitution of the person being advertised.

They also speak very much in favor of approaches to data-driven content marketing, which is aimed in a similar direction—even if this is used less frequently in practice and the mechanisms seem to be less developed.

So the knowledge about the relational effect of argument strength and the importance of consequences for argument strength can contribute to a more targeted topic planning, a better structure of posts and a more targeted formulation of statements—for more effective content marketing.

8.3 Designing Content with Cues for Automatic and Unconscious Effects

Not every human decision is well thought out, not always are arguments intensively and logically-rationally thought through. We humans are not even capable of this. And so the opposite holds true : The vast majority of our decisions and behavior are influenced by processes that require no or little cognitive activity. Then information related to this decision is not analyzed and thought through in detail, but only skimmed, judged, estimated, etc. These quick, superficial impressions still have an effect.

This also applies to content marketing: The topics overview of the website magazine is only quickly skimmed, the blog article is only quickly scrolled through or a YouTube video is only followed uninterestedly on the sideline. Maybe the reader was tired, distracted by something, unfocused for other reasons, had no time or just didn't want to use the and think through the content marketing substance intensively. And unfortunately this is rather the rule than the exception (even if it is often imagined and desired differently in marketing departments).

But that doesn't mean that content marketing would be useless then. It can also have an advertising effect in such situations—not through arguments and more intensive cognitive activity, but through other psychological processes. How content marketing can be designed to achieve this will be shown in the following sections.[7]

[7] It should be mentioned here once again that, from a psychological point of view, **neither** cognitive processing of arguments **nor** the effects described below take place, but always both effects take place at the same time. If there is more cognitive activity, only the effect of arguments on the central ELM route is much more important for the overall effect than the effects described here, which then have a more supplementary and supporting effect. However, if a person has only low cognitive activity, these effects become much more important and, if necessary, become primarily responsible for the advertising effect.

8.3.1 Heuristics and Affects Determine Attitudes and Behavior

In many cases, people only have limited knowledge for a decision because the required knowledge is really not available, there is no time to process it cognitively, one simply has no motivation to do so, the mental capacities are lacking for other reasons, etc. In such cases, it is the so-called cues that determine the formation of attitudes and decisions (including purchase decisions). Then probable or emotional conclusions are madeby so-called heuristic processes and affects. In the Elaboration-Likelihood-Model (Chap. 4) these are the effects via the peripheral route.

In heuristic processes, "which are assumed to be learned and stored in memory like other knowledge structures (e.g. 'expert opinions can be trusted', 'length implies strength', 'majority opinion is right')" (Chen and Chaiken 2000, p. 74), attitudes are formed by such previously learned evaluation criteria. So in content marketing, for example, not all 15 arguments in a content marketing post are actively read and thought through, but only the mere number of arguments is interpreted as positive: "if there are so many arguments for it, then I take it as accurate, I don't even have to read the individual arguments" would be such a heuristic assessment.

Important for the understanding of the psychological effect of such heuristics: Such conclusions do not have to be thought out consciously or decided rationally. It is sufficient, possibly even completely unconsciously, to notice the number of arguments (for example, in content marketing easily recognizable due to a numbered list, many relevant subheadings, etc.), in order to generate to such an assessment immediately. In the above example, a customer may not remember the number of arguments at all, may not have even noticed the number consciously and may not have thought about the number at all and may not have known that this had an effect on his attitude or decision—despite this effect having occurred in him.

Heuristics are therefore schemas that were often formed on the basis of previous experience or that are firmly anchored in human psychology. They work without the person concerned having to think about it or being aware of it.

People have a large number of these heuristics. It is necessary to address them in order to make content marketing effective even when it is not thought about intensively (including low involvement).

In the following, some selected and proven effects in psychological research are presented by way of example.

8.3.2 "Much" (or "Little") has an Effect

A heuristic that is often applied by people takes the sheer number of something as a basis for evaluation—regardless of the actual content.

An example shows this quickly: Let's assume that there are 9 advantages for an E-bike for a normal bicycle only 4 advantages—which of the two would you prefer spontaneously, without knowing more? Most people would only name the E-bike immediately because of the number of advantages—without having heard or read any of these advantages. And this decision is made spontaneously and without thinking about it at all. Only when you start to do this (think about it consciously), the decision may be different again. Then you become more critical and weigh up rationally—and only now do you come to the idea that there may be 9 small insignificant advantages for the E-bike, but 4 very important and large advantages for the normal bicycle, which is why it would actually be preferable and you would first need more information.

As long as you, for example, do not have time and motivation to think about the matter mentally, only the number itself acts as a cue and influences our attitudes (in the Elaboration-Likelihood-Model (ELM) as a process of the peripheral route, in the Heuristic-Systematic-Model (HSM) as a heuristic process).

Achieving Content Marketing Effectiveness through visible numbers
How can a large (or deliberately small) number work best within content marketing? The most important thing: it must be recognizable at first glance and easy to see.

For example, in a comma-separated list within the text, the number is much harder to see and is therefore—even with exactly the same choice of words—much less effective than a well-visible presentation as bullet points, in a table or in some other way made recognizable through graphical design elements. Or, in a video that addresses different points one after the other, you could give a short overview of the total number of aspects addressed later in the video right at the beginning, in order to make their number immediately clear (and thus achieve an advertising effect if the rest of the video is not completely viewed and processed cognitively) or, every time an aspect is mentioned, show a successive number.

However, when assessing a *Content Marketing element,* the number of words or lines (the length of the piece), and possibly the number of subheadings, also play a role. For example, they determine whether we classify a blog post as superficial or well-founded (and possibly convincing) before the first word is read. Dealing with important topics in your content marketing (for example, because of time constraints at your job, etc.) only briefly and quickly (and thus creating more content than good content), has rather negative consequences: you invest workload in content marketing that then has hardly any effect on many people who do not think about it any further and more intensively—although it could have a positive effect with good (and then unfortunately also somewhat time-consuming) contenet marketing design.[8]

> **Shorter online texts—because longer texts are not read anyway???** In practice, one often hears the argument that "texts on websites or in social media should not be too long, because anyway nobody reads them so extensively". This assessment is based on the—quite correct—observation that longer texts are often not read or only read completely with high motivation in front of the screen. Often websites are only roughly "scanned" or "skimmed through", only the first paragraphs are read, only headings are viewed etc. In social media, posts are often quickly scrolled through, pictures are viewed and texts are often not or only the first lines are read.
>
> So correct the description of this user behavior in the use of media is, so wrong is the conclusion to make only short texts. With such an argumentation it is not taken into account that longer explanations (texts, number of pictures, …) can have effects even if they are not read—as the explanation of heuristic effects or of cues shows by way of example. In addition, content-related comprehensive (and thus usually longer) texts tend to have better effects on Google[9] and search engine rankings.
>
> There are therefore several reasons to make content more comprehensive, even if this is not accessed at all by a good part of the users, not completely or only in part.

[8] However, this remark must not lead to the conclusion that one should simply write a lot of text. If this is done in the style of "a lot written, but little said", it may be long, but if it is not very informative, it would leave such a bad impression on the people who read it (and process it cognitively) that the actually positive effect of the length would be canceled out or turned into a negative.

[9] For the sake of accuracy, it should be pointed out here that, in contrast to the psychological effect on the peripheral ELM route, it is not the mere number of words that plays the main role in a ranking for search engines, but rather the content-related comprehensiveness and quality (which often results in a higher number of words).

Level of observation: Content marketing corpus
A content marketing with extensive selection of posts (e.g. a website magazine with many articles, a social media account with a larger number of posts, a YouTube channel with many videos, etc.) can lead to a change in attitude solely on the basis of this number of posts—even if they would not be accessed. Therefore, one should not orient oneself exclusively on (in itself very valuable!) view and reach statistics when it comes to the effect of content marketing.

Thus, a large number of posts can spontaneously lead to the belief by means of heuristic processes that the operator of a website (e.g. an e-commerce retailer) has a competence in the relevant area, since she has a lot of information to offer. The attitude towards website and webshop would be positively influenced.

For example, which trader would you rate as more likely to be better and more competent without actively thinking about it? One who offers only 12 video posts in his gardening magazine on YouTube, or one with 148 videos? Or a social media account with 10,435 followers versus 392 followers? And so on. The customer's attitude is heuristic, even before the first post is read or the first video is viewed.

Of course, the attitude could change again later if the 12 posts are also viewed, processed cognitively and rated as very helpful, while the 148 posts turn out to be superficial and uninteresting. But: Part of potential customers will not even come to this (and prefer a competitor's webshop), on the other hand, the effect of the heuristic attitude formation remains even if the cognitive processes mainly determine the final attitude.[10]

This effect can also be used thematically: For example, a larger number of posts dealing with the topic of sustainability would automatically result in the respective sender (the company, the brand, etc.) being perceived as more sustainable.[11]

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[10] In addition to these psychological, heuristic effects, reference is made here to Chap. 6: Search engines or social media algorithms also react to the number of posts, the scope of the content and the number of reactions. For example, a larger number of posts dealing with the topic of sustainability would automatically result in the respective sender (the company, the brand, etc.) being perceived as more sustainable.

[11] It should be noted that this example does not argue for greenwashing and simply communicating a lot about sustainability in order to create a corresponding (false) impression. Although this would work purely psychologically, it can quickly lead to very negative shitstorms. However, if a company is really committed to sustainability, content marketing can indeed achieve a advertising effect (e.g. on the image) through corresponding activities with the mentioned effect.

Finally, it should also be noted that usually not quantity or substance acts, but often both at the same time in different weights. So with a long list of arguments, time and motivation of the customer might be enough to process the first and the last[12] argument cognitively. But then it is simply stopped (reading or watching the video) and the further arguments are omitted. So a few arguments work cognitively, but then there is a heuristic rule "if there are 20 [more; note by the author] reasons that speak for it, it must be worth it" (Petty and Wegener 2000, p. 48; Petty and Cacioppo 1984).

8.3.3 "Again and Again" Works

In addition to the effect of the number, a frequent presentation of content can also act as a cue, again regardless of the actual substance. So if a customer again and again comes across certain communication topics of content marketing, this increases its effect.[13]

This effect is also called the mere-exposure effect in psychology and is proven in many studies (Bornstein 1989). This also applies to the effect of advertising media in marketing (Schumann et al. 1990). In addition to the stronger effect on the formation of attitudes (extremity), these are also more persistent and resistant to change (Haugtvedt et al. 1994), that is, stronger.

In content marketing, based on this effect, *elements* can be repeated several times in articles, e.g. the multiple mention of the same, important argument for the desired advertising effect (possibly implemented in different word choice or in different media formats) in a blog post or video. If this is done discreetly and not obtrusively, the advertising effect can be specifically increased.

The mere-exposure effect would also suggest using and presenting a blog, video, or social media post multiple times, e.g. teasing important content market-

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[12] Studies show that with enumerations, lists, etc. really often only the first and the last items are read. In addition, 5 to 7 points are more often perceived completely, but lists with more items are often only partially. 10 advantages therefore work better because of their number than only 4—but the 4 would probably also be perceived more consciously.

[13] It should also be noted at this point that the conclusion "a lot of advertising helps a lot" is not wrong, but also has its limits. "It has been shown that the preference [for a brand; note by the author] increases with the increasing number of exposures, but then decreases again" (Olson and Mathias Thjømøe 2003, p. 244). Or said more crudely: You can also overdo it with advertising.

ing posts in two issues of the newsletter or in several social media posts, or displaying it more prominently in the website's own search function. However, this must be done very aware and must not lead to "simply repeating everything possible". And: A sensible presentation frequency must always be considered from the perspective of the customer and not from that of the company (i.e. not just unreflectively: because it is important to us, we do it again). With a little bit of sensitivity, however, a more frequent presentation of *content marketing posts* or certain topics can indeed increase the effect.

On the observation level of the *content marketing corpus,* the mere exposure effect would mean that customers repeatedly come across the content marketing offerings by the concerning advertiser during their internet activities. In addition to the pure memory effect, this frequency would already contribute positively to attitude formation. For example, a frequent appearance of the domain of a webshop on the search result pages of Google and Co. caused by content marketing also supports the positive attitude towards this shop, even if the search results are not clicked at all (which of course is still desirable in order to achieve even more effect). If the customer later searches for a product or sees an advertisement, the probability that this very webshop will be chosen or the advertising medium clicked increases. Content marketing would have achieved an advertising effect, even without it being accessed at all (simply because its existence was often perceived).

8.3.4 Expertise, Trustworthiness and Attractiveness

You would certainly attribute more expertise in plant pests to a stranger with a large and beautiful garden than to a friend who does not have a garden. However, the same advice on the relationship with your partner would have little effect on this stranger, but the same advice from the good friend who has a happy relationship would have had much more effect on you. However, both mentioned people would probably only be accepted to a very limited extent by you for occupational issues.

The effect of communication content therefore depends not only on the actual content, but also on its sender. The same information can have different effects, depending on who it comes from. And this effect becomes all the more important the less the actual information is cognitively thought about.

An important criterion which has a positive effect on the perception of the sender is the expertise which is attributed to an information source for a specific topic. In this context, "expertise" is not to be equated exclusively with a professional expert status. In addition to such a professional expert status, "being experienced", "being versed" or "being able" (and many other things) can contribute to the perception of expertise with regard to a specific topic. For example, a person who has bought and used a certain product would be attributed expertise for this product (and if they have used it for a very long time, then they would be attributed even higher expertise).[14] A person introduced as an "IT administrator" would certainly be attributed expertise in virus protection solely on the basis of their job title. And another person is attributed expertise because they have been publicly expressing themselves on a certain topic for a very long time.

So how can content marketing be designed more effectively with this knowledge?

One initial approach to this lies in the level of observation of *content marketing elements*. For example, individual pieces of information in a post can become more effective by mentioning their source (a source with expertise). And if posts are not thought through completely by consumers, this effect might provide an effect that would not have occurred otherwise. So by referring to sources, you achieve a double effect: On the one hand, sources are good when arguments are built up and actively thought through (see Sect. 8.2.1), on the other hand, they have an effect through heuristics even when the argument itself is not intensively perceived or thought through at all.

If you look at the level of *content marketing posts,* guest articles by acknowledged topic experts, for example, as articles in your own blog, guest videos on YouTube or the "weekly guest post" in social media, can provide such cues and thus achieve more effect through peripheral, heuristic processes than if only the company itself were the sender.

The effect of guest authors or social take-overs

Guest authors have several positive effects. On the one hand, the positive heuristic processes described here (unconscious effects, simply because the relevant author appears) have an effect. On the other hand, the effect of a cognitively processed post may be higher because it comes from such a guest author and not from the company itself, which is otherwise the sender of the content marketing content. And finally, the image of the guest author, such as trustworthiness, quality, sustainability, etc., is also transferred to the organizations image that is offering the content.

It is therefore worth considering the usage of external authors or take-overs of accounts in social media from time to time in content marketing.

[14] For example, customer reviews would therefore have a stronger effect in marketing if it were communicated that a person giving the review had not bought the product for the first time, but had bought it several times before.

Another approach would be to implement posts in the content format of an interview. Instead of writing an editorial essay, a similar content can be conveyed as an interview and interview partners can be deliberately chosen according to whom the target group attributes thematic expertise.

But customers can also radiate corresponding expertise, be it in guest articles or interviews. A customer who has already been on the road by bicycle for many thousands of kilometers in her spare time will certainly be recognized as an expert if quality criteria for bicycle panniers are discussed in a content marketing article. And especially if the substance of this article is only consumed superficially by part of the recipients (not processed cognitively intensively, for example the video is only watched in the background), the quality criteria mentioned would be rated as more important and have a greater influence on a purchase decision than if they had simply been presented without such a person with expertise.

Attractiveness and likeability in content marketing

Also affective (emotional) characteristics of an information source are important for the effects. This includes in particular the much researched dimension "attractiveness", which, next to expertise and trustworthiness, is one of the three pillars of the Source Credibility Scale (Ohanian 1990). So it has been proven in numerous studies that information sources perceived as attractive have a higher persuasiveness than less attractive ones—even with exactly the same content communicated. And already the developers of the Elaboration-Likelihood-Model name this "source attractiveness" (Petty et al. 2005, p. 85) as an effect factor on the peripheral route. "This effect is independent of argument quality and source expertise, no matter whether the message receiver has actually read the message or whether the endorser is an expert." (Zhu et al. 2014, p. 272).

However, the term "attractive" is to be understood more broadly than just "beautiful" or "sexy", as is often colloquially equated with attractive. "Attractive" can also mean stylish or a good sense of humor can be attractive. In other studies, instead of attractiveness, it is simply said that one likes the information source, which is referred to as "source likeability" (Petty and Cacioppo 1986, pp. 143–146). In addition, the question of how much one can identify with the information source falls into this category of cues (Petty and Wegener 2000, p. 49).

While in classic advertising communication, for example, this effect is used by means of testimonials (Braverman 2008), in content marketing, for example, when choosing pictures of the authors, it can be deliberately ensured that they appear as attractive as possible—not just "beautiful", but in the sense just mentioned. In interviews or the presentation of people about whom reports are made, an attempt can be made to create a "like the information source"—for example, by also providing some personal insights, which can build sympathy. And in principle, when selecting experts, for example, for guest articles, interviews or customer opinions, etc., not only their thematic suitability should be taken into account, but also whether they are likable for the target group and one can identify with them. And last but not least, attention should also be paid to this psychological effect regarding good image quality.

This way, the effect of authors and experts in content marketing can be further strengthened (but expertise cannot be replaced).

Together, expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness of information sources in content marketing can thus also act on attitudes independently of or in support of the actual communication content—especially in situations and on topics of low involvement.

Not only positive, but also negative can be helpful

When designing content marketing, it should not be forgotten that the effects demonstrated here are first of all independent of the direction in which they act—that is, they can contribute positively to your communication goal, but also have a negative effect.

Thus, the use of a person whose expertise would not be recognized by the target group of a content post would not only not promote the effect, but even have the opposite effect. Good arguments would then be weakened by means of peripheral, heuristic processes.

Likewise, "too little" or "too seldom" can change attitudes quite unconsciously. And also bad pictures (e.g. illumination, image section, technical image quality, etc.) could be perceived as unattractive and trigger negative effects in this way.

So it is always worth to comply with a certain lower limit of quality when working on your own content marketing in order to avoid such negative effects as much as possible. Better some "less and therefore good" than "much and bad" would be a good advice in this respect.

8.4 Focussing Behaviorally Relevant Knowledge

Arguments and cues can be built up as well as they may be—if they have nothing to do with our own lives and our behavior, they will have a lesser or even no effect. Knowledge, on the other hand, which concerns possible behavior and associated attitudes, is central to us humans—which gives us another approach to how the effect of content marketing can be increased in practice.

Even the most basic definition of things in this world is based on psychological behavior in humans: A chair is not just *everything* that has a surface on four legs, but something you can sit on (more examples in Sect. 3.3 on cognitive concepts). And according to the Theory of Planned Behavior (Sect. 5.1), behavior does not arise from any random attitudes, but is determined by attitudes towards possible actions and their consequences. So everything pleads for the fact that content marketing that communicates specific actions and consequences is more effective than purely factual or behavior-independent information.

> Slogan Content marketing must not remain at mere factual knowledge transfer. It must also demonstrate the impact and consequences of actions and the specific meaning of something for people. With such action-relevant knowledge, content marketing is more effective and the behavior change desired by marketing is more likely to be achieved.

A simple example: In a content marketing article, it is shown which types of sun creams there are, namely those with organic-chemical filters (e.g. avobenzone, octocrylene, …) and those with mineral filters (e.g. zinc oxide, titanium oxide).

Will this given knowledge already change the attitude to certain sun creams and the behavior when buying sun creams? This may well be the case with some people if, for example, they bring along a prior understanding of the mentioned substances or have a positive attitude to everything with “organic” in the name or a negative attitude to everything with “chemical” in the name.[15] If such prior knowledge exists, the customer can also think about the consequences of using the sunscreen himself.

In content marketing, you should not rely on such prior knowledge if you want to achieve an effect with as many customers as possible (and not just those with the appropriate prior knowledge). Especially for those without this further knowledge, the above content marketing article would have little effect.

So one could also inform that the substances of chemical or organic sunscreen filters partly pass into the blood. But that is also just initial purely factual information that requires further conclusions and further prior understanding from readers in order to generate actionable knowledge from it.

It looks different when the action and its consequences are communicated directly and clearly: “Purchase and use of a sunscreen with organic-chemical filters can disrupt one’s own hormone balance or even cause skin cancer, as the relevant filter substances partly pass into the blood.” Here, an action (purchase and

[15] Here you can see very nicely how the choice of words can evoke different associations in many people: probably more positive associations with “organic filters” and more negative associations with “chemical filters”—although both terms mean exactly the same (the same sun protection filters).

use of a sunscreen with a certain type of filter) is associated with specific action consequences (hormone balance, skin cancer). Analogously: “Skin irritations can be avoided in sensitive skin by using sunscreens with titanium oxide as a filter.”[16]

Texts, images, infographics, storytelling, and many other formats can be created in content marketing through the targeted integration of action consequences in order to increase the intended effect.

Properties versus benefits: an example

In close connection with the question of behaviourally relevant content is also the difference between the communication of properties versus the communication of benefits, which is of great importance for both content marketing and advertising marketing communication.

One could quite reasonably assume that it is clear to customers themselves that an electric motor on a bicycle (factual-technical knowledge, the property of the bicycle) assists with propulsion and makes cycling easier (behaviourally relevant knowledge). This assumption is probably also generally correct.

However, in your communication, simply stop at the point of the reference to this property “has electric motor”, and unnecessarily forego any possible advertising effect. You could obtain this if, in addition to the property, you were to also communicate the benefit that your target group could draw from it.

It is therefore sensible, in communication, not only to point out the property “has motor”, but also “supports”, “makes it easier” etc. And one could further ask what this in turn means for them in terms of benefits. So, part of the potential customer base might not even be aware of what this could mean for them (the final consequences of action or the final benefit). Or had you immediately that this meant that an older person could, despite physical limitations, reach friends or places that were previously unreachable, that it enabled a larger family to make a sustainable weekly purchase, or that sporty mountain bikers could only enjoy regions that they could not previously reach, etc.?

[16] It should be noted that such consequences are seriously discussed in medical circles, but they are not finally proven. But this should not be of importance at this point, since this example should only serve to illustrate how content marketing content can be designed more effectively—the goal here is not to discuss sunscreens.

It is directly apparent that, by explicitly specifying the consequences of action that are also emotionally connoted (family, sustainability, experience, …), communication immediately becomes more convincing. And in content marketing, such emotionally connoted benefits can be very well conveyed using storytelling (text, video, podcast, …) rather than just arguing in a factual-rational manner. ◀

Introducing new things correctly

A behaviour-oriented communication is particularly important in content marketing when new knowledge and, in particular, new terms (e.g. also new product groups, innovations, …) are introduced and explained. In such cases, there is no clear, developed cognitive concept of the relevant objects yet.[17]

As we have seen in Sect. 3.3.1 or 3.3.4, people primarily form a mental concept or understanding of terms through action-related information about the term to be explained.

Content marketing should therefore not only say and explain what a certain object is (e.g. a "drone" is an unmanned aircraft made of lightweight materials that can often take off vertically using rotors). But as an explanation, content marketing would also say for what this object can be used, what could be achieved with it or how it is used, etc. (e.g. a drone flies autonomously or with remote control, it can be used for fast transport e.g. in the medical field to an accident site or online express orders and is suitable for places that are inaccessible to people for fast transport or recordings e.g. on islands, in the mountains, in emergency areas, etc.). This makes it easier and promotes the formation of mental concepts and the classification of terms for consumers and thus increases the intended effect of these content marketing (as well as advertising communication).

8.5 The Relational Effect of Content

Content marketing is perceived by people and then processed cognitively, so that new knowledge is built and associations are changed—with the goal of influencing attitudes. However, the substances of content marketing articles then come

[17] This is not just about real, physical objects, but also, for example, about abstract or other purely cognitive concepts, etc.

up against existing memory content, which differs from person to person. These already existing memory contents are referred to as prior knowledge in various humanities disciplines. Or formulated from the perspective of Chap. 3: knowledge, taxonomies, associations, etc. are basically subjective and individually different for each person (even if they are partly similar within a target group). The same content marketing can therefore have different effects or even fundamentally different effects depending on the prior knowledge. The effect of content is therefore not an inherent part of the content itself, but it only arises relationally, i.e. in the interaction of content and a certain person (this applies to any communication content, not just to the arguments presented in 8.2.2).

A common basic understanding between two communication partners is also a central prerequisite for their communication and their comprehensibility. This is often referred to as common ground (Ballstaedt 2019, p. 28).

In oral, interactive communication, feedback takes place between the communication partners on a continuous basis in order to adjust to each other. This can be verbal feedback or also non-verbal and gestural indications as well as metacommunication (Ballstaedt 2019, pp. 47–48). A frown, a questioning “Hm …?”, or even direct questions and much more can signal, for example, that there is not enough prior knowledge to understand the content communicated. Communication partners will then almost automatically incorporate additional explanations and supplements into the communication in order to create common ground.

Content marketing, on the other hand, lacks these feedbacks. Written communication or communication in videos takes place in social isolation. It is indirect, usually more reflective, has structural explicitness, is media-bound, and often more durable (Ballstaedt 2019, pp. 65–67). “In written communication, sender and recipient are spatially and temporally separated, the communicative situation is ‘stretched’” (Ballstaedt 2019, p. 66). And on top of that, the same media content is communicated to a large number of people on the Internet as a mass medium.

Different prior knowledges of the recipients can therefore no longer be taken into account, coordinated, and a common ground created during the communication process itself in content marketing. It is therefore the challenge for the sender (i.e. the author of content marketing posts) to take **different prior knowledges** into account that the content could meet beforehand. They must become aware that their own prior knowledge does not at all or does not exist in the same form for many recipients.

Content must therefore be created in such a way that it can fit into different memory contents at the same time and have an effect with different prior knowledges—after all, content marketing is not 1-to-1 communication, but 1-to-n communication (the same communication content meets n different communication partners).

So a content marketing subject that deals with the directional characteristic of microphones may have little effect on one recipient because the prior knowledge about this topic is lacking, while the same content can have a much greater effect on musicians, as the content is better understood. Just the addition of an expandable explanation box on the topic of "directional characteristic—what is that" can help here. Or the text is written in part for laymen and in part for professionals and the readers are led to the different places by internal links according to their knowledge.

In many areas of content, a common understanding can of course be assumed to be generally present. So the knowledge that too much sun leads to unpleasant sunburn and that sunscreen can help in such a situation is probably available to almost every[18] person. Even for the taxonomy "sports car" people living in many countriesis likely to have a similar cognitive concept as a prior understanding. But it gets more difficult with a "bifocal lens"—which some of my readers may be wearing right now without knowing it or not having a corresponding cognitive concept for it. And for the taxonomy of the "Spermatophytina" probably few readers of this book have a cognitive concept in their memory (it is the cognitive concept or the taxonomy for all plants that produce seeds). Finally: A term like "home" is probably known by almost everyone, but depending on the person, it is memorized with very different cognitive concepts despite the same name.

Content marketing process and thematic background knowledge

As the author of content marketing you have of course dealt intensively with the topics you write about, make videos, infographics or interviews. Very quickly it happens unconsciously that you also assume your own, possibly just newly acquired knowledge as a prior knowledge in the recipients. Or you know terms from everyday working life, but outside the company or industry these are rarely used.

And so in a content marketing article you mention the word "bifocal lens" quite matter-of-factly (because you learned it in the research for the article and

[18] The example with sunscreen also shows of course that knowledge is never quite universal: For example, small children may not (yet) have this knowledge, just as people who are biologically better adapted to the sun, e.g. in Africa, or who have never come into contact with the product sunscreen due to their poverty. This may be of importance from a psychological, communication-theoretical or sociological point of view, but it can be neglected here for the time being, since target groups of companies usually have a certain common understanding, e.g. potential sunscreen buyers the aforementioned memory contents.

now see it as “normal”). But the content marketing cannot at all or only partially achieve its effect, because precisely this term is not, not completely or even incorrectly understood by a part of the addressees.

Therefore, it is better to integrate too much explanation into your content than too little to create the required prior knowledge directly yourself. This does not always have to be a detailed info block. Sometimes it is enough to have an additional sentence part or notes in brackets, such as “… is a special feature of bifocal glasses (i.e. glasses that can be used for near and far because they have multiple strengths and are therefore also called multi-strength glasses) …”. You can see immediately that such content will have a greater effect on the overall recipients (not necessarily on every person). Also with mouse or finger click expandable elements, mouse-overs (on desktop) etc. are conceivable here.

In short: With additional content, create the prior knowledge yourself that is necessary for the intended effect of your actual central content.

Active formation of taxonomies

Somehow it sounds logical at first: Each of us knows the plant nettle. And almost all people will classify it into the same taxonomies “plants that should be kept away from” (who does not classify the nettle into this taxonomy, may touch a nettle) and “weed”. But would you have also classified the nettle into the taxonomies “vegetable”, “tea plant” and “medicinal plant”? Have you classified the nettle in your memory to the taxonomy “vitamin C supplier” and “iron-containing food” or to the taxonomies “fertilizer” and “insecticide”? Finally, the taxonomy “Rosales” (rosaceous plants) will be known mainly to biologists.

The problem: Content marketing often deal with the taxonomies of the objects actually to be advertised by marketing (products, brands, etc.), as the properties of the taxonomies are automatically transferred to the objects contained therein. This is a basic way of content marketing advertising effectiveness (Sect. 3.3.2). But this only works if the readers or listeners of your content marketing have a similar taxonomy classification in their heads as you as the creator of the content. If this is not the case, knowledge and associations to the taxonomy itself are formed, but they are not transferred to the actually to be advertised object (and thus the path of the intended advertising effect does not work).

In order to achieve content marketing effectiveness with as many people as possible, it is therefore useful to actively form taxonomy classifications that are not present in part of the target group again. This can be a simple mention in content marketing or especially in the product description, etc. A simple, but often forgotten measure to increase the effectiveness of content marketing.

Diverse executions

We had determined that, depending on the prior knowledge, one piece of information works better for one person, while for another person it is a completely different piece of information that has more effect. Therefore, it is important to integrate both (or as many different people appealing) contents into a content marketing article in order to achieve the greatest possible overall effect.

Deliver several arguments from different perspectives instead of only one, e.g. for people for whom sustainability is important, others who have to save money, and others who just want to feel good. Think of younger and older people, people with a family background and singles or people who grew up as only children. Think of people who need a lot of logical-rational arguments, but in the same article also of those who need to be addressed emotionally. And avoid an important mistake in this respect: to create content exclusively in the way you would like it for yourself. You would forego the advertising effect on a large part of other customers.

In practice, this can mean: In a blog post "How to paint walls correctly" you have integrated helpful content for inexperienced readers who rarely paint, but at the same time also further content for experienced hobbyists. You have integrated arguments for rationally thinking young people, for people with little time and an emotional appeal to seniors in the comparison of e-bikes with classic bicycles and have not forgotten companies (company bike) before the blog entry went online. And in addition to the Instagram post with a picture that appeals to men, is there also an (possibly also at different times) Instagram post whose picture is more appealing to women (possibly also for younger and older)? And so on and so forth—for even more advertising effect of your content marketing.

8.6 Further Increase Content Marketing Advertising Effect

We had already given recommendations on how content that is consciously processed cognitively can be designed more effectively (e.g. good arguments Sect. 8.2). And we had given tips on cues if the just said is not the case. But we can also increase the effect by influencing (with content marketing itself) how strong this intensity of cognitive processing takes place (and the more intense, the stronger the effect via the central ELM route tends to be). And we can also improve the effect of formed attitudes on resulting behavior: by creating the appropriate motivation and increasing the necessary skills through content marketing.

8.6.1 Strengthen Motivation for more Effect

Unfortunately, it is often the case that content marketing substances are not perceived intensively or actively processed at all, as the authors would like or imagine. So blog posts are only quickly scanned or only the first paragraph and headings are read—but not the information and arguments that are actually decisive from the author's point of view (just look at, for example, Google Analytics dwell times or scroll behavior on content pages that often do not allow the assumption of a complete, intensive reading). In the social media feed, a quick scroll on the smartphone is already the norm, only selected posts are perceived intensively there and, if necessary, also read actively (if they have reached the follower's newsfeed at all). And in videos on YouTube, it is and can be very easily be fast forwarded and only parts are viewed. Not to mention any distractions or even fatigue that more or less severely impairs concentration, in addition to the lack of time that does not allow for reflection. In short: Many contents on the Internet are not or only superficially actively thought through. As already mentioned, content marketing has an effect on cues or cues—but we should not rely on them alone.

It can now be started with the design of content marketing to achieve a more active and intensive engagement with the content and thus a higher effect of the latter. Because "a number of studies have confirmed the conclusion […] that many variables can increase or decrease the persuasiveness by increasing or decreasing the information processing" (Petty and Wegener 2000, p. 55). Only when recipients have enough motivation to deal with the content of the content marketing posts will this happen and the information and arguments contained therein can have their effect.

Increase the relevance of the content

At first glance, it seems as if the relevance is something that simply exists or does not exist for the respective person. Whether someone is interested in dealing with the sustainability aspects of e-bikes, whether this is relevant for him or her, whether someone is interested in the personal story of a company employee or whether someone considers the criteria for the camcorder selection to be interesting (relevant to him)—it seems to be from the perspective of a company for the respective person "just like that" to be fixed, without the marketing having any influence on it.

But that's only true until the person's contact with the marketing communication (or the content marketing posts) takes place. From this point on, the content itself can increase (or decrease) the motivation to deal with it cognitively—in the example just mentioned, the motivation to deal with sustainability information more actively and intensively.

As many elements of a post as possible should therefore always be designed and support in such a way that to the recipients the relevance of the information is demonstrated. This is particularly true for those elements that are in the center of attention, e.g. pictures and headlines, the first sentences of social media posts, the first paragraphs of web texts, the contents of the first seconds of videos, the names of the videos, but also intermediate headlines, graphics, highlights, lists, etc.

"Just learn how your plants will become healthier and more beautiful …" will increase the motivation to actively process the content that follows much more than just "In the following we will give you an overview of plant protection measures". Because in the first case relevance is established and a concrete benefit is named, while in the second case only factual information is given. The first motivated more to use cognitive activity and thus to the activation of the processes of the central ELM route (which, as has been said several times, leads to more attitude changes and stronger attitude).

Other exemplary formulations could be, depending on the target group: "Learn in the next 3 minutes how to train more successfully", "Don't waste any unnecessary money because you haven't read the following criteria" etc.

▶ **Universal motives of human action** What are the basic motives that drive people? Scientific research has repeatedly investigated this question. The following 16 motives are one of the results. They can serve us well in marketing (and content marketing) to establish a high relevance by referring to these basic needs.

"Here are the 16 basic needs. The order of presentation is without meaning.

- **Power** is the desire to influence others.
- **Independence** is the desire for self-reliance.
- **Curiosity** is the desire for knowledge.
- **Acceptance** is the desire for inclusion
- **Order** is the desire for organization.
- **Saving** is the desire to collect things.
- **Honor** is the desire to be loyal to one's parents and heritage.
- **Idealism** is the desire for social justice.
- **Social contact** is the desire for companionship.

- **Family** is the desire to raise one's own children.
- **Status** is the desire for social standing.
- **Vengeance** is the desire to get even.
- **Romance** is the desire for sex and beauty.
- **Eating** is the desire to consume food.
- **Physical activity** is the desire for exercise of muscles.
- **Tranquility** is the desire for emotional calm" (Reiss 2002, pp. 17–18).

8.6.2 Improving Ability to Enable Effect

To want something is not the same as being able to do it. You should therefore also think about how you can further increase the ability of the recipients (respectively their own perception of their ability) to intensively use and cognitively process content marketing content.

Creating the right situation
For example, someone who visits the website may not have enough time (e.g. general time pressure, being on the go, etc.) or he/she may be distracted by the children, superiors or simply noise from the street.

Of course, such situations cannot be directly influenced. But the relevant person can be gently asked to change the situation themselves. A "take your time, it's worth it—or do you want to be angry about … for years" can already lead to an improvement in the situation and, as a result, more intensive cognitive engagement with the content (and stronger advertising effect). Or you offer a functionality with which the relevant person can save a content marketing post for a later, quieter time or be reminded of it.

Enable
Can recipients follow the offered arguments at all and thus engage with them more intensively? This may be limited by the fact that a word is used in the content whose meaning they do not or do not sufficiently know. This can involve technical terms, special terms in the colloquial language of selected target groups (youth language, scene language, etc.), but also company-specific terms.

Therefore, make sure that target groups can also ognitively follow the content by choosing your words carefully and, if necessary, adding a short explanation in brackets.

If you use interactive content marketing elements, you should also support their ability by explaining their operation clearly and understandably—unless they are designed to be intuitive (from the user's perspective!).

Similarly, links to another website that provides important background knowledge for understanding can create the basis for a part of the recipients to be able to engage more intensively with the content.

Technical Factors
Since content marketing takes place on the Internet, not only psychological factors have to be addressed in the field of ability, but also technical ones. For example, a too small display (of an image, but also of the selected font size) can result in the usability of the content being restricted or so strenuous that cognitive processing does not take place on the central route—although the motivation would have been there.

A similar effect is caused by bad contrasts or very pastel colors that may still work well on a modern large monitor on the desk, but cause big problems on the smartphone used in the sun. The same applies to poor sound quality in podcasts or poor lighting or image quality in videos—they all restrict the ability of recipients to cognitively engage with the actual content.

The same applies to images without text in the so-called alt tags, e.g. when screen readers are used by people with visual impairments or someone reads the website from the computer out of convenience.

Many more factors could be listed that restrict or prevent the use of content from a technical point of view. However, since this is not the focus of this book, only the relevant specialist literature on good website design, video and podcast creation etc. should be referred to at this point.

Complexity
Complexity can take on many different forms in content marketing: a complex overall structure of a blog post or leaps in the red thread of a video. As too complex arguments (which is also relevant with regard to Sect. 8.2.2). Or simply in the form of a complex sentence structure[19] (long sentences, many subordinate clauses, widely separated references, etc.).

[19] For the understanding of linguistic communication and its various criteria, reference is made to the helpful book by (Ballstaedt 2019).

As simple as possible, but adapted to the respective topic and target group (and not only to the authors of the respective posts), a complexity on all levels—from sentence structure via individual arguments to the overall structure and red thread—should therefore be kept in mind in order not to unnecessarily reduce the content marketing effect.

Thus, complexity has a double effect: On the one hand, it influences whether and how intensively contents are processed cognitively at all, on the other hand, it influences within the central ELM route how arguments can be processed and work.

However, the conclusion "simple is always better" must not be drawn. Rather, the complexity has to be adapted to the target group as well as to the sender of the information in each individual case. Thus, (Hafer et al. 1996) demonstrates that, in particular, strong arguments work better in a less complex language, while "the use of jargon, rare words or complex grammar leads to the desired change in attitude" (Hafer et al. 1996, p. 334), if the senders are perceived as high-ranking or particularly knowledgeable.

8.6.3 Coordinate Advertising Communication and Content Marketing

Coordinate the editorial plan of content marketing and the action plan of advertising campaigns well with each other. Because what good is it if a product is intensively advertised, but only after the end of the advertising measure a content marketing post appears by chance, which could have strengthened the effect of this advertising medium?

If, for example, an office equipment supplier advertises its particularly ergonomic office furniture, its advertising media (e.g. product description, banner, printed brochures, newsletter, etc.) are all the more effective, the more importance a customer attaches to the criterion of ergonomics in his decision for office furniture. Content marketing posts that deal with the topic of ergonomics and create a positive attitude towards the importance of ergonomics and ergonomic furniture (and thus reduce the attitude towards pure cheap office furniture), should therefore be available or published in good time before and during the relevant advertising campaigns and the content marketing plan should not be set completely independently of the advertising campaign plan in terms of time and content.

Tension fields in practice
However, the coordination of content marketing arguments with the advertising marketing activities of the company also entails the risk that the non-advertising, customer-oriented

approach of content marketing will be infected by toointens advertising content after all and thus finally even lose advertising effect.

This is cleverly the case, for example, if in content marketing a helpful checklist is created for customers to select a good camcorder—but then actually very important checklist points would not be included because of the coordination with the advertising marketing, as they would speak against one or the other own product. Or a blog post on plant pests only deals with content subjects (arguments) that are related to a product that is currently being advertised in a campaign, but not with other subjects relevant to customers. Social media is familiar with a similar problem: a link to the webshop is compulsively integrated under every post, so that followers get the feeling that the posts are no longer generated for them, but for advertised content marketing.

So it is definitely about a temporal, thematic and content-related coordination between content marketing and advertising marketing activities. However, this should only be realized to increase the advertising effectiveness and may never impair the actual character of content marketing itself. Otherwise, advertising effectiveness would not be promoted, but unintentionally lost.

Part IV
Controlling in Content Marketing

“Creating value is an essential goal of any entrepreneurial activity” (Bach 2017, p. 2), to which area goals such as marketing goals and, in turn, online marketing goals are subordinate. Content marketing goals contribute to the achievement of (online) marketing goals and thus to the value creation of the company. Only if this happens does the discipline of content marketing have any justification for existence in a company. It is content marketing controlling that on the one hand proves this contribution and its efficient achievement and on the other hand contributes to its efficient control.

“Within the framework of operational marketing controlling, it is a matter of ensuring the economically sound use of the potential for success created earlier, and of checking whether implementation actually leads to the expected results. The main focus of operational marketing controlling is therefore on monitoring marketing activities, analyzing deviation causes, i.e. conducting cause analyses, and developing appropriate corrective actions if deviations occur” (Zerres and Zerres 2006, p. 8). In addition to the actual activities, the resources used by the company (personnel and working time, financial resources, software, etc.) and their efficient and effective use are also considered.

How this can be implemented concretely for content marketing is the central focus of this fourth section. For this purpose, some basic considerations on controlling in general and content marketing in particular are made in Chap. 9. Based on this, a comprehensive key figure framework is presented in Chap. 10 which can serve as the starting point for operational controlling systems for content marketing in companies.

Criticism of previous controlling in content marketing

In both specialist books on content marketing and in the research literature, the question of controlling and key figures for content marketing is often hardly, partly only superficially and incompletely and rarely considered with a view to the different activity and effect levels.

As a result, in practice, page views of websites or the reach of posts in social media are often used for success measurements. This is certainly not fundamentally wrong, but in no way sufficient to determine an advertising effect. And these key figures alone cannot in any way justify the use of the discipline of content marketing in corporate practice.

A page view or reach ultimately says nothing at all about a desired and possibly achieved advertising effect on the user–not even whether the content was actually noticed (or simply ignored on the screen). All they show is that the website was displayed in the browser or the post in the social media app. Nothing more.

Some users may not have even noticed the content displayed on the device for various reasons (e.g., because they were distracted, they closed the browser for a short time, or they simply scrolled past the post in social media without noticing it). Even noticed posts are only perceived fragmentarily under sales, e.g. only looked at the image for a short time, but texts not or only read the first words, video only watched the first seconds etc.). And for perceived content, there is no guarantee that this will be processed mentally at all, how intensively this happens or whether an effect takes place via cognitive processing or heuristically. But all this has to happen after the content has been played back, so that the intended effect can take place at all.

However, metrics such as page views or reach are by no means superfluous (and also part of the following content marketing control framework). But they show an upper limit for the potential of an advertising effect, not a successful advertising effect or the achievement of content marketing goals. They are key figures as a prerequisite for an effect, but not the effect.

The fourth section of this book is therefore based on the findings from psychology and advertising effects (see first sections of the book) to contribute here to the development of better key figure systems for content marketing.

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9 Basic Thoughts on Controlling

What is controlling and what is its purpose? Some basic thoughts on this should help to better understand the essence of controlling in content marketing and to set up a high-quality content marketing controlling. In order to improve the understanding of the following explanations, central terms should also be explained and clarified.

However, this chapter is not a mandatory prerequisite for using the content marketing controlling framework presented subsequently. Readers and readers who are more experienced in controlling could switch directly to the next chapter at this point—all others are advised to also take a look at this—short—chapter.

9.1 Purpose and Tasks of Controlling

In German, "controlling" and its tasks are often misunderstood. This is also due to a often made translation error: "In general, it can be said that 'control' must not be translated with 'control'. In a more appropriate translation, one could speak of steering" (Horváth 2015, p. 13). "Under 'control' one understands in the English-language management literature control, steering, control, regulation of processes. 'Control' and 'controlling' are used synonymously in this context" (Horváth 2012, p. 16).

Controlling therefore not only measures results and does not only check whether a target has been achieved. Rather, controlling takes on a steering function by providing decision-makers and employees with suitable information as decision-making basis to enable effective and efficient action, to ensure efficient resource use and to secure the rationality of management in companies (Weber and Schäffer 2016, pp. 47–50; Meffert et al. 2019, p. 927).

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https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-40551-9_9

Content marketing controlling must therefore be designed in such a way that it can help to further improve the content marketing activities of a company. Central tasks of controlling are information gathering, information processing and information provision for the relevant personnel. And in any case, the following also applies to content marketing: “The controller is not a controller!” (Horváth 2015, p. 14), but strategist and planner who increases or even makes the value contribution of content marketing in the company measurable and transparent.

In this sense, content marketing controlling is also a sub-area of marketing controlling and “marketing controlling [in turn] is a sub-area of corporate controlling. It supports the goal-oriented planning, steering and control of the marketing function in the company by providing and making available all planning, decision-making and control-relevant marketing information” (Zerres and Zerres 2006, p. 4).

▶ At this point we want to leave it at this basic statement, which Content marketing controlling has meaning. Those who are interested in the importance and function of controlling in companies are referred to the relevant specialist literature at this point. It should only be mentioned by way of example the presentation of different controlling concepts at (Hubert 2019, pp. 6–15) or the explanations of controlling functions and controlling objectives in the basic work of (Horváth 2012, p. 127), which can also provide interesting additional information.

9.2 Central Terms

Is every measured value an indicator or even a KPI? And what is the difference between a key figure system and a key figure framework?

Unfortunately, it can be seen in practice that the term KPI is almost inflationary for every measured value in web analytics and controlling. Due to this widespread, but ultimately incorrect use of this term as well as the often resulting confusion caused by the different terms measured value, metric, key figure and KPI, some clarifications regarding these terms should be made below.

9.2.1 Measured Values

There is a reality. For example, how many people actually read a content marketing article, how many of them actually changed their attitude or how many of them were motivated to make a purchase. We want to measure this reality. What we want to measure is the **measurement variable**.

In order to carry out the measurement, we need some kind of **measuring device**. This can be an online analytics tool, a questionnaire, a measuring device for measuring physiological body reactions or anything else that is suitable for capturing a measurement variable from reality. The values that a measurement carried out with this delivers are the **measured values** (note: the measured values are something measured, that is: they represent reality more or less accurately—but they ARE NOT reality; this difference may sound very academic and philosophical, but unfortunately it leads to incorrect handling of measured values and sometimes even to wrong decisions resulting from this).

Measured values can be quantitative, that is, they consist of numerical values. Then they are called metrics. A **metric** is something that can be counted more bluntly (pieces, seconds, meters, pixels, people, views, setting strength, …). These are the metrics that are measured in large numbers by the analytics tools of online marketing (e.g. Google Analytics, Facebook Insights, etc.).

Often, however, not only the quantitative metric, but also only nominally scaled measured values are recorded as attributes or properties of the metrics, the so-called **dimensions**. In Google Analytics, for each individual page view (recorded in the metric of the same name), the device used, the location of the user and many other dimensions are also recorded, based on which the metrics can then be analyzed in more detail.

Important for further understanding: Measured values (a metric, a dimension) do not have a meaning at first. They are just a measured value, some number or some value. Nothing more. As a measured value, they have no meaning and must first be interpreted and related to something in order to gain significance.

9.2.2 Indicators

Only when the purely formal measurement values are considered from a business perspective and selected measurement values are related to matching business[1]

[1] For a generally valid definition of the term indicator, valid also beyond business administration, "business perspective" and "business question" should not stand here, but only generally "in relation to something" and "a question". However, we reserve the right to define the term not quite abstract, but from the perspective of entrepreneurial controlling.

questions from blank data without any context and without any meaning (the measurement value) is an informative indicator (for something specific).

"It is important to consider the dual nature of indicators. From a more scientific perspective, indicators are a mirror image of reality that is ultimately used to measure success. On the other hand, indicators can also be interpreted from a social science perspective as an instrument for influencing the behavior of actors in the company" (Weber and Schäffer 2016, p. 210). Both perspectives must be considered when selecting indicators. This is exactly the approach of Weber and Schäffer that we will follow later when developing meaningful indicators for content marketing.

Functions of Key Figures

Not every key figure is used for success control. Some have other functions. And some key figures can even serve multiple purposes. So there are different "functions of key figures" in practice, depending on the case:

- *Stimulation function:* Key figures are used here to detect abnormalities and changes—controllers usually attach great importance to this function.
- *Operationalization function:* Key figures are formed to make goals concrete and measurable. This function plays a significant role in practice.
- *Preset function:* Building on this, key figures can be used to provide critical target values as a preset for entrepreneurial sub-areas.
- *Control function:* One can then speak of this if complex control processes are simplified by using one or more key figures.
- *Control function:* In this function, "key figures enable target-actual comparisons and subsequent deviation analyses" (Weber and Schäffer 2016, pp. 178–179).

So it is not only important to define which measurement values are to be considered key figures for a specific task, but ideally also to clearly determine whether the key figure should have a stimulation function, operationalization and control function or control function in this case.

Key figures also help to reduce complexity. They "are quantitative data that is supposed to inform about numerically recorded business economic phenomena as a conscious condensation of the complex reality (Reichmann and Hoffjan 2011). In other words, key figures serve to quickly and concisely report on an economic task area for which in principle a large number of relevant individual information is available, but the evaluation of which is too time-consuming and resource-intensive for certain information needs" (Weber and Schäffer 2016, p. 177).

Is this an important number?

With the knowledge of the difference between a measured value and a key figure, a common misunderstanding can also be resolved when it comes to the importance of measured values. If you simply ask for "the importance of a measured value/metric" (e.g. "is the time spent on a page important?", "Is the used device type important?", "Are clicks on a certain position important?", "What are the most important key figures in Google Analytics" etc.), then in principle no answer can be given at all. The question itself is meaningless. Because the importance is **not** a property of the measured value itself! Measured values are initially a completely neutral collection of data without meaning or importance.

Whether a certain value is important can only be answered if it is also said in which **context** it should have an importance (or not). And so the same measured value can be very important for one question (a significant key figure), while the same measured value is completely insignificant for another question (the measured value is therefore not a key figure for it). And just because a measured value is used very often as a key figure in many companies, it is not a generally important measured value and not generally always a key figure (and certainly not a universal KPI).

So the metric "Page Views" (rightly) is considered an important key figure for the success of website content in many companies. But for an employee whose task is to improve the website speed in order to contribute to a better search engine ranking of the content marketing content, the metric "Page Views" is certainly completely insignificant—and therefore not a key figure. The "document content loading time in ms" is certainly a key figure of great importance to him, while this measured value would certainly not be shown as a key figure in a report to the management on the success of content marketing as a whole and would have little informative value.

So if you are ever simply asked again whether a certain measured value is important, say "I have no idea, it depends" and first ask what task or underlying question it is and for what purpose this measured value should have meaning (or not).

Indicators usually also have an actual and a target value. The actual value is the measured value. The target value is a specified target size. It is precisely from the comparison of actual measured values and target values of an indicator—a typical procedure in controlling—that useful information results. For example, if you knew that an indicator value of 14,432 calls for content marketing articles was good or bad? You realize: it is not possible to answer this question in a general way, but only when you set a target value. If this were 10,000, the measured indicator value would be a great success (the goals could be adjusted upwards in the strategic process). However, if the target value had been 25,000, (with the same actual measured value), it would be necessary to consider how measures would have to be changed in order to better achieve this target value. Therefore, it is always necessary to set clear, quantified, i.e. target values (the target values) with numerical values in advance (!) in controlling. Simply measuring without actual-target comparison and without a specific question or without a specific application often does not provide much information—it leads to pseudo-controlling and "management by opinion" instead of factual control through controlling.

9.2.3 Performance Indicator (PI)

Some key figures are only important for a specific task, a small part of the activities or time-limited. But those key figures that are best suited for a particular operational area to reflect the current situation and its development as a whole, are then called **Performance Indicator (PI,** German also performance indicator).

Often, performance indicators (PIs) are set at the level of teams or channels. So it may be for the channel Facebook page or the team Social Media although a large number of key figures (number of followers, number of comments, average word length per post, number of posts per week, etc.), but the key figures "reach" and "engagement" certainly reflect the overall performance of this channel or team, they are thus in this case PIs (Performance Indicators). Analogously, the "SEO ranking of a particular blog article" would certainly be only a simple key figure, while the SEO visibility as a whole could be considered as a PI—at least if the company concerned pursues the goal "visibility in Google" as an important content marketing goal (if the Google visibility were not a goal for content marketing, the SEO visibility would also not be a PI, but possibly only a subordinate key figure as a means to an end for other goals, e.g. image building).

While such performance indicators are now more operational performance indicators—"Performance indicators help teams align with their organization's strategy" (Parmenter 2015, p. 7)—the perspective now changes to the strategic level when it comes to the term KPI in the next section.

▶ **Definition** Performance indicators (PIs) are those central key figures that are best suited for an operational area and its current goals to reflect the previous achievement as a whole.

In content marketing, such operational areas are often seen as teams or channels.

9.2.4 Key Performance Indicator (KPI)

"**Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)** are those indicators that focus on the aspects […] that are most critical to the current and future success of the organization" (Parmenter 2015, p. 7). If "organization" is still meant to be the entire company in corporate controlling, of course, the organizational unit of the same name can also be the focus of the KPI consideration or the KPI level.

KPIs of content marketing are therefore only those indicators that can really provide information about the overall success of content marketing. Usually no more than 3 to a maximum of 5 KPIs are given.

The total reach of all content created is certainly to be seen as a KPI of content marketing, because in this single indicator the overall success of content marketing is very well reflected—if only as an indication and not as an effect. Or an indicator that shows the strength of the—methodologically measured—influence of content marketing as a whole on purchasing behavior would certainly be a good KPI.

But there are certainly not THE universally valid KPIs for content marketing, because KPIs always have to be specifically defined for the goals of each individual company. But they should be selected very carefully and in not too large a number, and in particular, not every indicator should be referred to as a KPI.

▶ **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) of content marketing** are those indicators that are most critical to the current and future success of content marketing as a whole (Parmenter 2015, p. 7).

9.2.5 Balanced Scorecard

If you are no longer considering individual indicators, PIs and KPIs, but want to create a good overall view, a **Balanced Scorecard** according to Kaplan and Norton is the right choice. In it, central indicators such as KPIs are summarized from different perspectives to allow for a comprehensive strategic view. "The Balanced Scorecard supplements […] measures of the past with measures of the drivers of future performance. […] The objectives and measures [in the Balanced Scorecard—note by the author] consider the company's performance from four perspectives: finances, customers, internal business processes and learning and growth" (Kaplan and Norton 2009, p. 8). This makes the Balanced Scorecard a good, compressed overview of its status and development.

This principle can also be adapted to the marketing discipline considered here and used as a content marketing balanced scorecard. For example, indicators for costs and influence on sales (financial perspective of content marketing), indicators for customer satisfaction (customer perspective of content marketing), indicators for internal processes and the organization (perspective of internal business process in content marketing) and indicators for quality, training, etc. are compiled into a regular overall report, which provides a good strategic view of the content marketing activities of a company.

9.2.6 Performance Measurement Systems

If there is a large number of different performance indicators at different levels and for different areas of activity, they are usually combined into performance measurement systems. This is not only for purely organizational reasons, because "the individual performance indicators are limited in their informative value […] above all by the possibility of numerous ambiguous interpretations" (Reichmann et al. 2017, p. 41). "In order to increase them, several performance indicators can be combined with each other. If two or more performance indicators are related to each other, supplement each other or explain each other (cf. Sandt 2004, p. 14), one speaks of a **performance measurement system**" (Weber and Schäffer 2016, p. 196).

As Reichmann shows, performance indicators are closely related to the goals and goal system of the area to be controlled (Reichmann et al. 2017, pp. 34–60). The selection of suitable performance indicators for content marketing controlling can therefore be deduced deductively from the goals set for content marketing by the respective company. In controlling, "the actual values are then compared with the specifications […]" (Reichmann et al. 2017, p. 40), so that "a point-in-time and/or continuous, usually comparison- or target-oriented analysis of the marketing-constructing elements to ensure long-term successful corporate management" (Meffert et al. 2019, p. 927; Kreutzer 2017) is achieved.

Since goals are usually arranged in goal hierarchies, performance indicators also have a hierarchy from the strategic level via sub-area levels down to performance indicators that relate to individual measures. This hierarchy therefore extends from the strategic to the operational and detail work level and the organization and its activities) and is reflected in the goal system as well as in the performance measurement system of controlling. There can never be one performance measurement system that is valid for all companies in the same way, but only one that is individually developed for one's own needs. A good performance measurement framework can provide helpful assistance in this.

9.2.7 Key Performance Indicators Framework

If you now play through the various possible variants of key performance indicator systems for different companies, look at the different key performance indicators contained therein, determine the key performance indicators that make sense in many cases and summarize the results in an overall framework, a so-called framework results.

A **framework** is to be understood as a system of rules and ideas that can be used to plan something (in our case: the key performance indicator system of an individual company) and to make decisions in this regard. It is a structure that helps to build something up (Cambridge Dictionary 2020). In this sense, a content marketing framework should arise in the following. This framework cannot and should not be transferred one-to-one into a company—but it provides a framework from which the company's own key performance indicator system for content marketing controlling can be created.

10 The Content Marketing Controlling Framework

Simply measuring the number of page views of content marketing articles on a website or their reach in social media, while widespread and technically simple, may be good indicators of advertising effectiveness.

With regard to the content marketing advertising effectiveness model from Chap. 2 and the psychological background of Chap. 3 to 6 as well as, on the other hand, the requirement to also take a look at processes and content production as well as economic effects, these figures can in no way suffice for controlling content marketing. Not to mention if controlling is to communicate information in the form of indicators as "purpose-oriented knowledge for specific decision-making situations" (Reichmann et al. 2017, p. 40).

The content marketing controlling framework presented below can serve as a starting point for more comprehensive, individual key figure systems and provides a structured overview of important indicators with a special focus on advertising effectiveness.

Strategic versus operational controlling

The term strategic controlling refers to plans that go beyond day-to-day business and relate to an ongoing fiscal year (or other longer-term planning period), as well as to measures that require organizational changes (Hubert 2019, p. 48). If this (enterprise-level) definition of strategic controlling is transferred to content marketing, this corresponds to the objectives level of content marketing as a whole. Therefore, in addition to the enterprise-level term *strategic controlling* or the marketing-level term *strategic marketing controlling,* one can then speak of a *strategic content marketing controlling*. The task of this controlling area is to measure the long-term success of content marketing with the appropriate key figures and to support its steering and long-term orientation. The key figures from this area are therefore also to be seen as the KPIs of content marketing.

In contrast, *operational controlling* refers to plans within the day-to-day business and the resulting measures (Hubert 2019, p. 48).

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https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-40551-9_10

The authors Zerres summarize the difference between strategic and operational controlling and the underlying objectives very well and in a way that is easy to understand: Strategic controlling allows “doing the right things”, while operational controlling supports “doing the things right” (Zerres and Zerres 2006, p. 6).

In this sense, the following explanations and the content marketing controlling framework are to be understood essentially as operational content marketing controlling.

10.1 The Content Marketing Controlling Chain

Content marketing controlling should provide key figures to enable better content marketing. This “better content marketing” is more specifically formulated as higher advertising effectiveness. For this purpose, content marketing content is developed in a department or working group, this content is retrieved by the target group and played out on a terminal, it is perceived and processed cognitively and can or should finally have an advertising effect on objects to be advertised. Along the links of such a chain, key figures for a framework of content marketing controlling are strung out—from content production to the value creation of the company.

The first stage of the content marketing controlling chain (see also Fig. 10.1) of course begins with the **creation of content**. The focus here is still strongly on key figures for internal activities (e.g. how much content is created and how many resources are used for it). Once the content is available, the **content itself** can then become the subject of controlling or measurement (e.g. quality key figures).

Of course, the content is subsequently presented outside the company (online), e.g. published on the website, posted in social media or made available as a podcast, etc., which leads to **presentation key figures** (e.g. frequency of blog post views in browsers or video minutes accessed).

Whether this presented content is then actually **perceived** and **cognitively processed** by the users (e.g. knowledge has been created, attitudes have changed—***not*** related to the object being advertised—etc.) and whether there has possibly even been a **reaction** (conative effect, e.g. likes, etc.) to this content must be clearly distinguished from the previous stage of pure presentation on a terminal. Key figures for this can be found in two further links of the controlling chain.

Up to this point, no actual advertising effect has been achieved. The key figures of the preceding steps could also apply to purely journalistic publications. However, they are a prerequisite for the actual advertising effect, to which key figures are delivered in the further links of the content marketing controlling chain. These are key figures of an effect regarding the objects to be advertised

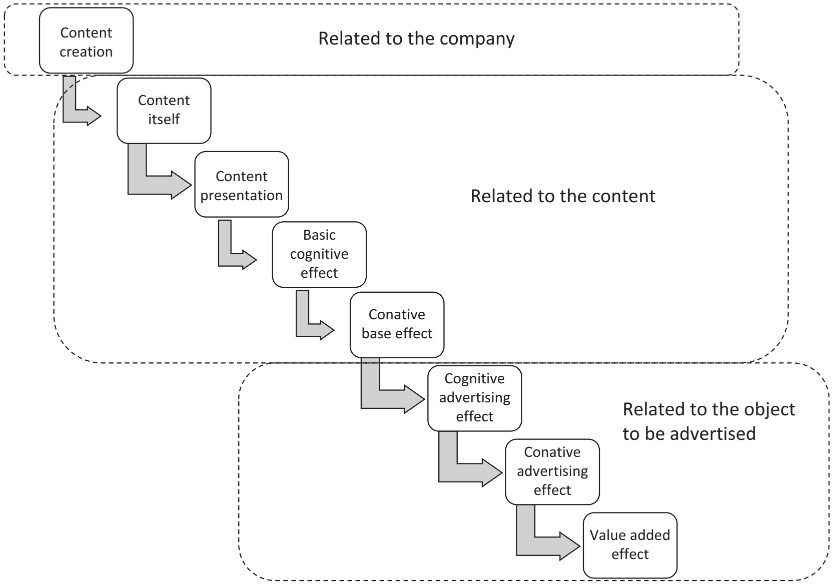

Fig. 10.1 The content marketing controlling chain for structuring KPIs

(product, brand, company, etc.), whether—see also Sect. 2.2—a direct advertising effect (awareness, image) or in the sense of the preparatory content effects (PCE) an indirect advertising effect (e.g. reinforcement of classical advertising media).

Differences have to be made again betweena purely cognitive advertising effect, e.g. on attitudes towards the advertised object, and on the other hand action-related (conative) advertising effects, e.g. information gathering, contact making, purchase, etc.

Finally, as the last link in the chain, the actions influenced by content marketing to marketing and corporate objectives, e.g. the sales influenced by content marketing, the value added or contributions to other central (mostly economic) corporate objectives are added. This is where the transition from content marketing controlling to classical corporate controlling takes place.

▶ Chain does not mean cause and effect! The fact that above we speak about a controlling chainand the different key figure areas are structured along this chain in the following sections must not lead to the conclusion that this content marketing controlling chain shows any kind of order of advertising effect or even represents an advertising effect model (see also Sect. 2.1 on the history of advertising effect research and the obsolescence of hierarchical models).

The controlling chain only serves to structure the key figure framework into distinct, fundamentally different key figure areas. An interpretation beyond this structuring function (in particular with regard to a cause-and-effect relationship or processes of an advertising effect) would inevitably lead to false conclusions and should not be made. You should be warned of this once again.

About the structure of the following sections

In the following sections, an overview of important, associated key figures will be provided for each stage of the content marketing controlling chain just outlined. However, this list must not be understood as a complete list of all conceivable key figures. But they are key figures in the sense of a framework that are suitable for many applications and problems in practice and enable a sensible control of the content marketing. An justified supplement with own, individual key figures is permissible and sensible.

For each of the stages, the central key figure groups will be named and explained first, then concretized into individual key figures and operationalized. Finally, important hints for practical measurement and typical problems will be given.

10.2 Content Creation Metrics

Content creation metrics are usually used to obtain information about the output of the content marketing workforce and the resources used. Important metrics include the number of publications produced and the time or cost of production. For efficiency considerations, these are also related to each other for derived metrics.

Metrics are often used by content marketing management, they are part of a balanced scorecard or they are part of the overall marketing or corporate control.

▶ Content Creation Metric Groups

Resources Used (time, financial)

Publishment Count (i.e. number of published articles, posts, videos)

Publishment Efficiency

The most basic are the resources used for content marketing, the metric group **Resources Used**. These include the time spent on content marketing and of course the costs incurred. In larger organizations, the number of employees involved in content marketing may also be added. For a more detailed view, it may also be possible to differentiate between content production and strategic or management activities.

These metrics are usually considered for *content marketing as a whole* and serve content marketing management as well as higher-level corporate levels.

Depending on the actual question, however, these metrics can also be considered at the level of *content marketing segments,* for example the total time spent on Instagram or, for example, content-format-specific costs for the production of how-to videos.

The output generated by these resources can be measured with the **Publishment Count** metrics. They capture the number of content marketing posts produced (and/or published) in a given period of time.

Publishment-count metrics are usually considered at the *content marketing segment level* (usually channel- or content-format-specific), for example the number of blog posts published, the number of how-to videos, the number of Instagram posts published or the number of new podcast episodes created.

However, publication count figures are rarely considered at the *level of observation of the content marketing corpus* or *of content marketing as a whole*. The reason: A general statement "64 articles published" would have little meaning if it is unclear whether these are elaborate magazine articles for the website or simple image posts in social media.

If (especially in social media) posts are posted multiple times, e.g. at semi-annual or annual intervals, both a figure for the total number of published posts and a second figure for newly created or published posts should be shown separately in order to reflect the aforementioned company practice and to obtain meaningful figures.

If the figures are not needed for considerations of ongoing content marketing, but rather as part of a content audit, a distinction should also be made between newly published and, on the other hand, all articles available online as well as articles deleted in the period under review.

It is always important to specify the time periods to which the measured figures refer. Depending on the scope of the content marketing activities and the question to be considered, this will often be monthly or quarterly figures, but weekly or annual figures may also be used (e.g. for large content marketing departments with high output or for annual reports).

Depending on the current consideration, the figures can also be further differentiated. For example, in social media channels, a distinction could be made between self-created and curated (shared foreign) posts. Or it is about the assessment and further development of the content concept, which is why the differentiation of the Publishment Count indicators according to different genres (expert article, how-to, sayings, humor, …) or media formats (text only, text-image, multi-image articles, stories, reels, …) is carried out.

Then **Publishment Efficiency** indicators can be calculated from the basic Publishment Count indicators and the indicators of the resources used. These efficiency indicators are relational figures and are not measured, but mathematically derived from other indicators. Most of the time, two individual indicators are divided. This results in indicators such as time spent per post (time spent divided by number of posts), total output per person (number of posts divided by number of employees) or cost per publishment (e.g. the cost per post in social media; costs incurred divided by number of posts published).

Operationalization and measurement of key figures of content creation

Typical indicators for the indicator group of the resources used (Resources Used) can be found in Table 10.1.

In addition to these input (resource) key figures, Table 10.2 also contains key figures for the output, i.e. the key figures for the key figure groups Publishment Count and efficiency key figures.

Backgrounds and problems of practical measurement

At first glance, the measurement of the figures listed here appears to be very simple, since only the published articles have to be counted and time or costs have to be taken over from other controlling systems.

However, this is problematic in practice because, for example, in social media channels, on the one hand, posts in the sense of content marketing content and, on the other hand, also advertising posts are often published. A statistic from a tool that simply counts all published posts does not provide valid, meaningful measurement values for content marketing. Rather, only the number of content marketing posts may be included in the measurement of the key figures. This often requires semi-automatic or even manual effort and must always be taken into account when interpreting clearly recorded key figure values.

Analogously, employees often work on content marketing topics and advertising communication at the same time—especially if there is no separate content

Table 10.1 Measurements for the operationalization of the key figure group Resources Used

Range	Level of observation[a]	Key figures
Time expenditure	Content marketing as a whole	Total (working) time used for content marketing If necessary, separated by task areas: Planning/Management, Media Creation, Controlling, …
	Content marketing segments	Channel-specific: time spent on blog, Facebook, podcast, … Format-specific: time spent on research, writing, image/video production, actual posting, … Genre-specific: time spent on how-to, entertainment, professional, humor posts, etc.
	Content marketing post[b]	Time spent on a specific post, possibly by task areas (research, writing, image creation, …)
Costs	Content marketing as a whole	Total cost of content marketing, possibly separated by cost types, e.g. personnel costs, agency/service provider costs, material costs, license costs, etc.
	Content marketing segments	Channel-specific: costs for blog, Facebook, podcast, … Format-specific: time investment for research, writing, image/video production, actual posting, … Genre-specific: time investment for how-to, entertainment, expert, humor articles, etc.
	Content marketing post	*(Controlling and key figures for an individual post are rather unusual)*

[a]See also the explanations in Sect. 1.3 for the levels of consideration.
[b]The recording for an individual post is certainly only useful for special questions. However, if it is carried out consistently for all posts, it can also be used to calculate segment key figures by summing up the individual values of the posts.

marketing department. And agencies are also commissioned for both content marketing and advertising communication at the same time. Common time recording systems (if any) or the accounting of service providers are often not designed to distinguish between these areas of responsibility. Depending on the company, new measurement mechanisms must therefore be established or suitable estimation methods used.

Finally, the allocation of time and costs to the relevant segments is also not unproblematic in the case of segment-related key figures. The total amount of time spent on content marketing may still be easily determined. But especially if

Table 10.2 Measurements for the operationalization of the key figure groups Publishment Count & Publishment Efficiency

	Key figures Publishment Count	Key figures Publishment **Efficiency**
Content marketing as a whole	Total number of words and pictures	Cost per word/picture
***Channels** (Content marketing segment level of observation)*		
Website	Number of published articles (typ. pages/URLs[a])	Cost per article Time expenditure per article
Weblog	Number of published weblog articles	Cost per article Time expenditure per article
E-Mail-Marketing	Number of newsletter issues, used mail routes or trigger-mails[b]	Cost per newsletter issue Time expenditure per news-letter issue
Podcast	Number of episodes	Cost per episode Time investment per episode
Voice App	Number of available/created dialogues	Cost per dialogue Time investment per dialogue
Social Media as a whole	Total number of published posts (posts, tweets, stories, snaps, reels, etc.)	Cost per post Time investment per post
Facebook	Number of published posts, number of live streams	Cost per post Time required per post
Instagram	Number of published posts, stories, reels	Cost per post Time required per post
LinkedIn	Number of published posts	Cost per post Time required per post
Pinterest	Number of published boards, number of pins completed[c]	Cost per pin/board Time required per pin/board
Snapchat	Number of snaps and snap stories published	Cost per snap/snap story Time required per snap/snap story
TikTok	Number of videos published Total length of videos published	Cost per video Time required per video
Twitter	Number of tweets published	Cost per tweet Time required per tweet

(continued)

Table 10.2 (continued)

	Key figures Publishment Count	Key figures Publishment **Efficiency**
Xing	Number of posts published	Cost per post Time required per post
YouTube & other video portals	Number of videos published	Cost per video Time required per video

[a]Some websites do not publish articles on a single page, but split them up into several pages to continue browsing. In such cases, only the URLs of the respective first page are to be counted here—that is, the number of articles, not the number of pages/URLs in total.
[b]Note: The number of recipients or the number of emails sent (which belongs to the presentation of content) is not counted in the content creation metrics presented here, but rather the number of newsletter issues, mail campaigns, etc. created.
[c]On Pinterest, it is necessary to distinguish between content created and then pinned, and on the other hand, pins placed on other people's content—especially because the effort for both differs significantly and this is particularly important for efficiency metrics for their interpretability.
[Table footer—please overwrite]

a company works efficiently (for example, by researching a certain topic in general first and then developing a comprehensive article for the website, 10 Facebook posts with tips, 5 Instagram posts, a how-to video, and a newsletter article from the research results), it is not possible to clearly allocate the time spent to channels or segments. Here, it is then necessary to work with the best possible, practicable allocations according to fixed rules or in a lump sum, without watering down the basic meaning of key figures.

10.3 Key Figures of the Content Itself

Once content marketing posts have been created, they can in turn be the subject of controlling. They can be quantified (e.g. in terms of scope), classified (e.g. by type) or measured qualitatively. These key figures provide management and content creators with useful information on how to develop a balanced and high-quality content marketing strategy, for example by supporting the conceptual and editorial planning through the key figures of controlling.

10.3.1 Amount and Classification of Content

Content marketing posts can be segmented (classified) by the number of words, pictures, etc. which be measured as well as the actual topics can. The following groups of key figures do this.

▶ Groups of key figures for type and amount of content
Content Classification (Genre, Topic, Format)
Content Volume (Element Count, e.g. Word Count, Image Count; Content Duration; Subsection Count)

The key figures of the group of key figures **Content Classification** serve to a large extent to create a better overview of the content marketing corpus or segments thereof. Typical classification criteria here are the genre of the posts, the type of content and the content format used.

The type of a particular content is referred to as the genre. There are how-tos, editorial reports, infographics, expert articles, entertainment and other genres. ***Genre key figures*** are measured on the one hand as absolute numbers (number of posts belonging to a genre), but often also in the form of a percentage of the total number of posts.

The content-based classification of ***topic indicators*** is very individual for each company, as each company publishes different content that is suitable for its target group and company. For example, the content marketing of a bicycle provider could work with the content categories Tour Tips, Repair, Technical Knowledge, News, etc., while the provider of fashion uses the content categories Outfits, Material Knowledge and Designer Reports in its controlling and measures the number of each article published.

These genre and topic indicators are almost always measured at the level of the *content marketing corpus* or for *content marketing segments,* e.g. the total number of How-To articles (in all channels) or the number of proverb posts in Instagram.[1] Such indicators help, for example, to check whether a content strat-

[1] It must not be confused at this point with regard to levels of observation that although each individual article is assigned a certain classification or category, in controlling the total number of articles with a certain assigned category is considered as a whole or in a certain area (e.g. in a channel)—key figures are therefore considered at the level of the *content marketing corpus* or *segment*—and not at the level of an individual *content marketing article*.

egy defined in advance has been implemented well and where optimization potentials in the form of new content exist.[2]

The ***content format indicators*** finally relate to the format of the realization of the content. On the one hand, the whole article can be assigned a format, i.e. e.g. text-image format (e.g. Facebook post), multi-image format (e.g. slideshow), video, multimedia format (e.g. blog article with a mixture of text, image, video) etc. Again, indicators arise at the level of the *content marketing corpus* or the *content marketing segments* (mostly channel-specific), e.g. the proportion of video posts in Instagram or the ratio of single-image to multi-image articles.

While the previous indicators have dealt with the content type, the second group of indicators **content volume** from the framework area of quantitative measurement of the scope of content marketing is dedicated.

The indicators for ***Element Count*** indicate how many individual elements a content marketing article consists of. What is considered to be such an individual element in each individual case (and the underlying consideration) must be specified for each individual case. Words and content sections can both serve as content elements to be counted.

For text and image-oriented articles, such as magazine articles on a website or Facebook/Instagram posts, initial indicators can be gathered for this, such as the number of words (Word Count) or the number of sentences (Sentence Count). Similarly, the average number of images per article (Image Count), for example. Interesting findings can also be derived from calculated ratio indicators, such as the ratio of the number of paragraphs to the number of words (statement on the structure of the texts) or the image-text ratio.

Finally, for video and audio formats, the playback time (***Content Duration,*** e.g. video length, podcast length in minutes and seconds) often plays a more important role in the context of content volume indicators than the number of words.

For more extensive formats (e.g. on websites or longer videos or podcasts), a more content-oriented indicator can be helpful: the number of content sections or subtopics that the article is made up of (Subsection Count). For example, such an indicator provides an indication of how well and diversely topics are elaborated for weblog articles. Something like this can be determined either content-wise manually or at least as a rough indicator, for example the number of sub-headings in between for website magazine articles, can be recorded automatically.

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[2] If necessary, a comparison can also be made with an SEO keyword research, search volumes and search intentions in order to gain extended insights for the target-oriented control of content marketing.

Based on the key figures recorded for all articles (of the corpus or a segment) in the above way, it then makes sense to derive the relative frequencies and distribution indicators. For example, it could be determined what percentage of the articles are under 100, up to 300, up to 500, up to 1000, up to 3000 or over 3000 words. Such information for website articles would be of interest both for the editorial assessment of the content and with a view to the search engine (SEO) effect—while on the other hand such akey figure would hardly be meaningful for a Twitter channel.

Operationalization and measurement of the indicators of content classification and scope

The key figures of content classification are usually recorded both as absolute numerical values and as relative shares, as Table 10.3 shows in overview. The percentage figures are then formed depending on the need and question in focus at the level of observation of the *content marketing corpus* (then the total number of all content marketing articles is used as the divisor for the calculation) or for the level of observation of the *Content-Marketing-Segments* (Divisor for the cal-

Table 10.3 Key figures for operationalizing the Content Classification key figure group

Segment	Absolute Key Figures	Relative Key Figures
Genre *z. B. How-To, Specialized Information, ommend, Slogan-Posts, Reports, …*[a]	Number of post in the respective genre	Percentage of total output *(Number of genre-posts devided by number of all posts)*
Content category *Strongly dependent on the individual case, e.g. for a bicycle provider: Tour tips, repair, technical knowledge, news, …*	Number of posts in the respective content category	Percentage of the total output *(Number of posts in the category divided by total number of posts)*
Content format *e.g. text-image post, infographic, video, short video, image gallery, audio post, webinar, dialog sequence (e.g. voice assistant), …*	Number of posts in the respective format	Percentage of the total output *(Number of posts divided by total number of posts)*

[a]Which genres are useful here as segments is to be determined in the individual case and with a view to one's own content marketing activities.

Table 10.4 Measurements for operationalizing the key figure group content volume

Media format of the content	Absolute key figures	Relative key figures
Format-specific	Number of content sections/ thematic sub-points	Frequency distribution of posts by number of sections
Text	Word count Number of sentences Number of paragraphs	Text-to-image ratio Paragraph-to-word ratio Frequency distributions
Image	Number of images Image size (displayed and file size)	Frequency distribution of posts by number of images or image size
Video (and other moving image)	Video length	Frequency distribution of posts by video length
Audio (streaming or download-based)	Audio length	Frequency distribution of posts by audio length
Interactive speech formats (e.g. voice assistants)	Number of dialogues (e.g. as number of available intents) Possible dialog chain length	Frequency distribution of posts by number or dialog chain length

For all key figures, relative frequencies and dispersion measures.

culation is then the total number of posts of the respective segment, e.g. only the number of weblog posts or Facebook posts).

The content volume indicators in Table 10.4 differ depending on the content format to be measured. They depend on which basic media formats the respective content are composed of (for the difference between the terms media format and content format, see also Sect. 1.2). For an "Instagram Post" as a content format, which consists of the basic media formats text and image(s), both relevant key figures are of interest.

Backgrounds and problems with measurement and interpretation

A content classification (genre, content category, content format) should ideally not be established retrospectively, but assigned to each post during the planning or implementation process. This can be done, for example, in the editorial plan or an editorial software. So these classifications—not only for automated controlling evaluations—are always easily available. The scales for these key figures are typically nominal scaled, the values are the class labels. This list of possible values should be fixed on the one hand and relatively stable over time, but on the other hand also be adapted to new circumstances from time to time.

The number of words, sentences, pictures or the video length from the key figure group content volume is just as comparatively easy to determine and also automatable. This can be done using statistics or exports from editorial systems as well as tools for automatic crawling of websites, etc.

10.3.2 Quality of the Content

In addition to the quantitative measurement of the content in the last section, of course, its quality also plays a role in controlling. Here it is necessary to distinguish between the technical quality (in particular the quality of the media formats used) and the substantive quality of the content. With the advertising effect in mind intended in content marketing, it is also necessary to measure how well the content fits the target group.

> **Key figure groups of content quality**
> **Technical Quality** (media quality)
> **Substantial Quality** (Overall Substantial Quality, Readability, Comprehensibility, Element Variability)
> **Targetgroup Fit**

The ***Technical Quality*** refers to the media used. Here, for example, the visual quality of pictures and videos or the audio quality of podcasts has to be evaluated. Oftenaverage values at the segment level (channel-specific or format-specific) or frequency distributions are again considered as key figures. But also minimum-maximum considerations or distributions can provide interesting results here.

The key figures of the ***Substantial Quality*** do not consider the technical media quality, but the substantive, content-related quality. Such a key figure can either be measured as a single key figure by evaluating the overall quality (Overall Substantial Quality) or differentiated into specific key figures. For example, with written texts, the readability (Readability) or, with written texts, spoken language and pictures, the comprehensibility (Comprehensibility) can be evaluated and recorded.

In addition, it has been shown that a large variety and richness can also be seen as high quality. This can be a variety of topics found at the level of observation of the *Content Marketing Corpus* as well as a variety (in terms of content and media formats used) measured and considered at the level of the *Content Marketing Segment* (e.g. manually evaluated by people or, for example, for blog posts, the number and length of text paragraphs, the number of pictures, the number of lists, indents, info boxes or other content or graphical design elements automatically measured and used as an indicator for the key figure Element Variability).

Finally, it is important to understand content quality in relation to other factors. So the content must not only be of high quality in and of itself, but it must also be as well-suited as possible to the target group ***(Targetgroup Fit)***. This is influenced, for example, by factors such as the language being appropriate for the target group (choice of words, etc.), arguments that are appropriate to their prior knowledge (knowledge and experience, etc.), and suitable metaphors that are also comprehensible in light of the target group's sociological background (see also Sect. 8.5).

Such typical indicators of content quality can be found in an overview in Table 10.5.

Backgrounds and problems with measurement and interpretation

The measurement of quality indicators is often no longer posible in a completely automatic way, especially because an assessment of quality often also makes sense from a human perspective or is not well done by machine alone.

While the technical quality can still be evaluated quite well in objective values in part (e.g. sampling rate or noise measurement in video/audio, font size, choice of a suitable image format jpg, png and/or webp), but already the optimal compression of image or video files an optical impression (e.g. are compression artifacts visible?) comes into play.[3]

The content quality can only be measured to a very limited extent automatically, which is why it is often not systematically measured in practice despite its importance. In the simplest case, each post is rated manually, e.g. as an overall quality on a scale of 1 to 10. However, such an assessment should not be made by the same people who created the respective content, as this would unconsciously lead to biases in the measurements. In addition, clear and uniform assessment criteria should be defined in advance (especially if several or changing persons carry out the assessment). Organizational support can also be provided by crowdworking or usability testing platforms if a larger number of posts are to be examined.

[3] Fortunately, there are optimization tools that compress images or videos or audio files for the Internet on the one hand in terms of file size and bandwidth to the smallest possible extent, but automatically avoid optical or acoustic restrictions to the best possible extent. So when using such tools, manual control of the technical image quality is at least not regularly necessary.

Table 10.5 Measured values for operationalization of the Content Quality key figure group

Bereich	Media Format of the Contents	Key figures
Technical media quality	Format-independent	Correct representation Suitable file formats Performance indicators
	HTML formats	Quality of HTML/CSS implementation (correctness, integration of structured data, etc.)
	Text	Text readability (font size, contrast, font)
	Image	Image resolution Compression (e.g. problem of visible artifacts)
	Video/moving image	Video resolution Compression (e.g. problem of visible artifacts)
	Audio (streaming/download)	Sound quality (e.g. bit/sampling rates or bandwidth, noise/clarity etc.)
	Interactive language (e.g. voice assistants)	Intent-Utterance-Variability
Content quality	Format-independent	Overall rating Argument strength (see also Sect. 8.2.2)
	Text	Readability (e.g. L.-indices LIX, Flesh Reading Ease, …) Comprehensibility[a]
	Image	Significance Fit between image and text
	Video/moving image	Depending on the content[b]
	Audio (streaming/download)	Depending on the content
	Interactive language (e.g. speech assistants)	
Relational quality		Target group fit e.g. word choice, necessary prior knowledge, etc.

(continued)

Table 10.5 (continued)

[a]For readers who are interested in a deeper understanding of the communicative quality of communication, the book (in German language!) “Sprachliche Kommunikation: Verstehen und Verständlichkeit” (Ballstaedt 2019) or for a quick overview of comprehensibility models (Wikipedia 2021) is recommended at this point.

[b]Of course, different criteria and indicators for the assessment of the content quality apply to teaching videos, entertainment or artistic videos. Therefore, it is not possible to list individual quality criteria and indicators for all types of video or audio content here. They must be determined individually in each case.

All technical indicators possibly on different devices.

In particular in texts, but also in infographics or even for image motifs, a measure for the strength of the argument can be useful from a psychological point of view in terms of advertising effectiveness. However, in the sense of Sect. 8.2.1 (structure of good arguments), an experienced or trained employee should be used for such an assessment who does not only understand the term of the argument as a fixed sentence structure, but as the underlying content pattern.

But also tools can be used to gain data on the quality of a text. There are various readability and understandability indices that try to automatically assess longer texts. Partly, in addition, the key figures mentioned in Content Volume are also determined, such as sentence length.

A value that is again rather manually determined by human evaluation and hardly automated is the target group fit, that is, the question of how well the content is adapted to the target group (for example, rated on a scale of 0 to 10). A prerequisite for realistic and helpful key figures is that the person evaluating the target group fit knows the target group well and can empathize with it.

All of the above-mentioned measured key figures are usually measured on the level of individual *content marketing posts*. The individual post as a level of observation of controlling can also be helpful for the content creator in practical work processes, for example, by automatically checking the readability in an editorial tool and comparing it with a minimum threshold. This provides the creator with hints that the text should be revised with a view to readability.

However, controlling key figures are more important for content planning and management in the form of aggregated measurement values at the level of the *content marketing corpus* or *content marketing segments*. For this purpose, in the simplest case, sums and averages or distribution of frequencies are calculated and indicated as key figures. This can be the total sum of video length published on YouTube per quarter or the percentage distribution of the number of words of all articles published in a month. Or, in the field of content quality, the average quality of articles published quarterly is determined and compared in a time curve.

10.4 Key Figures of Content Presentation

After its creation, content is played out over one or more channels and presented in a frontend terminal (i.e. a screen). In practice, key figures of how often this happens are very often used in the controlling of content marketing, e.g. page views as a measure of how often a website magazine article was displayed in a browser.

However, the frequent use of these key figures is less due to the fact that they are most signifiacant regarding an advertising effect, but to the low effort of their measurement. Statistics such as page views, post-reach or podcast downloads are already available in widely used web analytics tools in a simple standard integration.

However, one must be aware that these indicators do not show any advertising effect. They only measure the presentation of content marketing posts, i.e. how large the advertising effect *potentially maximum* can be (because a presentation on a terminal does not mean that the content was seen or heard at all, let alone paid attention to in any way).

10.4.1 Frequency of Content Presentation

The more often content is reproduced on a terminal (e.g. displayed on the screen or played out over loudspeakers), the more people of the target group it can potentially reach. That is why frequency key figures are important in content marketing controlling. However, the ratio of retrieval statistics of content marketing and advertising communication can also lead to interesting findings.

> **Indicator groups of content presentation frequency**
> **Content Reach (Content Impression, Content Visits, Unique Visitors & Unique Users)**
> **Editorial-Advertising-Ratio**

The key figure group **Content Reach** counts the number of times the content is presented the user's end devices. Depending on whether the same content is counted once or several times when the same user retrieves it several times, this results in different individual key figures.

The ***Content Impressions*** show the number of all presentations—for example, how often a blog entry is displayed by a browser, how often a podcast episode was audible, or how often a dialog about content marketing topics was output on a voice assistant—regardless of whether the presentation is on different end devices or several times on the same end device. In the controlling of websites, impressions are often also referred to as page views.

The ***Content Visits,*** on the other hand, do not record each individual appearance of the content. Rather, the user sessions[4] (engl. also visits)[5] in which the relevant content was called up at least once are counted. So if, during a visit to a website, the same magazine article is displayed several times in the same browser, there are several impressions, but only one visit.

If you do not look at time-limited blocks of visits (sessions), but at individual end devices over a longer period of time, the key figure ***Unique Visitor*** is created. So if the same browser calls up the content marketing article twice this morning, once this afternoon and again next week, four impressions, three visits (visits at limited time intervals) but only one unique visitor (a visitor, namely the relevant browser) are created. Analogously, this is the case with other devices such as smartphones, podcast players, etc. Important with this key figure: It is not related to persons yet, but to devices. So if, for example, several people use a device together, they are recorded as one unique visitor.

The key figure ***Unique User*** finally measures not only anonymous browsers or devices, but the number of real people who have been presented with content—regardless of which device this happens on. This is often technically measured by assigning user sessions in which the same log-in was used (but on different devices) to each other and treating them as one user.[6] For example, in social media, users are permanently logged in, which corresponds to the often stated "number of people reached" there.

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[4] A session or a visit/visit consists of several page views by the same browser that must not be more than a maximum time apart. After more than 30 minutes of inactivity (no page view), another visit to the website (session, visit) is often assumed. Analogously, this can be defined for the channel of the voice assistant, if one understands continuous dialogues as a visit, which consists of several individual statements (views). On the other hand, it does not make sense to record visits for e-mail marketing, since e-mails are practically always viewed individually and not in a session. In the statistics tools of the social media networks, visits are usually not shown, but are often focused on reached persons, i.e. unique visitors.

[5] Attention: at this point visits, not visitors.

[6] For the sake of accuracy, it should be noted here that strictly speaking, the number of real people is not actually being measured, but the number of log-ins used, which would result in very similar key figures in practice and therefore this difference is not discussed in detail.

These content replay reach key figures are analyzed at the different levels of observation, depending on the available controlling purpose. For example, on the *post level,* the reach of individual posts can be determined (and compared with other posts) just as the reach of a specific channel is measured on the *segment level*. The reach of different subject areas (based on content classification) can also provide useful information. Finally, on the level of the *content marketing corpus,* the total reach of all content marketing publications, as measured by content replay key figures, plays a role, as it shows the potential impact of content marketing as a whole.

In most of the tools used, in addition to the content marketing figures, there are also analogous key figures for the distribution of advertorial communication content. This then allows the key figure ***Editorial-Advertising-Ratio*** to be derived by dividing the number of impressions or visits of content marketing posts (Content Impressions) by the impressions or visits of posts with advertising communication. Such a ratio can be an indication of the importance of content marketing for the overall (online) marketing advertising effect.

Operationalization and measurement of frequency key figures

In the operationalization of these key figures, concrete measurement values have to be selected again on the basis of the channels used, the objectives and, if necessary, the actual problems of controlling in the company. Table 10.6 provides an overview of the most common key figures that are used as frequency key figures.

The ratio key figures of the editorial-promotional ratio are then derived from these values or calculated. For example, for a website, the page views of pages with advertising content (advertorial page views) are related to the page views of pages with content marketing (content page views): editorial-promotional ratio = content page views divided by advertorial page views.

Origin of content retrievals

Especially on websites or in blogs, it is often interesting to also know where the users come from, i.e. whether they came to the website via a search engine, via a link on another website (and which one), by directly entering the domain, from links in social media or via other means.

The dimension of origin (English: source) recorded in web analytics tools is helpful for this question, with which content reach key figures can be further broken down.

However, it should be noted that when using the technical standard integration of analytics tools, the sources of origin of visitors are not always correctly or sufficiently differentiated. Here it is necessary to take further technical measures, e.g. when linking to content marketing postsin newsletters or possibly also in social media, to use additional tracking parameters (e.g. utm parameters in Google Analytics), as otherwise, for example, users who clicked on newsletter links would be wrongly counted as a direct access to the domain.

In addition, the tools form source groups, but e.g. Google Analytics does not include all search engines in the respective source group (but these are partly evaluated as links from other websites). But this can often be adjusted in the configuration settings.

Such problems of correct measurement have been known for a long time and are technically solvable to a large extent. However, the above hints should make it clear that it is not enough to simply integrate analytics tools. For controlling with meaningful indicators, it is necessary to take further technical measures, e.g. to integrate additional tracking codes, to make configurations or to always extend links in other channels than the website by parameters. If necessary, specialists should be consulted for the technical set-up.

Backgrounds and problems with measurement and interpretation

For the measurement of the key figures of content replay reach, there are different tools available for almost every existing channel. These are web analytics tools for websites/blogs such as the widely used Google Analytics (or others) or statistics offered by the channel operators themselves such as Facebook Insights, TikTok Analytics or LinkedIn statistics.

For content marketing controlling, however, these tools all have a fundamental problem: they do not recognize the difference between advertising content and content marketing automatically. An Instagram metric "Reach(ed Accounts)" therefore only shows the total reach of all posts, not (only) the accounts reached by content marketing posts. And Google Analytics or other web analytics tools measure the total number of visits or visitors, but not the visits of content marketing pages separately from visitors who only or also access the website's advertising content.

While on the level of individual *content marketing posts* the key figures can often still be reliable taken from the respective tools, for example the page views of individual posts on websites/blogs or the reach of individual social media posts, the measurement important for the content marketing advertising effect on the level of the *content marketing segments,* for. B. the total content marketing reach of a website or a social media channel, is usually more complex.

This problem, of really only gathering data about posts with content marketing for clean content marketing metrics (and posts with advertising communication in other metrics), can be partly solved by adapting the technical integration of the measurement technology (e.g. Custom Dimensions), partly by filtering data or semi-manual data collection, in part (due to the limitations of the respective

Table 10.6 Measurements for the operationalization of the key figure group Content Reach

	Typical Key Figures
Content marketing as a whole	Content Views, Unique User
Channels *(Content marketing segment level)*	
Website	Page Views or View-Events, Visits/Sessions, Unique Visitors, Unique Users, the pages with content marketing content called Embedded or linked PDFs & other document formats: Number of downloads or link clicks In embedded content marketing videos: Video Views
Weblog	(analogous to website)
E-Mail Marketing	Number of opened e-mails (Unique Users) *(e.g. calculated from opening rate * number of recipients)*
Podcast	Subscribers Downloads, in streaming: Plays Completed Episode Count Unique Listeners Podcast Rankings
Voice App	Voice App Unique Users Number of started dialogues
Social Media as a whole	Overall reach: Impressions, Unique Users
Facebook	Page views, post reach, story reach, video plays *(Reach in Facebook Insights usually shown as Unique Users)*
Instagram	Reached accounts (= Unique Users), video plays
LinkedIn	Post Views and Article Views
Pinterest	Impressions, size of target group (Audience Insights)
Snapchat	Story Views
TikTok	Total Video Views, Live Video Views, Profile Views Reached Audience (= Unique Users)
Twitter	Tweet Impressions, Video Views, Profile Visits
Xing	Profile visits, post impressions
YouTube & other video portals	Views (Views) Individual viewers (Unique Users)

channels) but sometimes not at all. Some important approaches to practice can be found in the following box.

Optimize analytics tools for content marketing controlling

How can content marketing metrics be collected cleanly? The following approaches should give you a first glance for planning your measurement systems.

Solution approach: data filtering

If the content marketing can be identified by clear rules, for example because/magazin/(or similar) is included in the URL for all such pages, the content marketing metrics may possibly be extracted by data filtering in the web analytics tools. For example, Google Analytics allows you to define so-called data segments for analysis or group content by rules in the configuration.

This solution approach is often the simplest, as no technical adjustments and at most a few configuration settings are necessary. However, this approach is limited to cases in which such a clear distinction between content marketing and other content is possible by clear rules (e.g. a certain word in the URL). If content marketing were published in other places, it would not be considered in the measurement and the metrics would be distorted.

Solution approach: data labeling

It is technically possible to provide web analytics tools with additional identifiers, which are e.g. called custom dimensions at Google Analytics. This allows each individual page/URL of a website to be clearly identified as to what type of content it has, e.g. content marketing or advertorial. Once pages are marked in such a way, they can be considered separately in the analysis (e.g. as segments or content groups, as with data filtering). Since this approach is relatively easy to integrate technically and is mainly a one-time effort, it should be implemented early on in practice as content marketing activities grow. However, this solution approach (as well as data filtering) is usually not possible in social media networks or for channels that only offer their own statistics.

Solution approach: semi-manual data collection

In social media networks, if no further technical solutions can or should be realized, semi-manual data collection is necessary. For example, the reach of each individual post has to be read manually from the channel's own statistics (e.g. Facebook Insights or podcast download statistics, etc.) and, for example, transferred to Excel or another analysis tool in the simplest case. There it can then be identified which posts is acontent marketing post and which were advert communication. In this way, specific content reach indicators can be determined.

But beware: The reach of social media can change days or even weeks after the post is published because it is still displayed to more individual users. Therefore, such an evaluation should only be carried out with sufficient time delay after publication so that the updated reach of the same posts does not have to be transfered manually again.

Unfortunately, this semi-manual approach is the only sensible approach for reliable content reach indicators without using more sophisticated technology due to the technical limitations that some channels or social media channels set.

Solution approach: APIs and scraping
Some tools and channels offer the possibility to transfer data to your own databases or tools via APIs (programming interfaces) or export functions. This way one can then create individual key figures adapted to content marketing controlling and carry out specific evaluations that usual analytics tools do not offer. For example, data from Google Analytics can be exported via data export, just as Twitter offers good export options.

However, channels such as Facebook or Instagram do not provide this. But so-called scraping tools can help here (see exemplary tools in Sect. 10.6.2.4). These automatically read out content called up in the browser (e.g. the Facebook feed) and make the data available in databases or Excel. This would make it possible to automatically read out all your own posts from Facebook, including likes and comments, and further process them with other tools—in order to get good content marketing key figures.

But this approach is certainly subject to companies with more extensive content marketing activities, for which the effort of such more elaborate measuring technology pays off (or technically versed readers),

It should not be forgottenthat not all web analytics tools measure page views of HTML pages displayed in the browser by default, but not downloads (e.g. PDFs, Word documents, etc.) or content in interactive functionality (e.g. output generated by Javascript or content loaded). So it is very annoying in practice when, for example, a large number of (and very valuable for advertising effectiveness and marketing goals) downloads with content marketing do not appear at all in the controlling measurement values because it was forgotten to take the necessary technical precautions.[7]

It is also not unproblematic to decide what should be counted as a video or audio play as content replay and what not: already the playback of only one second (which leads to the fact that automatically starting videos are counted even if they only scroll briefly over the screen, but certainly had no chance to achieve an advertising effect)? Often only those videos are counted that have run for at least 3 or 5 s. About this you should always be aware of what is actually measured and how for different analytics tools and your own technical integration in order to be able to interpret the resulting key figures correctly.

Finally, there are sometimes channel-specific peculiarities. For example, an Instagram business or creator account is necessary to access statistics. Or some channel operators require a minimum number of followers before they unlock access to statistical measurement values.

[7] Without providing a complete technical manual here, only the possibility of measuring events should be briefly mentioned, which can be easily configured for download clicks (and other user activities) when integrated via the Google Tag Manager. Other tools such as etracker offer similar possibilities by specially adapting the used download links.

These considerations demonstrate that for high-quality content marketing controlling, simply reading out the values available by default in analytics tools is not sufficient in most cases or leads to diluted measurement values. In order to really be able to prove the success and advertising effect of content marketing in a reliable manner and to derive meaningful decisions for further activities from the key figures, it is necessary to take all of the above mentioned topics into account when operationalizing and implementing them technically and to ensure as clean measurement values as possible.

10.4.1.1 Effect on Search Engine Rankings

The key figures in this section so far are pointing out how often a piece of content is presented on a device. However, how high this value will be also depends heavily on the effect the respective content has on machines and algorithms, in particular those of search engines. The more often content marketing is recommended there, the more users will pay attention to it and the potential for an emerging advertising effect increases. Due to the great importance of search engines, key figures for the effect of content on their algorithms must also be integrated into the content marketing framework at this point.

The key figures given here for content marketing are based on the usual measurement values for SEO (search engine optimization).

> ▶ **Key figure groups of the SEO effectiveness of content**
> **Content Rankings**
> **Content Visibility Index**
> **Content-Induced SEO-Traffic**

The **Content Rankings** show for each search term on which position of the organic (unpaid) search results a content marketing post can be found. They show how successful a content is impacting the ranking algorithms and how well it is then placed in the results list. These key figures are usually only considered at the level of the respective *content marketing posts* and possibly still averages for certain content groups. At the level of the *content marketing segments,* an overall average (e.g. the ranking of an entire blog) can of course be determined, but this is rather unspecific and visibility indices are much better suited to measure the overall SEO success of content marketing.

The **Content Visibility Index** provides an assessment of the overall visibility of content marketing posts on the search result pages of a search engine as a key figure. This SEO visibility is the higher the number of rankings for search term are, the more often these search terms are actually searched and the further forward the listing is on the results page. Therefore, the Content Visibility Index is particularly useful at the level of a content marketing segment, e.g. to measure the overall SEO success of a website magazine.

The key figure **Content-Induced SEO-Traffic** represents the transition to the above-mentioned key figures of Content Presentation. It measures the traffic (share) caused by content marketing on the website resulting from search engines, i.e. the number of clicks on organic (content marketing) search results. These clicks can be measured as an absolute number or as a percentage of traffic.

Backgrounds and problems with measurement and interpretation

A central tool for SEO-related controlling is the Google Search Console (or Bing Webmaster Tools), which is free of charge for website owners. It provides ranking information for search terms and pages/URLs. The positions of pages as search results are offered as average values for the respective time period selected, so that the selected analysis period must always be taken into account depending on the underlying question or for regular reporting. Fortunately, this data can also be exported or read out via an API provided by Google and further processed in your own controlling IT.

The data from the Search Console can be considered the most reliable ranking information available, as they come from Google on the one hand and are based on the average of a large number of real searches on the other. This makes them more accurate than the rankings of other tools. However, when interpreting these statistics from Google, you should be aware that they too are not an exact reflection of reality. They are also incomplete and should be considered more as minimum values and not as exact measurement values.

Rankings from other, very valuable SEO tools such as Sistrix, Searchmetrics, Ahrefs, etc. must be interpreted differently than the data from the Google Search Console, despite the exactly the same terms used for different measured figures. Ranking key figures from these tools are not based on the average of all or a large part of the real searches, but are usually only a snapshot of a single search per day. However, the advantage of these tools is that they provide ranking data for much longer periods of time than the Google Search Console (which is limited to 16 months). In addition, these tools can also be used to retrieve rankings for competitors and their content marketing success in Google.

In addition to the individual rankings, many tools also determine the overall visibility in search engines. If you do not do this for the website as a whole, but only for the content marketing pages, you will receive a Content Visibility

Index. However, when these figures are automatically calculated by SEO tools, it must be taken into account that each tool provider calculates the visibility index according to a different formula and that they are therefore hardly comparable—despite the same terms used for all of them. In addition, not all tools offer the option of determining a visibility index not only for the entire website, but also for a specific part of this (namely only for the content marketing posts) in addition to the visibility index of the entire website.

However, the key figure Content-Induced SEO-Traffic can be compared relatively easily with the usual web analytics tools. The source of the traffic must be considered and the traffic that came about through entry pages with content marketing must be filtered out.

10.4.1.2 Effect on Other Algorithms

Content marketing content also has an effect on social media algorithms (which content marketing content is displayed in the feeds of followers) or search functions in various channels (Facebook search, Pinterest search, etc.). However, there are hardly any meaningful, direct measurement tools available for this, which is why explicit key figures are not included in the content marketing controlling framework.

However, reference is made to Sect. 10.6.2, in which at least interactions caused by content, which in turn have an effect on the social media algorithms, are provided with key figures.

10.4.2 Intensity of Content Presentation

It may happen that you were in the sun five times—but for tanning the skin, it makes a big difference whether you only sat in the sun five times for 1 minute or five times for 1 hour. Analogously, the number of content presentations is one thing, the amount of the presentation—or more generally formulated: the intensity of the content distribution—is something else and requires its own key figures.

The question of what is to be understood as intensity depends on the respective media format. For videos, for example, the duration of the display on the screen is suitable, for websites the period of time they were visible in the browser or on the screen.

In addition, it must be taken into account that the presentation intensity is also closely related to the intensity of the content usage. Because while the indicators in this section are independent of the actions of the users here, the indicators to be found in Sect. 10.6.1 show active user interactions with the content (and thus also indicate a more intensive use). These two levels of effect should therefore be considered on the one hand due to their different nature, but on the other hand always considered together in controlling practice (especially because the boundaries between the two are partly fluid).

> **Indicators of content playback intensity**
> **Content Replay Durations (Avg. Page View Duration, Avg. Video View Duration, Avg. Audio Play Duration)**
> **Replay Durations per User**

The indicator group **Content Replay Durations** shows how long the content is presented on the end device, that is, how long a website is visible, how long a video runs or how long an audio file is outputted through speakers. This usually leads to key figures such as the average time the content is displayed on the screen (Avg. Page View Duration) for image and text-based formats, or for video and audio formats, to indicators of the playback time (Avg. Video View or Audio Play Duration).

Depending on the underlying question, these key figures can be useful on different levels of observation. For individual *content marketing posts* (individual videos, blog posts, social posts, podcast episodes, etc.), they help to assess and compare operationally which posts seem to have aroused particular interest in the target group or even which parts of the post were of particular interest. On the level of *content marketing segments,* on the one hand, a total can be gathered (e.g. total playback time of all videos per channel). Or, on the other hand, key figures provide useful clues as to which type of content leads to particularly high engagement with this (i.e. a good sign of an emerging advertising effect) when segmented by topic or format (e.g. infographics, how-to, etc.). Analogously, this is sometimes useful on the level of the *content marketing corpus*.

Operationalization and measurement of presentation intensity key figures
The typical key figures for presentation intensity that can be measured with common tools and with reasonable technical effort can be found in Table 10.7.

Backgrounds and problems with measurement and interpretation
The measurement and interpretation of average times on a websitepage is not problem-free. For example, if a page is called up in a browser, but then (for example, after reading the content) the browser is closed directly, the usual web analytics tools do not receive a signal when the page disappears from the screen—they

cannot measure the stay time at all. As a result, only those calls that result in another page call to the same website are often included in the measurement of the average stay time. This is particularly problematic for content marketing, as visitors often leave the website just when they have found the information they were looking for. In this case, it may be worthwhile to implement your own capture of the usage time in addition to the standard values of the analytics tools, for example, via special tracking events.

10.4.3 Quality of Content Presentation

The quality of the content itself as well as the quality of its realisation in a media format have already been grasped by the key figures of Sect. 10.3.2. But also the actual presentation in the respective channels can have an influence on the quality. Key figures for this should now be considered.

Key figures for the quality of content presentation
Presentation Quality
Device Adjustment

The key figure group of **Presentationayback Quality** provides key figures on how well the content marketing is accessible and how it is transmitted in terms of quality. Here, for example, the availability of the website is measured or the video/audio quality of the transmission. Loading times also belong in this group of key figures, for example the time until a video starts or the transmission time of websites (including, for example, the web core vitals known from SEO). Even if a video or audio stream hangs up, this would be one of these key figures.

However, since these key figures usually apply to a channel as a whole and differ only rarely from the values for other content, especially for content marketing, no separate operationalization should be carried out here, but it is recommended to transfer the usual key figures for channel quality to the content marketing controlling framework.

10.5 Key Figures for Cognitive Basic Effects

All previous key figures regarding content presentation from the last sections are all still independent of whether any human user perceives the distributed content at all. But if you now take into account the human users in front of the devices

Table 10.7 Measurements for the operationalization of the key figure groups Content Replay Duration

	Content Replay Duration
Content marketing as a whole	Total call or presentation time of the content marketing content
Website	Average time on the page
Weblog	(analogous to website)
E-Mail-Marketing	*(Messung technisch derzeit kaum möglich)*
Podcast	playback time
Sprachassistenten – Voice App	period of time with active communication
Social Media total	Total usage time of page / page-group Total playback time of video
Facebook	Average video playback time *(Duration of post views not available on Facebook)*
Instagram	Average video playback time *(Duration of post views not available on Instagram)*
LinkedIn	
Pinterest	Total playback time *(available only for videos, not for Pin/Board usage)*
Snapchat	
TikTok	Total Play Time *(of all videos)* Average Watch Time *(per person and video)* Watched Full Video
Twitter	
Xing	
YouTube & other video platforms	Playback time of channel Playback time of a single video Average playback time

and the effect that the distributed content has on them, in a first step you will reach the key figures of the cognitive basic effects.[8] The most important of these are, on the one hand, the awareness (of the content—not yet of the object to be

[8] We deliberately refer to the effects here as basic effects, because they are effects of the content on the people, but not yet effects with regard to any objects to be advertised. So it's not the actual desired advertising effect, which is then considered in Sect. 10.7.

advertised) and, on the other hand, knowledge, attitudes, etc. created by content marketing content.

10.5.1 Awareness of the Content

Is the content itself known to the target group? Can you remember a social media post, a checklist, or just generally that there is a customer magazine on the website? Or is the memory thematic, e.g. "that there is a lot of information on website xy.de about …?"

Such awareness is clearly to be distinguished from the presentation key figures of the last section. Once the users have retrieved a content and also seen or heard it, the next question is whether the corresponding memory structures—in other words, awareness—have arisen from this. Was the content really processed and remembered cognitively? Or were the users perhaps distracted while the blog post was displayed on the screen? Maybe they went away from the computer and just let the video run on? Or was a link to the content page not opened with a normal click, but with the right mouse button in a new browser tab, which was never called up and displayed? Maybe users just scrolled through social media mindlessly, without really looking, or they only perceived the content in their working memory[9] for a short time, but did not form any long-term memory structures. In all these cases, a content play-out would be measured, but no cognitive basis effect would occur. The relatively easy-to-detect key figures of content presentation (Sect. 10.4) are therefore an absolute prerequisite for awareness, but they are not to be equated with it. We therefore we need independent key figures of cognitive effects in the content marketing controlling framework. We use the term awareness, which is widespread in marketing, for this purpose.[10]

▶ **Groups of indicators of content awareness**
Content Awarenesses (Content Awareness, Topic Awareness, Substance Awareness)
Targetgroup Reach Rates

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[9] The working memory was previously often referred to as the short-term memory.

[10] Important: At this point in the basic effects, it is only about the awareness of the content and its contents, but not yet about the awareness of an object to be advertised (see Sect. 10.7.1 for this). To make this clear, we speak in the context of this framework of content awareness in contrast to an awareness of an advertised object.

The group of key figures of **Content Awarenesses** can be related on the one hand to the level of observation of the *Content Marketing Corpus*. On the other hand, it answers the question of whether users are aware that the respective provider offers content marketing posts beyond advertising communication.

On the level of the *Content Marketing Segments* it is then measured, if persons of the target group know the Content Marketing offers of certain channels (e.g. the magazine on a website), certain topics (e.g. the existence of content areas for plant care or for arranging house plants) or selected Content Formats (e.g. the presence of How-To-Videos, checklists, etc.).

For individual *Content Marketing posts* one would measure the awareness, if the users are familiar with the main topic available in content marketing posts, which is why the relevant key figures are called Topic Awareness (or thematic awareness). If, in addition to the topic (e.g. of an existing website magazine article), even more detailed content of this article is known—i.e. individual *Content Marketing Elements* at content level—one can speak of a Substance Awareness (substantial awareness) as a key figure.

Often, awareness key figures are then related to the total size of a target group (share of the target group), which leads to **Targetgroup Reach Rates**. First, the size of the total target group must be set as a base value and, with awareness key figures, a proportional reach rate is calculated as a new key figure.

Operationalization and measurement of awareness key figures

In addition to the level of consideration, the distinction must always be made between a supported awareness (Recognition) and an unsupported awareness (engl. Recall) when operationalizing the awareness key figures—i.e. whether something is recognized again on re-presentation or whether an active memory takes place without re-presentation (Moser 2015, p. 165).

Both types of awareness can be achieved and strengthened by content marketing. Thus, the first contact between customer and content marketing posts leads to an initial and, in the first step, supported awareness. The more often a contact with content marketing takes place or the more intensively it is cognitively processed, the more likely it is that the supported awareness will become an unsupported awareness. In practice, it therefore makes sense to offer a variety of content in order to provide a large number of potential touch points.

Awareness key figures are usually measured by memory tests. Such "memory measurements have long been the most commonly used advertising effectiveness measures and are still widespread today" (Moser 2015, p. 165). In the operationalization, different levels[11] of depth of awareness are usually distinguished (Aaker 1992, p. 84; Esch 2005, p. 70):

- unknown
- passive awareness (supported recognition, one recognizes it again)
- active awareness (memory, one remembers it)
- intensive active awareness (top of mind, one immediately remembers it)
- dominant (exclusive memory, only one remembers it)

For the target group reach rates, which show the share of the target group, the underlying target group must first be defined and its size recorded. Then either the awareness key figure or, somewhat simpler, the content reach key figures from Sect. 10.4.1 are divided by the corresponding target group size.

Backgrounds and problems with measurement and interpretation
"Active brand awareness is measured using recall tests, in which the consumer is asked to spontaneously name brands for a product category. Passive brand awareness is determined using recognition tests, in which the brand must be recognized from a set of given brands" (Esch and Eichenauer 2017, p. 278). What Esch describes here for brand awareness is of course just as valid for content awareness. Only that here either openly (e.g. "Which content of the website/which posts do you remember?") for unsupported or e.g. with topic specifications for the supported awareness (e.g. "Which of the following topics do you know from our weblog?") is asked.

Top of Mind can be calculated from the same surveys as the proportion of the first mention and the dominant awareness as the proportion of those only naming one topic. The surveys necessary for this can be carried out in writing, orally, by telephone or online (see also the advantages and disadvantages of these survey methods (Meffert et al. 2019, p. 195).

It is important to be aware of the baseline and the sampling when carrying out such awareness surveys in order to obtain interpretable and meaningful key figure values. So is it about awareness in the whole population of a country or only among internet users? Is it about awareness in a specific target group (what is the

[11] For readers who are interested in more depth, it should be mentioned that, in addition to dedicated levels, generalized scales are also discussed in marketing research. See, for example, (Laurent et al. 1995).

point, for example, if B2B content marketing has high awareness values, but only among private individuals who do not belong to the B2B target group)? Or is it not the awareness of the entire target group, but only the awareness of the website visitors that is being considered? And: Are only website visitors (e.g. via a small pop-up) or Facebook users (e.g. via the Facebook survey tool) interviewed, are customers called up to fill out a questionnaire in a podcast, is the survey carried out in pedestrian zones of a city in general? Or are the surveys carried out in several ways and then evaluated as a whole? Depending on this, the awareness figures must be interpreted differently at the end.

It makes sense for larger content marketing activities to not only promote and carry out the survey online. For example, in e-commerce shops, customers can be asked to participate by including a questionnaire in the shipped packages (possibly with a small thank-you in advance), surveys can be conducted in person at possibly existing brick-and-mortar stores or customer events and trade fairs, or questionnaires can be sent out as direct mailings (either by post to a sample of customer addresses or electronically to newsletter recipients). Also, if a company or brand is already conducting other target group surveys, it should not be forgotten to also include questions for determining content marketing metrics in these surveys.

For the percentage target group reach rates, it is just as clear to define what they are actually based on. For example, the awareness of or the reach of posts in Facebook can be related on the one hand to the size of the target group in the market as a whole (e.g. the percentage of all vegans who were reached by content marketing posts), on the other hand, it can be related to the size of the target group in one channel (e.g. the ratio of the reach of own content marketing posts to the total number of users with interest in "vegan" in Facebook), or the number of fans of one's own Facebook page is used (the percentage of own fans/subscribers reached by content marketing posts). Depending on the chosen base size, you will receive information for different underlying questions and must interpret the metrics accordingly.

10.5.2 Effect on Knowledge, Attitudes and Other Mental Constructs

If the substance of content marketing is further processed cognitively, this affects knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and other cognitive constructs. For example, users learn new knowledge and new skills, they learn about the importance of certain evaluation criteria, or they find a certain post or content more or less positive/negative.[12]

> **Key Figures for initial cognitive effect of content**
> **Content Referencing Attitudes**
> **Beliefs/Knowledge Nurtured**
> **Attitudes Formed**

Was the content helpful, entertaining and generally seen as positive? Or do users find it uninteresting, superficial and inappropriate? Such attitudes towards content are represented by indicators of **Content Referencing Attitudes** (i.e. attitudes towards content). They give a good indication of whether the content created (whether in the overall view of the *Content Marketing Corpus,* one -*segment* or one *post*) is also positively received by the target group and meets their needs—or whether it is worked on past these needs and thus the further advertising effect of the content created is less likely (or even turns negative).

Another important cognitive basic effect of content is the formation of knowledge and beliefs (see also the more detailed presentations in Chap. 3). Whether this has happenedis integrated into the content marketing controlling framework under the heading **Beliefs/Knowledge Nurtured** (i.e. beliefs and knowledge formed or promoted).

Finally, content marketing can also form or change attitudes, which are included in the controlling under the heading **General Attitudes Formed**. However, from the perspective of the controlling chain, these are not attitudes towards products of the provider or the company itself and, in contrast to the Content Referencing Attitudes mentioned above, they are not attitudes towards content, but other general attitudes that have been influenced.

All of these indicators can be measured using the methods usual in psychological research to measure attitudes or existing knowledge.

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[12] It is also important to make a distinction here with regard to the metrics: If it is about general knowledge, beliefs and attitudes regardless of the objects to be advertised and with regard to the content itself, this is reflected in the metrics mentioned here. Knowledge and belief of the objects to be advertised or attitudes towards these are reflected in the metrics of Sect. 10.7.

10.6 Key Figures of Conative Basic Effects

If content has achieved first cognitive effects, these also influence decisions and the behavior of users. These action-related effects are usually referred to as conative.[13]

Key figures regarding such actions directly triggered by content, such as scrolling through websites, jumping back and forth in videos, or clicking to open info boxes, can also be seen as indications of more intensive cognitive processing of the content and greater interest in it. Likes or comments given can serve as indications of an attitude formed towards the content. Also, a triggered further interest (e.g. measured by calls for additional content) or the loyality of the target group (e.g. measurement by return of the users) can be gatherd and assessed by key figures of conative effects.

10.6.1 Intensity of Content Use

The Internet is an interactive medium. And so many devices and tools also offer the possibility of measuring actions of users during reception of the content. The basic idea of these indicators is that an increased activity (conative effect) measured in this way can also be seen as an indication of more intensive cognitive effects with respect to, for example, attitudes, knowledge acquired (and consequently also advertising effects).

The indicators of only intensity of content use are similar to those of content presentation intensity (Sect. 10.4.2), but they assume that a user does not only retrieves the content once or intense, but also actively influences the presentation, for example by scrolling through a page, jumping back and forth in a video, or opening and closing info boxes.

▶ **Key figures of content use intensity**

Bounces (Fast Bounces, Slow Bounces)

Content Utilization Ratios (Replay Ratios, Completion Rate, Return Rates)

Control Interactivity Rates (e.g. Mouse Overs, Image-Resize, Box-Open-Close-Rate, Read More, …)

[13] And here too, it is necessary to distinguish between an advertising effect in the form of conative effects with respect to objects to be advertised, i.e. for example product information behavior, purchase behavior, etc. (the indicators can be found in Sect. 10.8) and a behavioral effect that is related to the content itself (the indicators in this section).

Bounces should be distinguished as key figures in content marketing in two ways, each of which is to be interpreted differently. Users come to a content marketing post and then decide whether to consume it more closely or leave it immediately. Such fast bounces are of importance to users from search engines in terms of SEO, but can also provide interesting information in general. For example, if users click on links to articles on the overview page of a website magazine, the fast bounce values can say something about whether the expectations of the users were met (i.e. the content can continue to have an effect) or possibly the structure of the article was unsuitable at first glance and the coordination of overview page to article page was unwise and the advertising effect could be increased by optimization (an example of the control function of content marketing key figures).

On the other hand there are users who retrieve content marketing posts, use it more intensively (i.e. stay longer on the blog entry, watch the video longer or listen to the podcast longer), but then do not retrieve any other content marketing content. Such slow bounces are not necessarily to be interpreted negatively. It was not possible to bind the user immediately, but he apparently dealt longer with the content and the basic effect for a further advertising effect could be laid.

The intensity of the use of the content is reflected the key figure group of **Content Utilization Ratios**. Of course, it plays a role whether the entire content (eg the whole video) was viewed or only more or less large parts of it. For this purpose, the *Replay Ratio* key figures for videos (a what large part of the video was reproduced) or for websites also known as Scroll Ratio are available. The proportion of those users who can use a content post in full can be gathered in completion rates, while users who return to the same post are measured in return rates.

Replay Rate versus Replay Duration (for Video/Audio)

At this point, the duration of the video view (Replay Duration, Sect. 10.4.2) should not be automatically equated with the displayed video content (Utilization Rate or Replay Ratio for videos). As long as a video is viewed purely linearly, of course, both provide the same measurement: For example, if a video with a total length of 4 minutes is interrupted after the first two minutes, a Replay Duration of 2 minutes and a Replay Rate of 50% (2 of 4 minutes) is measured. But online videos are interactive. For example, a user may rewindin a How-To-Video after the first minute to the beginning and after 2 minutes watch the second minute of the video again—she therefore has a video length of 4 minutes with a Replay Duration of 4 minutes (as long as this video was on the screen), but still only a Replay Rate of 50% (she has only seen the first half of the video, but this twice). Depending on the underlying question in the respective controlling and the decisions to be supported in content marketing, it is important to use the right key figures here.

But content marketing posts are also composed of various elements that allow users to control content usage. The use of these interactive controls is measured with the key figures of the **Control Interactivity Rates** and integrated into the content marketing controlling framework.

This can, for example, be the use of drop-down boxes or accordion effects on a website that allow additional content to be displayed or hidden. Or it's the clicks to enlarge or zoom an image. Even mouse-over effects etc. count as such interactive elements on websites. In social media, posts with several images can be scrolled or swiped through, and in the feed, only partially displayed texts are only fully visible with a click on "more". Such conative effects indicate a cognitive interest and a more intensive engagement with the content.

Operationalization and Measurement

As important as the key figures of the conative effect are, they are just as diverse and individual for the respective content and its realization, as the above examples have already shown. Therefore, it seems hardly possible here to offer all key figures available for interactions. But you should be motivated to check in each individual case which interaction possibilities users have to the content and then to record these in key figures of a conative basic effect—after all, they show important effects of the published content.

The Content Utilization Rate of a website can, for example, be measured as its scroll rate. This figure is usually not included in all standard integrations of the different web analytics tools, but can be relatively easily implemented if not available. This then provides a statistic of whether and how far a page has been scrolled by users.

The operationalization of Content Interactivity Rates on websites depends, for example, on which interactions the content offers at all. So, for example, each answered question could be counted in an interactive quiz (especially with incomplete participants) or the number of calculations carried out in a travel time calculator. In a game, selected important activities of the game course could be included in the measurement. Technically, this is often done using Javascript calls that transmit events (events) to Google Analytics (possibly via Google Tag Manager). Content Interactivity Rates can then be read or calculated from these metrics.

10.6.2 Interaction Triggered by Content

While the key figures in the last section still referred to user behaviour regarding to the use of the content format and retrieval (e.g. opening boxes, scrolling, jumping into video etc.), this section now captures actions that relate to the actual content an its substance, i.e. actions resulting from attitudes, motivation, beliefs about the content.

First of all, these can be clicks onto links that lead to further content. Such forward interactions show an interest in further content aroused by the actual content. However, users also let us know, by means of suitable interaction, that they find a content marketing post interesting, cool, outstanding, great, crazy, helpful, funny, stupid, great, boring, true or false, provocative (and so on) or what opinion they have of it, which are measured in key figures for feedback interactions. Or users even believe that other users should see this content contribution, which leads to multiplier interactions (shares, recommendations, …).

10.6.2.1 Forward Interactions

In most online channels, links can also be set with which users can jump to other content. These links take a user away from the relevant content marketing post to another, which is usually (but not necessarily) related to the present content in some way.

> **Key figures for link clicks triggered by content**
> **Click Count; Click Through Rate**
> (for Content-to-Content and Content-to-External clicks)

Clicks on links are usually measured on the one hand in their absolute number **(Click Count),** on the other hand as so-called **Click Through Rate** (CTR). If you know how often a link was presented on a device (Views or Visits) and how often it was then clicked, you can calculate this percentage click rate: CTR = Number of Clicks divided by Number of Views or Visits of the link.

If you only consider such links that refer from one content marketing post to another (e.g. from a blog post to another), you can speak of content-to-content clicks and a content-to-content CTR as a key figure. In addition to the key figures for amount and the self-assessment of quality (see Sect. 10.3), such key figures can also provide an indirect indication of how good and attractive content marketing is from the perspective of users.

If links are set to content from third parties, this results in content-to-external click-counts and -CTR (i.e. the click rate of those users who leave the content offer via set links). Something like this can make sense on the World Wide Web, which lives on such networking (e.g. if user satisfaction is restored or users use the content offer again in the future because of these external links), but it can also indicate the need for optimization of content marketing post or corpus.

Operationalization and measurement of key figures for link clicks

It is not possible to set links in all channels. While links are a very typical element in websites or blogs and links are often included in Facebook posts, link-setting is not possible in Instagram posts at all (only one link in the profile information, often called "bio", is possible there). And in pure audio formats such as podcasts, links are not available at all due to the media format.[14] Table 10.8 shows which link click key figures can be gathered in the different channels.

Backgrounds and problems with measurement and interpretation

In web analytics, the presentation of a post (e.g. page view on a website) must not be confused with link clicks that lead to it—even if the former is of course the consequence of the latter.

Often analytics tools do not measure the (internal) clicks themselves, unless additional tracking code has been integrated. For example, this can be done neat and measured for a website by event tracking of clicks. Tracking parameters such as Google Analytics utm parameters may also be helpful for cross-channel links to the website. Finally, URL shorteners often offer a click statistics for these links (but are less suitable for website-internal links, for links from social media to websites but very well).

Content-based instead of only technical control. Or: Link click is not the same as link click

Technically, every link is always the same and a click on it can be measured relatively easily. But for good controling, it is necessary to go beyond the purely technical view of links and link clicks. It is important to distinguish between links and functionality of links. Which meaning the link click statistics have and which interpretation they allow with regard to the effect of the content or an advertising effect depends on this difference.

A part of the technical links only serves the operation or use of the content marketing post. This includes links that can turn individual content elements on or off (e.g. infoboxes, accordions, etc. on websites or the "…" more on social media posts), or links that only lead to another part of the same post (e.g. anchor links on websites).

Something else are links that refer from one content marketing post to another or reference content on other websites.

Finally, there are links that link from the content marketing post to advertising content, e.g. product pages of an online shop.

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[14] Of course, the domain name of a website can also be mentioned in a podcast. However, since clicking is not possible and manual input by the listener would be necessary, it is to be classified as a mention, not as a link.

Table 10.8 Measured values for the operationalization of the key figure group Click Count and CTR

	Typical key figures *(All content-to-content and content-to-external links)*
Content marketing as a whole	Total link clicks and CTR
Channels*(Content marketing segment level)*	
Website	Click Count and CTR (click on links in content)
Weblog	(analog Website)
E-Mail-Marketing	Link Clicks, Unique Link Clicks, E-Mails Clicked,[a] Clicks per Recipient und repective CTRs
Podcast	*(not possible in this media format)*
Sprachassistenten—Voice App	*(not posssible in this media format)* possibly clicks from on smart speakers with screens
Social Media as a Whole	Links-Clicks in Social Media overall and CTR
Facebook	Click Count & CTR to Links in Content-Marketing-Posts
Instagram	Click Count & CTR Content-Marketing-Stories[b] *(in Posts no Links possible[c])*
LinkedIn	Click Count & CTR in Content-Marketing-Posts
Pinterest	Click Count ("Click on Pins") & CTR for Content Marketing Pins
Snapchat	Click or Swipe up Counts & CTR for Links in Content Marketing Snaps
TikTok	(no links in TikTok videos possible; for product links see Sect. 10.7)
Twitter	Click Count & CTR in Content Marketing Tweets
Xing	Click Count & CTR in Content-Marketing-Posts

(continued)

Table 10.8 (continued)

	Typical key figures *(All content-to-content and content-to-external links)*
YouTube & other video portals	Click Count & CTR to links in the video description (Description), in Info-Cards[d] or in the video end screen of content marketing videos

[a]While Link Clicks counts all clicks, only the first click (but no repeated clicks of the same recipient) is counted for each individual link in the email in Unique Link Clicks. The metric E-Mails Clicked finally captures how many of the emails sent have been clicked at least once.
[b]Integration is done by adding a so-called link sticker to the story.
[c]It is possible to integrate URLs into the text of Instagram posts, which are then not clickable, but only displayed as normal text. A user would have to type this URL into a browser manually. If you were to use a URL shortener, such as Bitly, for the links, you would at least have a measurement of how often this happens. However, since URLs are very unusual in Instagram posts, no metric has been included here.
[d]Links in Info-Cards and in the End-Screen are possible to other videos or channels; individual links only for members of the YouTube Partner Program.

While statistics for the former (operational links) rather refer to the intensity of the use of the content and the latter can be seen as an indication of further interest and the connection to the content (both basic effects of the content), the latter are already a real advertising effect that is not related to the content itself, but to objects to be advertised.

Such a distinction, which is often not made at all in the usual and often technically influenced web analytics activities, may at first glance complicate the measurements, but it is of great importance for content marketing control and is therefore also implemented in its framework using different key figures. In practice, such a distinction can be implemented well in control tools by means of filters, labels or additional markings and configurations.

10.6.2.2 Feedback Interactions

In social media, feedback interactions in the form of likes or comments play an important role.[15] But feedback functions of various kinds can also be found in blogs or podcast platforms.

[15] In addition to their importance to people in front of the devices, interactions in social media also have a direct impact on the reach of future posts by influencing social media algorithms—see also Sect. 6.2.

> **Key figures for triggered feedback interactions**
> **Ratings**
> **Acknowledgements** (Likes, Sticker, Gifts etc.)
> **Comments** (Count, Sentiment)

In **Ratings,** an object to be rated is placed on a defined scale. In online marketing, the 5-point scale has established itself, which is often represented as a star rating. It is used to rate posts in blogs as well as podcast ratings on iTunes or as a rating of Facebook fan pages.

Feedbacks in which no scale is used, but only monadic[16] feedback is given, we summarize here in the key figure group **Acknowledgements**. These are, for example, the widespread likes (or "I like") in various variants[17] but also stickers or small virtual gifts, as they can be awarded, for example, in TikTok live sessions or in other channels.

If the feedback is given in the form of text, it is called a c**Comment**. In addition to the number of comments, the so-called sentiment can also be determined for these, that is, whether the text has a positive, negative or rather neutral connotation.

Operationalization and measurement of key figures for feedback interactions
The Table 10.9 shows an overview of the typical feedback options and values at the time of publication of this book.

Backgrounds and problems with measurement and interpretation
In channels whose technology one is responsible for, such as websites, the integration of feedback functions and the measurement of their use can often be implemented according to one's own wishes and ideas.

This is different for channels that are operated by third parties, especially social media channels. There you are largely dependent on the functions and statistics

[16] Monadic = indivisible, unary. A monad is an indivisible unit. Acknowledgements are referred to as monadic here because they are either granted or not granted, but cannot be further subdivided into different levels as with ratings.

[17] The term "likes" is now used not only for the approval like, but often also as a general term for all monadic feedback variants available in the social media channels, such as approval, rejection, laughter, anger, etc.). Accordingly, the term like or likes is to be understood in this book.

offered by their operators. Whether a measurement can then be carried out manually or at least semi-automatically depends on the respective channel.

It is also important for content marketing and its controlling framework what the feedback is about—and not just whether there is such feedback. So feedback on content marketing posts indeed usually relate to their content, while feedback on advertising posts or product pages rather relate to the products featured and advertised therein. But this is not necessarily the case, because a user can post a product feedback post that is not related to it at all in terms of content but placed under a content marketing post.

Although in practice it is often possible to proceed from the aforementioned "normal case" for the sake of practicability, the resulting inaccuracy of the measurement values should be taken into account when interpreting them. If you value an exact measurement, you need to take appropriate measures in the measurement process with regard to the aforementioned problem. However, a separation of likes and comments from advertising posts and content marketing posts should always be made (see also the relevant hints in Sect. 10.4.1).

10.6.2.3 Multiplier Effect

In practice, interactions that allow users to share or recommend content marketing to other users are often considered very valuable. On the one hand, this is the direct forwarding of the post (share), on the other hand, a pure mention elsewhere (mentions) or in addition the setting of links to the relevant post (referrals).

> **Key figures for multiplier effect**
> **Content Shares**
>   **Content Referrals**
>   **Content Mentions**

The key figure group **Content Shares** plays a role, especially in social media, since many social media networks offer such functions. This allows other people's posts to be shared in their own feed with their own followers or friends network. These social media shares have largely replaced the forwarding of e-mails, which in the past has often led to viral effects (although by no means completely replaced).

But such shares are not only possible online. Good content is also revived in print media, TV or radio and published. As long as the content marketing post (or the publication channel, e.g. the blog or YouTube channel) remains recognizable as the source of the content, this can also be referred to as an (offline) share and should be included in the content marketing control.

Table 10.9 Key figures for operationalization oft Ratings, Acknowledgements & Comments

	Acknowledgements	Ratings	Comments
Content marketing as a whole	Acknowledgements Count	Rating Count, Rating Avg.	Comment Count, Sentiment
Channels *(Content marketing segment perspective)*			
Website	*(individually, depending on the website's functionality)*		
Weblog	Likes	Rating Count, Rating Avg.	Comments (Number, Sentiment)
E-Mail-Marketing	(-)	(-)	(-)
Podcast	(-)	Rating Count, Rating Avg.	Comments (Number, Sentiment)
Language assistants—Voice App	(-)	*(Voice App)* Rating Count, Rating Avg.	*(Voice App)* Comments (Number, Sentiment)
Social Media as a Whole	Likes in different types, Total number	Rating Count, Rating Avg.	Comments (number, sentiment)
Facebook	Likes in different types	(-)	Comments (number, sentiment)
Instagram	Likes - in different types	(-)	Kommentare (number, Sentiment)
LinkedIn	Likes in different types	(-)	Kommentare (number, Sentiment)
Pinterest	*(-)* *(Pins may be understood as acknowledgements)*	*(-)*	*(-)*
Snapchat	(-)	(-)	Snap Messages (number, Sentiment)
TikTok	Likes (Heart), Gifts in LIVE	(-)	Comments (Number, Sentiment), Messages in LIVE
Twitter	Likes (Heart)	(-)	Comments (Number, Sentiment)
Xing	Likes (like)	(-)	Kommentare (number, Sentiment)
YouTube & andere Videoportale	Likes (like, dislike)	(-)	Kommentare (number, Sentiment)

If not the content itself is shared, but the post (blog post, podcast publication, …) or the channel (viewing level of the *Content Marketing Segments,* e.g. Naming of the online magazine or the podcast) is only mentioned or recommended without taking over content, this is measured with the key figures of the **Content Mentions**. A measurement of mentions can and should take place both in online and in offline media.

If a mention is also provided with a link to the relevant post and directly usable for the user, this is referred to as **Content Referrals**. These are mainly links to content on the Internet, which are then often referred to as backlinks in search engine optimization.

10.6.2.4 Problems with Engagement Rates

Many social media networks offer figures hat are called an engagement rate or interaction rate in their statistics. These are very important key figures for controlling in social networks.

However, the first problem with these statistical values issued by social networks is that they are usually calculated for all posts of a social media account, but for content marketing controlling only the engagement rate for the posts based on content marketing is relevant (which with great probability differs from the engagement rate of advertising posts and thus from the overall average or is usually significantly higher).

On the other hand, the different social networks often use the same terms for completely different measured values. So sometimes only likes and comments are included in the calculation of the engagement rate, but other social media networks also take link clicks and/or shares into account—which ultimately leads to completely different and incomparable values (despite the confusingly identical key figure term used).

In addition, the networks differ in part in whether the calculation of the engagement rate (a percentage share) is based on the number of all followers, on the number of followers plus subscribers, on the number of only active followers, etc.—which in each case results in completely different values measured. Even within one company, this is sometimes done differently and so the engagement rate calculation for Facebook and Instagram (both part of the Meta Group) differs.

In short: The engagement rate indicated by one social network is by no means the same as the engagement rate indicated by another social network. And how this measurement value is to be interpreted differs each time (apart from a “the higher the better”, which practically always applies). All of this must be taken into account building a a key figure system for content marketing and the interpretation of the relevant key figures.

Calculate content engagement rates yourself

The two problems mentioned here can be solved by the fact that the engagement rate and similar values are not taken from the statistics of the social networks, but are carried out in their own calculation.

However, this leads to the problem to acquire the necessary raw data, which can be done automatically to some extent, semi-automatically, depending on the channel, but also not or only manually in other cases. Helpful herefore are scrapers like Apify, Grepsr, Oktoparse, PhantomBuster, Zyte and other social/web scraping tools that can automatically read posts, comments and interactions from various channels and then process them in their own databases.

Even if such a solution leads to cleaner and more comparable key figures, it appears, however, due to the necessary technical effort, only for larger content marketing projects to be reasonable.

10.6.3 User Engagement Metrics

More frequent contact with a company or brand increases the likelihood that a purchase will be made there.[18] It must therefore be a goal of companies to bind interested parties and customers and bring them into more frequent contact. If content marketing can achieve this, an important basic effect is achieved, from which a conative advertising effect (e.g. a purchase, see Sect. 10.8) results.

▶ **User engagement metrics**

Content Retention Rate

Content Registration Rate

Do users return to content marketing offered—and maybe even regularly? The metrics of the **Content Retention Rate** measure the loyality of interested parties and customers to content marketing.

[18] From a psychological point of view, various effects are at work here, e.g. a deeper awareness that brings the product or supplier into the consideration set according to Kotler's 5-phase model, e.g. a sympathy that arises solely through the higher number of contacts, or e.g. by effects by the mere exposure effect. But this is only an exemplary psychological background of how frequent contacts can generate advertising effects and also increase the likelihood of purchase.

Perhaps they will even take the opportunity to be informed about news or changes, e.g. by subscribing to a newsletter that informs about new magazine articles appearing on the website, subscribing to a weblog feed or subscribing to a YouTube channel—or in social media by becoming a follower. The **Content Registration Rate** figures provide key figures of how well the content achieves this.

Operationalization and measurement of key figures for feedback interactions
It is not possible to determine retention or registration rates in all channels. However, Table 10.10 provides an overview of the most important measurement values.

Backgrounds and problems with measurement and interpretation
If web analytics tools such as Google Analytics are used to measure a website or blog, these tools provide a metric called Returning Visitors as standard. However, the problem with this metric for content marketing controlling is that returning users are only measured regarding the entire website. In order to obtain a meaningful measurement value for content marketing, it must be determined in a narrower view how many users of content marketing retrieve only such content again or, in a further view, how many content marketing users return to the website somewhere (not necessarily to content marketing content). However, this requires additional technical measures and/or data filtering.

This also applies to newsletters, which often consist of a mixture of content marketing topics(e.g. references to new blog posts, …) and advertising communication (e.g. discount offers, introduction of new products, …). However, what is decisive for content marketing controlling is whether the motivation to subscribe to a newsletter was an associated discount offer (advertising) or the content marketing content—which, on the one hand, is not directly measurable, and on the other hand, often led users to register for the newsletter at the same time. Here, either surveys of all newsletter recipients on their motivation for registration or the location of registration as an indirect indicator (e.g. did the newsletter registration take place on the website-pages belonging to the webshop or on the website-page belonging tocontent marketing?) must be used to increase the interpretability of such key figures for content marketing.

In the case of podcasts, in turn, the problem arises that the number of subscribers (as well as the number of listeners of individual episodes) cannot be determined exactly and can differ by up to 20% or more depending on the tool or

Table 10.10 Measurement values for operationalizing the key figure groups for user binding

	Content Retention Rate	Content Registration Rate (each: time series of the number, percentage increase, …)
Content marketing as a whole	*(cross-channel hardly measurable)*	
Channels *(viewing level content marketing segment)*		
Website	Returning Visitors (share, frequency) Tight view: only content users on content marketing content; wide view: content users on website in general	Registration Content Newsletter
Weblog	*(analogous to website)*	*(as website)*Weblog Feed (RSS)—Registration/Use
E-Mail-Marketing	(-)	Content Newsletter Registration
Podcast	(-)	channel subscribers
Sprachassistenten – Voice App	Returning Users (share, frequency)	(-)
Social Media als Ganzes	*(cross-channel not realy measureable)*	
Facebook	(-)	Likes & Subscribers to the Facebook page
Instagram	(-)	Followers
LinkedIn	(-)	(-)
Pinterest	(-)	Followers
Snapchat	(-)	Snap-Score *(as a rough estimate of the number of followers)*
TikTok	(-)	Follower
Twitter	(-)	Follower
Xing	(-)	(-)
YouTube & other video portals	Returning Viewers	channel subcribers

Note: The indication (-) does not mean that no useful measured values are conceivable here, but that currently useful measured values are not available.

measurement method.[19] This should be taken into account when interpreting such key figures—but it does not make them superfluous.

Even on Snapchat, the number of followers is not displayed, but only a snap score, which, however, can only be used as a rough guideline for estimating the number of followers.

10.7 Key Figures of Cognitive Advertising Effectiveness

The key figures of the content marketing framework from the previous sections already provide good indications that content marketing and its content have an advertising effect. But the previous indicators have only measured indications of an advertising success. They were a prerequisite for advertising effectiveness to arise at all, but they did not yet show any real effect with regard to the objects to be advertised. In principle, they were more suitable for purely journalistic publications.

Content marketing is more than journalism. It differs from this in that it wants to contribute to the achievement of corporate or marketing objectives with its content (Sect. 2.3.2.2). The goal of content marketing is therefore an advertising effect related to the objects to be advertised, e.g. products, brands, companies, etc.

Key figures provid inginformation about such an advertising effect are now added to the content marketing controlling framework. First, the cognitive effects of awareness, image and an increased effect of advertising advertising media are considered, before the next section also completes the framework with key figures for conative, i.e. action effects.

10.7.1 Awareness

Increasing the awareness of a retailer, a brand or a product is an important marketing goal, because "the awareness of a brand or a product is a prerequisite for the success of advertising" (Moser 2015, p. 165). It is causally preceded by the

[19] Some hints for practice can be found, for example, in https://www.mikrofon-test-podcast.de/podcast-analytics-abonnenten/.

achievement of economic objectives. Therefore, key figures on how much content marketing contributes to achieving and deepening the awareness of objects to be advertised are of great importance—even if their measurement, as we will see, is not exact, but only approximate.

> **Key figures of awareness**
> **Content-Induced Awareness (C.-I. Company Awareness, C.-I. Brand Awareness, C.-I. Product Awareness, …)—each recognition and recall (supported and unsupported awareness)**

The key point with this group of key figures is that it is about the *influence of content marketing on awareness* and not about an overall awareness of the objects to be advertised. Overall awareness is a goal and key figure for marketing as a whole, but it has little value for content marketing.[20] That is why the key figures are not simply referred to as awareness, but as **content-induced awareness**[21].

[20] The (overall) awareness of a product, brand or company is influenced by many factors and company activities, of which content marketing is only one of many. So, for example, if overall awareness were to increase sharply, no conclusions could be drawn for content marketing from this, as this increase in awareness could have been caused by a TV campaign. Overall awareness is therefore a good key figure for (overall) marketing with all its activities, but it has no value for content marketing. Therefore, content marketing needs key figures that measure the influence or share of this in an overall awareness.

[21] The distinction from the key figures in Sect. 10.5.1 (content awareness) and from an overall awareness or the terminology used for this in this book shall be clarified once again using an example: Let us assume that a company operates an editorial magazine on its website. If one is interested in whether a consumer knows this at all, one would speak of *content awareness* (on the level of observation of the *content marketing posts* the awareness of content of the magazine, on the level of observation of the *content marketing segments* e.g. the awareness of this content marketing channel, i.e. the existence of the online magazine). Something else is the question of how much this magazine and its content have contributed to the awareness of the company (or the brand or products). This influence would be measured by key figures of *content-induced awareness*. Please note: If it is only about the awareness of the website or an online shop, not the brand or the company, this would be understood as an amplification of the effect of advertising media (key figures in Sect. 10.7.3), even though this of course always overlaps to some extent. If it is not about the influence of the online magazine or content marketing, but simply about the question of how well-known the company (the brand, the product) is overall (regardless of which marketing measures have led to this awareness), the term *awareness* (or brand awareness) would be used.

Operationalization and measurement of awareness indicators

Depending on the object to be advertised, which is to be considered in controlling, a distinction can be made between content-induced company awareness (influence of content marketing on the awareness of the company), a content-induced brand awareness (influence of content marketing on brand awareness) and a content-induced product awareness (influence on product awareness). They are all measured in the same way and only have a different focus, which is also immediately clear from the corresponding use of terms in controlling.

E-commerce success—only by the cheapest price or by brand and awareness?

In the early days of the Internet, i.e. when transitioning from traditional trade to online trade, it initially appeared as if awareness of supplier and brands would lose importance. This impression arose because, due to the network effects on the Internet, the supplier itself was not the first focus in purchase processes and then the product secondarily (as is mostly the case in traditional trade), but this sequence was reversed: one searches for a product and the provider seems to be secondary. Because with the advent of the Internet, a customer could find a huge number of suppliers for a certain product with very little effort and without having to know them beforehand using internet via search engines, price comparison portals or marketplaces. This and the effects of a platform economy still lead to much more intense competition and price pressure today.

However, practical experience and studies on the rising importance of brands, especially for online purchases (McKinsey 2019), show that by means of brand and supplier (retailer) awareness this competitive and price pressure can be countered. For example, customers can be persuaded to first research in a webshop they are acquainted with before or instead of using price comparisons or marketplaces.

Thus, awareness of suppliers is (in connection with the image) an important strategic approach to surviving in the competitive environment of e-commerce in the long term and to avoid this competitive pressure to some extent. Content marketing can contribute a lot here, because it already addresses customers (and brings them to the website/webshop or makes them followers), even before they carry out specific searches for suppliers—and in the negative case then stumble across competitors. As a supplier you gain a head start by coming into contact with the customer earlier in the purchase process (Kotler et al. 2017, pp. 218–228), in particular in the information phase or with regard to the consideration set.

Backgrounds and problems with measurement and interpretation

However, the question of measurement methodology for the aforementioned figures of awareness is not unproblematic. The classical methods of awareness measurement, as they are also described in Sect. 10.5.1, are indeed both suitable for the measurement of awareness of the content itself and for the measurement of an overarching total awareness, as reflected in the question of research, e.g. “Which brands of product group XXX can you remember?” (unsupported awareness) or “Can you remember brand YYY?” (supported awareness). Therefore, when conducting your own measurements, it should always be clearly defined which type of this memory measurement is relevant for your individual research question in content marketing controlling, because “they represent independent methods which collect different memory contents” (Hiller 2007, p. 24).

However, these key figures of awareness are in no way sufficient for content marketing, as they do not reflect awareness (solely or predominantly) caused by content marketing, but rather total awareness (e.g. of the product to be advertised, of the supplier, etc.) resulting from all marketing measures.

Correlation analyses are therefore a sensible approach to determining the effect of content marketing on awareness. For example, time series of awareness of the content itself (measured by surveys, see Sect. 10.5.1) or simply its frequency or intensity of play-out (see Sect. 10.4) can be correlated with time series of total awareness of the advertised object.

Another methodological approach would be a group comparison. Statistical methods are used to compare the awareness of advertised objects in a group that knows the content marketing of a company well (high content awareness) or that calls often or intensively with the awareness of the advertised objects compared to a group that hardly knows or uses content marketing.

However, such measurements require a larger number of users for statistical reasons, possibly multiple surveys (for correlated time series) or effort for the selection of respondents for the group comparison. In addition, the content marketing measures must have a scope that is in proportion to other marketing measures in order to be able to detect any influence at all. Therefore, such key figures can only be applied in larger content marketing projects.

In principle, it would of course also be conceivable to directly ask people in the target group whether they remember how they became aware of a brand, the company or a product, or where they know it from. The frequency with which content marketing, its channels and content itself are mentioned as an answer could be interpreted as a measure of its influence on awareness. However, this rather simple method comes with the problem that many consumers probably will not remember anymore whether they became aware of a brand, company or product through content marketing posts or through advertising communication—especially because a deep awareness always arises from a large number of communicative touchpoints of both kinds. Therefore, although such surveys are better than no key figures at all, they are only limitedly significance for a content marketing effect as a whole.

Links as a measure of an awareness effect?
If a user clicks on a link in a content marketing post that leads to an advertising communication medium (e.g. a webshop product page), it can of course be assumed that such a link click creates or deepens the awareness of the advertised (linked) object. And it is technically a good measurable method to determine such clicks by users on such editorial-to-advertising links.

However, it should be warned at this point not to use this as a key figure (or even KPI) for an advertising effect of content marketing (content-induced awareness) or even its overall success. Because, as much as some companies might wish it: Only a small part of the users clicks on these advertising links within content marketing posts—although awareness and further advertising effects are achieved in other ways.

Of course, such measurements of the number of clicks on editorial-to-advertising links can and should be carried out. However, the importance of such a measurement value should not be overestimated as is often the case in practice. This almost inevitably leads to a massive underestimation of the overall content marketing effect and to wrong business decisions regarding content marketing.

10.7.2 Image

Could content marketing have had an influence on how the objects to be advertised are assessed? How could it have changed their brand image?

> **Image key figures**
> **Overall Image Change** (value, degree)
> **Differentiated Image Change** (Knowledge Change, Belief Change, Association Change)

"Image measurements can basically be made by a single overall assessment or by means of more differentiated measurements" (Esch 2005, p. 500). An overall assessment measures the attitude towards the object under consideration as good/bad. However, in contrast to marketing, the goal of content marketing controlling is not the determination of such an image value, but the question of a change thereof or the influence of content marketing activities on this. So a **Overall Image Change.**[22]

[22] For the purpose of this controlling framework, the term image, which is common in marketing, has been chosen for the designation of these key figures, not the term attitude, which is common in psychology. If one were to make a measurement more from the perspective of psychology, one could use the term "Attitude Change" instead of "Overall Image Change".

However, content marketing does not act directly on such an overall assessment. Rather, it creates knowledge, beliefs and associations, which in turn generate the attitude or image (see also the psychological basics in Chap. 3). Therefore, a group of **Differentiated Image Change** indicators is required for more detailed measurements.

In the words of marketing, image measurements are often carried out as differentiated image analyses with several items as image dimensions (Esch 2005, pp. 500–501). These different image dimensions or the influence of content marketing can be reflected with a respective figure. Psychology, on the other hand, speaks of "attitude measurements based on beliefs" (Fishbein and Ajzen 2010, pp. 85–96). It is possible to distinguish, from this point of view, key figures of whether and how strongly content marketing has created the company-desired knowledge (Knowledge Change), caused the desired beliefs regarding the object to be advertised (belief change) or changed the strength of associations (association change) in order to influence the image by means of content marketing.

Operationalization and measurement of awareness indicators

The Overall Brand Image is a one-dimensional evaluative construct that can range between a positive and a negative attitude. Accordingly, for the measurement of attitudes, the semantic differential developed by (Osgood et al. 1957) is often used as a basis. It spans as a 7-point scale between two opposing adjectives, e.g.

good	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	bad
unimportant	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	important
negative	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	positive
unpleasant	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	pleasant
etc.								

In questionnaires, an attitude to be measured is usually operationalized in several such semantic differentials[23] and the mean is then used as a value for the construct of this attitude. On the one hand, this allows the **valence** (positive or negative; also called valence) of the attitude to be determined, on the other hand its **degree** (or intensity) of this valence (how strongly or less strongly the positiv-

[23] The selection of the right semantic differentials aka the adjectives used in them is more difficult for psychologically correct questionnaires than it seems at first glance, as the discussion by Fishbein and Ajzen 2010, pp. 79–82 shows.

ity or negativity is expressed). In literature, this is often referred to as attitude valence and extremity. An attitude towards an object therefore ranges from very positive to slightly positive, neutral, slightly negative to very negative.

However, the problem for content marketing controlling is, as with the awareness key figures, that such an attitude towards a product, brand or company is influenced not only by content marketing, but by many other factors and activities. The aim is therefore to try to measure solely the influence of content marketing on the image in a methodologically correct way. This is, for example, again possible by means of correlation analyses of time series or statistical group comparisons. For example, image values are correlated with values of content reach (Sect. 10.4.1) or content awareness (Sect. 10.5.1). Which time series are included in the correlation is always to be checked in each individual case.

If knowledge created is to be measured for the knowledge change indicators, knowledge queries are the right means. However, when constructing questionnaires, care should be taken to ensure that no biases occur solely through the formulation of the question.[24] Such measurements can be carried out online, for example, by means of a playful quiz. Methodologically, it would be possible, on the one hand, to compare, for example, the proportion of correct answers for users who had already visited the content marketing on a website[25] with the corresponding values of users who had not retrieved the content marketing (two-sample t-test). Or an attempt is made to establish a connection between the variable "has called up content" and the presence of correct knowledge (chi-square test or rank correlation).

Similarly, statistical methods can be used to try to determine whether certain important beliefs (whether about a product, a brand, or the product group as its taxonomy, see also Sect. 2.2.2.2.1) for the image were influenced. An example would be a survey "What positive characteristics come to mind when you think of product XY?", in order to then correlate the occurrence of certain beliefs in the answers with the use of content marketing posts relevant to these beliefs (i.e. their presentation intensity, the intensity of their use or their content awareness) or to make group comparisons.

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[24] For example, a question "Did you know that …?" (which already contains the knowledge to be tested in its formulation) will be answered more often with "Yes" on a yes/no scale, i.e. for questions that do not directly communicate the knowledge in the question.

[25] Determinable, for example, by using first-party cookies.

In order to measure associations (association change), we can use the methods used in psychology and market research. However, in market research, the free association methods derived from psychoanalysis are not useful, but the more focused restricted association methods, such as word association tests, image association tests or sentence completion tests. In addition, the implicit association test (IAT) introduced by (Greenwald et al. 1998) has gained widespread popularity in recent decades.[26] They can all be helpful in measuring associations and, through statistical methods, can be measured in relation to content marketing by means of a chi-square, rank correlations, correlations or a group comparison (t-test).

Backgrounds and problems with measurement and interpretation
Three central problems always have to be considered when measuring and interpreting image change key figures. Firstly, it is always necessary to check whether the planned measurement can actually detect a significant influence of content marketing—only then are the measured key figures meaningful at all. So, while it would be technically possible to measure how often a ***single*** content marketing post was called up and whether this correlates with an overall brand image, since the influence of such a single post should only determine a fraction of the brand image, the resulting key figure would be rather considered as meaningless and not providing any valuable information. However, whether the introduction and expansion of comprehensive content marketing assets ***as a whole*** and its call-up rates are associated with a positive image change of the website visitors (e.g. the content count, the intensity of playout or the content awareness correlate over the long term with an image value), can indeed be a meaningful key figure, since in this case a greater influence of the two correlated variables on each other is to be expected. So it is always necessary to consciously select which figures can be used meaningfully used in which statistical methods.

Secondly, it is always necessary to keep in mind that the key figures measured regarding the image (overall image/attitudes, beliefs, associations, etc.) all only measures of psychological constructs that are not directly accessible, but only

[26] For best practices for administering IAT, see also Greenwald et al. 2021.

indirectly, by means of measurement in psychology and market research.[27] As valuable as these measured values are in psychology and market research, when interpreting them, it must be taken into account that they are not exact measured values in the physical-scientific sense. Here, the design of questionnaires or the questions used can have an influence on this alone. Therefore, a methodologically clean procedure is of great importance.

Finally, it is necessary to keep in mind that statistical methods (such as correlation analyses, t-tests, etc.) are necessary to determine the influence of content marketing on the image. However, in order to obtain valid results with these, a variety of conditions must be met. This mainly concerns the sample size (necessary amount of data) and the sample selection. With too few or the wrong respondents, even the best statistical methods will not provide any meaningfully interpretable results. The same applies to the choice of the right statistical method, which in part also depends on the data collected itself. Careful methodology is of great importance for all of these points.

10.7.3 Amplification of the Effect of Advertising Communication

Do advertising media of classical advertising communication achieve a stronger effect if the persons of the target group also consume content marketing? Such an amplifying effect is part of the total advertising effect of content marketing as an indirect advertising effect (Preparatory Content Effect, PCE, see also Sect. 2.2.3). Accordingly, the following key figures will be included into the frameowork in order to measure this advertising effect of content marketing.

▶ **Indicators of indirect advertising effect**

Ad Effectiveness Change

Criteria Importance Change

Ad Engagement Change

Content-Induced Ad Awareness

[27] To be precise, it cannot even be assumed that these constructs measure something that really exists in the world, but rather only theoretically assumed constructs of theoretical models for the description (!) of this real world, but not to be understood as a 1-to-1 reproduction of this. This is just a hint for readers who are interested in the science of science.

The group of key figures **Ad Effectiveness Change** measures how much the advertising effect of an advertising communication (e.g. a product description in a webshop, an advertisement placed, etc.) differs depending on whether the relevant consumers have dealt with content marketing content or not.

Ad-Effectiveness-Change key indicators therefore measure whether and to what extent an amplification of the advertising effect of advertising media by content marketing has taken place. On which path and through which effects this came about in detail is not said.

In our advertising effect model of content marketing, we had determined that such an amplification can take place through changed beliefs and their importance in attitude formation by the advertising medium (Sect. 2.2.3.1.1). If, for example, an advertisement advertises an e-bike with a particularly powerful battery, content marketing that has made it clear to the target how important a powerful battery is for him can amplify the effect of this advertisement (compared to the effect it would have had without consuming this content marketing). There can therefore be key figures for a **Criteria Importance Change**. They show a change in whether and how strongly different criteria of the advertising medium (e.g. arguments used in it) were responsible for an effect of this advertising medium (e.g. the attitude towards the product advertised with it).

The indicators of an **Ad Engagement Change** refer to the finding from Sect. 2.2.3.1.2 that a more intensive engagement with an advertising medium increases its advertising effect and content marketing can trigger the same. If one therefore measures such an intensified use of the advertising medium, one has concrete indicators for a content marketing success.

Finally, content marketing can also lead to a higher awareness of advertising media and thus increase their overall advertising effect—which can be measured with key figures of the **Content Induced Ad Awareness**. A very typical (and also associated with the discipline of search engine optimization) example is the increased awareness—and thus increased advertising effect—of an online shop, which was achieved through the introduction and expansion of content marketing on this. The increase in awareness of an outlet, a stand at a trade fair, etc. induced by content marketing can be measured analogously.

Operationalization and measurement of the reinforcement indicators

To measure an Ad Effectiveness Change, it is necessary to compare the advertising effect with and without the influence of content marketing and to find suitable key figures for this. So first of all it has to be defined how the effect of the advertising medium concerned can be measured in general. For this purpose, one can use the methods of classical advertising effectiveness research, advertising psychology and web analytics. For example, surveys can be carried out as well as in an online shop can measure how well an advertising media had work to cause a product being placed in the shopping cart (Micro Conversion Rate: Add-to-Cart) (here: the online shop product page with product description, the pictures etc.). Click Through Rates for ads can also be used, among many other key figures, to measure their effectiveness. It is a matter of choosing suitable key figures in each individual case, matching the own underlying questions and methodological possibilities.

Once these basic figures have been established, the influence of content marketing can be determined again by statistical methods. This can be done, for example, by marking or selecting website users retrieving content marketing aboutthe importance of strong batteries in the example of electric bikes. Then all visitors to product pages on which powerful batteries are used as an argument in the advertising communication for electric bikes are divided into two groups (with and without this content use). For both groups, it is now determined how often a PDF product data sheet is downloaded, how often the bike is placed in the shopping cart or how often contact is made with the provider. By means of statistical methods it can be determined whether there is a significant difference in this micro conversion between the two groups.

You could measure not only whether the relevant content marketing was accessed, but also its frequency and intensity of use (see also Sect. 10.4.1 and 10.4.3). With these values, statistical correlation methods could then be performed to establish a connection between the use of content marketing usage and an increased advertising effect.

If content marketing is to be used to intensify the effect of advertising over time and this is to be measured, time series analysis can be helpful—especially if content marketing activities are started from scratch or significantly expanded. Then measurements should be carried out before the (new) content is published and it should be possible to prove the intensification of its advertising effect after the publication of the content marketing by statistically comparing this.

In contrast to the Ad Effectiveness Change previously considered, which measures whether and to what extent an effect has been intensified, key figures of the Criteria Importance Change try to make it more clear which arguments of the content marketing have achieved this change. This means that it must be determined which of the knowledge or changed general attitudes created by the content marketing actually intensified the advertising effect of the advertising communication.

For this purpose, consumers would be asked which criteria they consider important for a product or product group (this can be determined for the target group as a whole or only for buyers after purchase with small surveys). For our consideration, two groups would then be selected and compared to see if the criterion to be specifically promoted by the content marketing is considered more important by users of the relevant content than by non-users.

Methodologically, it is not easy to measure an Ad Engagement Change, as it is about determining how intensively advertising is processed cognitively (that is, mentally)—in contrast with and without the use of content marketing. However, such cognitive processing can only be measured indirectly. For online marketing and its controlling, methods are available here that, based on time measurements (e.g. how long a product description text was visible on the screen) or clicks (e.g. display of additional information by clicking or mouse-over to certain features of a product?)provide at least indications of such intensive cognitive processing in order to then establish relationships on this basis using statistical methods. Experiments can also provide better data using eye tracking and other methods.

10.8 Key Figures of the Conative Advertising Effect

We had already considered conative effects, i.e. actions or action intentions triggered by content, in Sect. 10.6, namely given likes, because someone likes the content, a comment or engagement with further content. However, only actions that related to the content and content marketing itself had been considered until now, but never regarding a product to be advertised. The like had been given because the person liked the Facebook post, not a product or company. That is why we had spoken of conative basic effect in that section.

However, in the following, key figures shall be addressed that relate an effect of content marketing to actions with respect to objects to be advertised, which is why we are now really speaking of advertising effect in contrast to content-based effect.

On the one hand, actions are considered that lead to a purchase (leads, reservations, purchases, etc., but also re-purchases), on the other hand actions that have a multiplier effect (e.g. product recommendations).

10.8.1 Purchase

Depending on the product (e.g. due to its need for advice) and the purchase situation, this leads either to leads, i.e. to a contact with an interested party, or directly to a purchase, whereby, from a psychological point of view, a distinction is to be made between an intention to purchase and an actually carried out purchase transaction[28].

> **Key figures of conative advertising effectiveness**
> **Content-Induced Leads (Contact, Offer Requests, Reservations, …)**
> Content-Induced **Purchases**
> Content-Induced **Purchase Intention**
> Measurements of basic effect: Subjective Norm Changes, Percieved Behavior Control Changes

If a customer from the target group contacts a company and leaves contact data, this is referred to as a lead. This can be a general contact with sales, it can be due to a strong interest in purchasing (e.g. specific offer request, Eng. offer request), there may be a general interest in the company and its services (e.g. newsletter registration) or, for example, in the process of a click & collect, a reservation of a product for inspecting it first. If such lead generation was caused or at least significantly influenced by content marketing, this can be reflected in key figures in the key figure group **Content-Induced Leads**.

Key figures that measure how far actual purchases were actually influenced or caused by content marketing are classified as **Content-Induced Purchases** key figures. Closely related to these key figures is the **Content-Induced Purchase Intention,** which indicates an intention to purchase (but not yet an actual purchase) influenced by content marketing.

Operationalization and measurement of the key figures of conative advertising effectiveness

As with other advertising effectiveness key figures, on the one hand it is necessary to measure the advertising effect itself, on the other hand to measure the content marketing in order to statistically test the influence or connection of both.

[28] To make this clear using an example: Even though a customer may have developed an intention to purchase a product, this does not necessarily lead to an actual purchase, because the shop is currently closed or the webshop does not offer the desired payment method. In such a case, advertising has indeed taken place successfully (intention to purchase has arisen), but a realization in a concrete action has come about due to factors that are outside the focus of advertising effectiveness controlling. For this reason, it makes sense to take this distinction (see Sect. 5.1) between intention and actual action from psychology into account in controlling, whether by means of dedicated key figures for both or at least by taking this knowledge into account when interpreting key figures.

Which key figures for measuring the content-induced leads are the most useful of course depends on the individual case. If the goal is to make contact, on the one hand key figures can be measured for really successful contacts. A different contact path have to be considered here: So it is still easy to technically record the sending of an online contact form, to at least partially record calls triggered by a website through call tracking, while it is hardly possible to directly measure a visit to a trade fair or company event caused by online marketing in order to make contact (possibly but by surveys is roughly estimated).

Similar to the lead-related key figures, the key figures for content-induced purchases would have to be operationalized, only that instead of won leads, completed sales are considered now, be it by number, average or absolute sales or also the question of repeated purchases, etc. It must be decided, if only online purchases or also purchases in other channels are considered (for example, if a content marketing article leads to visiting and purchasing in stores).

Key indicators for an intention to purchase can complement these indicators well. Since the intention to purchase is a cognitive construct, surveys are used at this point. But also content-influenced (content-induced) add-to-cart or check-out clicks, which then do not lead to a purchase, can provide key figures that can indicate such problems—even if they do not directly measure the cognitive construct of the intention to act.

Backgrounds and problems with measurement and interpretation

The main problem with measuring and interpreting the key figures of conative advertising effects lies in the problem of distinguishing which influence the content marketing really had on leads or purchases or the intention to purchase (and how much these were caused by other influencing factors).

A starting point in the consideration of the *content marketing as a whole* could be a time series of the content marketing activities (for example, the well-available key figures of content presentation from Sect. 10.4, but also key figures of basic effects of the content from Sect. 10.5 and 10.6), which are then correlated with incoming leads or purchases.

Another possibilities are the statistical group comparisons already mentioned in other sections: A group of content users and a group of content non-users are selected. In the simplest case, the number of concluded leads or purchases with and without prior content marketing usage is then compared. Also time series of a webshop conversion rate can be used here for a correlation.

If not only the effect of content marketing as a whole on lead generation is of interest, but rather on the levels of the *content marketing segments* or individual *content marketing posts,* more detailed insights can be gained. For example, the introduction of a new content marketing-driven social media channel and its influence on leads or purchases could be measured. Also the influence of selected content marketing posts on the purchases of a certain product group is possibly conceivable. Also here, number or frequency measurements, statistical group comparisons and correlations can be used.

How many purchases are made via links in the content?

This is the time to address a procedure that is often used in practice—especially by those who are not very familiar with how content marketing works—in order to measure the success of content marketing: the direct measurement of how often links are clicked within content marketing articles and then purchases are made in an online shop.

The problem: With this method, only a (rather very small) part of the advertising effect of content marketing is measured and such measurements are not very suitable for drawing conclusions about how useful these content marketing activities are or whether they should be continued.

Because whether a product is purchased after such a click depends on many factors (and the product itself) that content marketing can not influence at all. In addition, products are often not purchased directly after content marketing use and a click, but often only hours or days, sometimes weeks later, so that the influence of the link click on the purchase can not be measured technically at all.

Measuring sales due to such editorial-to-advertising clicks therefore provides technically correct numerical values, but content-wise they have very little to no value for evaluation and control—they are therefore not even included in the content marketing controlling framework.

10.8.2 Multiplier Effects

If products or providers are recommended to other people, this is very valuable for companies. If content marketing can create multipliers, it has achieved a valuable advertising effect. The key figures in this section try to measure such a conative advertising effect.

It is also worth keeping in mind Sect. 10.6.2.3, which also dealt with multiplier effects. The key figures of both sections are shares, referrals and mentions. However, they differ to the key figures hier in what is shared, referenced or mentioned. With the conative basic effects, the further dissemination of content marketing itself, its posts and content was measured. With the key figures of the conative advertising effect in this section here, it is the objects to be advertised (products, brand, company, etc.) that are—caused by content marketing—shared or recommended. This is also reflected in the name of the key figures (e.g. Content Mentions vs. Content-Induced Mentions).

Key figures of multiplier advertising effectiveness
Content-Induced Shares
Content-Induced **Referrals**
Content-Induced **Mentions**

We again distinguish here between shares (i.e. copying and forwarding the entire content), a reference (referrals, e.g. link to content) and only mentions (mentions) without direct link. The respective influence of content marketing on these is integrated into the content marketing controlling framework as key figures **Content-Induced Shares, Content-Induced Referrals** and **Content-Induced Mentions**.

Operationalization and measurement of the indicators of multiplier effect
It is practically impossible to determine in individual cases whether a certain social share of an advertising product post, the internet link to a webshop or (online as well as offline) the mention of the brand or the company by the content marketing was caused by the content marketing. Especially because a direct, immediate cause-and-effect relationship (saw a content marketing post and then—directly and immediately—multiplied another—advertising medium) often does not exist at all.

However, the fact that this direct, immediate effect does not exist does not mean that there is no effect at all. So a good, comprehensive magazine on the website may lead a user to visit it more often and then recommend a product from the webshop there— and this multiplier advertising effect would not have come about at all without the content marketing (and the image of the webshop possibly generated by it).

As I said, it is hardly possible to prove this in individual cases. But in the sum of the effects of a larger number of people, correlations can be used as statistical methods.

The task is therefore, for example, to determine by means of correlations whether the number of shares, referrals and mentions has been positively influenced by the use of content marketing. For this purpose, time series of this numbers can, for example, be correlated with the key figure of content presentation (frequency, intensity—see also Sect. 10.4) or, if the cognitive and partly even the conative basic effects are available (Sect. 10.5 and 10.6), with these. Statistical group comparisons are much more difficult to implement in these cases.

10.8.3 Effects on Customer Loyalty

Loyal customers who are bound to a company, product or brand are significantly more profitable than other customers, as, for example, (Reichheld and Teal 1996) show very clearly. This can be explained using the purchase intentions associated with customer loyalty for a repeat purchase, a recommendation or an additional purchase (Moser 2015, p. 123).

Research shows a variety of different rational and emotional factors (Moser 2015, p. 123), which contribute to customer loyalty[29]. From the perspective of content marketing, customer satisfaction and customer trust, as well as partly the experience orientation, are important factors for content design.

The following key figures provide a starting point for measuring customer loyalty or the influence of content marketing on it.

> **Key figures of customer loyalty**
> **Content-Induced Shop Retention**
> Content-Induced **Purchase Retention**
> Content-Induced **Registrations**

A first step, even before the actual purchase, is the Shop Retention, i.e. a repeated visit to a distribution channel, such as the webshop, a stationary retail store or a social media shop. If content marketing is the trigger or had a significant influence on it, this can be measured by **Content-Induced-Shop-Retention** key figures.

If content marketing significantly contributes to the fact that customers not only make a purchase from a provider, but become repeat customers, this is reflected in the key figures of **Content-Induced Purchase Retention**.

But registrations, for example for discount newsletters, which indicate a closer bond with customers, can also be captured in **Content-Induced-Registrations** key figures (although these are sometimes difficult to measure from the key figures in Sect. 10.6.3).

[29] A comprehensive overview of explanation models for the emergence of customer loyalty can be found in Bagusat 2006, p. 77.

Operationalization and measurement of the indicators of multiplier effect
As with the measurement of the basic influence of content marketing on purchases (Sect. 10.8.1), also with regard to customer loyalty, statistical methods must be used. For example, correlations could be determined between the use of content marketing (e.g. presentation or usage intensity, Sect. 10.4.3 and 10.6.1) and purchasing behavior (e.g. purchase frequency, frequency of visits to the shop, etc.). Also, statistical group comparisons, which compare the use of content marketing content for the group of one-time buyers (or infrequent buyers) with the group of regular customers, can provide interesting clues for an advertising effect of content marketing with regard to customer loyalty.

Backgrounds and problems with measurement and interpretation
The challenges already mentioned for the key figures regarding purchases (or in the measurement of cognitive advertising effects) for such statistical procedures to provide meaningful results (e.g. necessary amount of raw data, sampling, etc.), are also present for the indicators with regard to customer loyalty. Therefore, such indicators are only meaningful to determine with thoughtful measurement techniques and larger numbers of users, which is why they are usually only implementable for a relatively large content marketing.

10.9 More Insights through Relationships and Comparisons of Key Figures

Key figures can not only be measured and interpreted. They can also be related to each other and compared. Thus, one can come to further leading insights and key figures for even more other questions beyond the key figures of the content marketing framework mentioned so far. Therefore, it is worth considering whether the key figures of the content marketing controlling framework listed in the preceding sections should not be related to each other for certain questions and decisions, cumulated or otherwise offset.

A simple comparison is often the time comparison. For this purpose, a key figure is recorded at regular intervals or for uniform time intervals. The different measurement values of the key figure are then compared with each other (eg January of this year compared to January of last year). A percentage change can be calculated or index values determined. In addition, such time series are also good raw data for correlation calculations.

However, relational figures can also be determined, that is, two different (but technically related!) key figures are combined into a ratio key figure. An example would be the awareness of a content marketing magazine on a website (see also key figures in Sect. 10.5.1) to set in relation to key figures of the deployment frequency or -intensity (key figures in Sect. 10.4) to come to a new, calculated key figures “reached (cognitive) awareness per presentation”, which can be, for example, a measure of how well the content has been implemented to achieve a memory performance. Analogously, this is possible with many other key figures to be found in the last sections.

Many other types of offsetting (from summation of similar key figures to total values, averaging or calculation of standard deviations to statistical correlations) can provide further interesting insights.

However, one should always start from specific, practical underlying questions and consider which calculated key figure provides useful information for this purpose. Any offsetting of any key figure is not conducive and can even distract from the purpose of controlling. Targeted calculated key figures, on the other hand, significantly increase the quality of content marketing controlling and its key figure system.

10.10 Typical Problems with Measurement Tools and Data Capture

Content marketing controlling often struggles with the fact that necessary key figures are either not or not accurately measured, be it for technical reasons or because cognitive constructs have to be assessed. Although this cannot be a reason not to use key figures and not to measure values at all. However, for the interpretation of the key figures as well as the resulting evaluations and decisions, it is very important to know how key figures were measured in detail and where inaccuracies have to be taken into account.

It is not possible to give a complete overview of all problems of measurement technology and methodology here. However, for typical and often encountered technical analytics tools, some important background information should be pointed out here.

Website Analytics Tools

Google Analytics, etracker, Matomo Analytics and other tools are very valuable and helpful in order to obtain measurement values for the use of websites. However, by indicating very exact numerical values in their statistics, they convey the impression of representing reality very well—which is unfortunately often not the case. Depending on the tool used and depending on the website (e.g. type of consent integration), but also depending on the target group, deviations of 10–40% (and even more) can occur between actual website usage and the measurement values in the tools.

Typical limitations of such web analytics tools are, for example:

- Consent Banner/Privacy Settings
  Web analytics tools can only partially capture users if they have consented to the capture or cookies and/or necessary privacy settings. If they do not or object, these users will be missing from the respective tool's measurement values.
- Browser Plugins, Ad Blocker
  Web analytics tools are usually based on Javascript program code that is executed in browsers. In some cases, there are browser functions or browser plugins (e.g. Ad Blocker) that prevent this code from being executed and, as a result, the relevant user is not included in the statistics.
- Technical Errors
  The problems here lie in the exact technical process of using the Internet. For example, in some (albeit not too common) cases, a website can be loaded and displayed in the browser but no measurement signal can be transmitted to the web analytics tool. This can happen, for example, if the connection is interrupted at an unfavorable moment or if the user clicks too quickly when the transfer rate is very slow.
- Fake User
  Not only people are on the Internet, but also machines. Various types of automated software may cause page views in the statistics for which there is no real person (and therefore no advertising effect can occur).

In addition to these data gathering problems, one should also be aware of how the statistics displayed in these tools are generated. Thus, some tools calculate the presented values really exactly by summing up and crediting the raw data completely. But some tools only do this exactly up to a maximum of the computing power required for the calculation. In addition, so-called sampling is used. So only a smaller part of the raw data is used for the calculation and this is extrapolated to the displayed total values by means of different mathematical methods—which are therefore no longer the exactly measured values (even if they look like it).

All in all, despite all these limitations, the measurement with web analytics tools usually works quite well and helpfully in many cases. However, the statistics displayed do not reflect reality as accurately as it appears to be due to the very exact-looking numerical values. A professional interpretation is always necessary in the context mentioned.

Social Media Analytics

Social media usually offer their own statistics (often called insights). These have their own problems.

- Reliability/correctness
  There are usually very few ways to check the correctness of the statistics offered by social networks by third parties or independents. In some cases there is no access at all (e.g. with Facebook) or only limited access (e.g. Twitter) to the raw data that would allow verification. Although it is assumed that the statistics do not completely bypass reality—that Facebook confirmed in 2016 that a video playback time that was incorrectly reported by more than 2 years by 60% to 80%—at least critically.
- Unknown or different calculation methods
  Many social media networks offer an interaction rate (also called engagement rate) or you can calculate it yourself from the given values for user actions. The problem: interaction rate is not equal to interaction rate and both are often not comparable. There are more than 5 formulas for the interaction rate or engagement rate—depending on which values are related to each other (which user actions are included in the calculation at all and are they related to reach, number of subscribers, individual posts, etc.). As a result, depending on the calculation method, the same raw data can easily result in double or five times as large values. If you do not calculate the values uniformly or do not know how a social network has calculated them, the interpretability of the key figures may suffer.
- Fake users and profiles
  The estimate of how many of the users of social networks are not real people, but fake users and automatic bots (and generate reach, like and write comments, that is, simulate human activity), lies somewhere between 10% and 40% of the activity in such networks. However, the number differs from account to account. So on some Facebook fan pages, only a negligible proportion of such fake activity may be found, while on others the statistics may falsely simulate considerable activity (and possibly advertising effect) that does not exist at all. Since there is hardly any way for companies to detect or calculate such fake data (and this problem must be solved by the operators of

the social networks), at least key figures should be critically questioned again and again with this knowledge.

- Limited raw data export
  The attempt to use raw data instead of the statistics offered by the operators of social media and to evaluate them is more or less restricted (a manual, manual evaluation is not to be considered here at all due to the effort involved). For example, Twitter is much more generous when it comes to downloading data for its own evaluation, while Facebook and Instagram do not offer any interfaces or functionality for this purpose and even try to legally prevent external data collection on a larger scale. Only a limited scraping is possible here with some tools (see also box in Sect. 10.6.2.4). In short: There is a clear limit to your own clean calculation of key figures.

Podcast Analytics
The statistics on downloads or number of listeners and number of subscribers to a podcast channel should be interpreted with great caution.

First of all, the infrastructure for podcasts is very fragmented. A podcast may be heard on a variety of devices and retrieved from many different hosts. A centralized statistic, as one might know it from websites or from YouTube videos, is often not available and various data sources must be combined.

In addition, for example, Spotify stores podcasts heard on its own servers (technically called caching), which can result in the download statistics of the podcast host not containing the listeners on Spotify. And podcast apps sometimes automatically download episodes (which are counted in the download statistics), even if they have not been requested or heard by the users. So downloads are not automatically listeners.

It is even more difficult to determine subscriber numbers for podcasts because there is no central recording instrument for this. They are always only a rough estimate that can vary greatly depending on the procedure and tools used. This need not be a problem if always equally recorded numbers are compared and percentage changes are measured—comparing numbers with different tools and measurement methods or the assumption that the numbers would correspond to an exact reality would, however, lead to wrong decisions based on such controlling.

> **Important note on all these inaccurate measurements**
> **At this point, only some of the problems in the practical measurement and interpretation of key figures can be addressed.**

However, the fact that hardly any exact measurement are possible must not lead to the conclusion that controlling would not be useful (and in practice must not be used as a reason or excuse for not implementing controlling). Because the goal of controlling is not simply to create an exact image of reality, but to provide the best possible information for decisions and the control of content marketing activities.

However, it is still urgently recommended to always deal with the exact background information when measuring or calculating key figures and to know or consider common limitations when drawing conclusions from these key figures.

Separability of content marketing and advertising communication

In many tools that are used to measure key figure values, special measures must first be taken in order to obtain key figures specifically suited for content marketing at all. In some channels this is easier to do (e.g. for website/blog through segmentations, custom dimensions and data filtering in Google Analytics), in others such as semi-automatic or even manual procedures are required (e.g. the determination of the reach and interactions of all—but only the—content marketing posts in Facebook or Instagram).

For content marketing, therefore, special measures and measurement methods are required in addition to the usual web analytics or social media analytics in order to obtain reliable and meaningful key figures for content marketing.

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