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From Feed to Fan: How Content Marketing Value Builds Brand Advocacy Through Authenticity

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ABSTRACT

As brands increasingly use social media content to create lasting connections with consumers, it is not always known whether – and when – this content will turn into unprompted advocacy, especially in under-researched secondary markets. The value of content marketing and its influence on consumer advocacy via brand authenticity and brand familiarity and digital engagement among adult social media users of Punjab, Pakistan. The study adopts a combination of Signalling Theory, Uses and Gratifications Theory, and Social Exchange Theory, and models content marketing value (CMV) affecting consumer advocacy both directly and indirectly via brand authenticity, which in turn is moderated by brand familiarity, while digital engagement is moderated by the path of brand authenticity to consumer advocacy. The data analysis technique in this research was qualitative using cross-sectional survey method with quantitative approach, which was then analyzed using partial least square-structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) software version 4.0. Indicator reliabilities, internal consistency, convergent and discriminant validity of the measurement model were satisfactory, and there was no common method bias. All six hypotheses were supported: content marketing value significantly predicted both brand authenticity and consumer advocacy; brand authenticity significantly predicted consumer advocacy and partially (complementarily) mediated the content value–advocacy relationship (34.1% of the total effect); and both moderation effects were positive and significant, with the content value–authenticity link strengthening at higher brand familiarity and the authenticity–advocacy link strengthening at higher digital engagement. The findings extend authenticity-mediated content-marketing frameworks to a secondary urban market and offer brand managers an evidence base for calibrating content strategy to consumers’ familiarity and engagement levels rather than applying a uniform approach.

Introduction

Background And Rationale

As social media platforms become a major channel for brands to communicate with consumers, posts, videos, stories, and influencer collaborations are now widely used as a key tool in maintaining a long-term relationship (Curris et al., 2023). This transformation has transformed content marketing from a tactical communication strategy to a strategic asset that is thought to influence the perception of the brand's authenticity and ultimately make consumers more likely to be brand advocates. However, with the increase of digital content volumes, there has been a rise in consumers' scepticism about brands' messages being commercial and not authentic (Foroudi et al., 2020, as cited in Kaushal et al., 2023) which is not yet resolved, as recent research on sustainability messaging and Instagram content has demonstrated (Bulmer et al., 2024).

The digital consumer economy has seen a sharp growth in Pakistan with increased penetration of social media and mobile use of internet, especially among young and urban population (Kaushal et al., 2023). In this area, Punjab's increasing digital integration provides a relevant but under-researched context for the examination of the link between value of content marketing and perceptions of brand authenticity and then to consumer advocacy, and the way both of these translations are influenced by consumers' prior familiarity with the brand and their level of digital engagement.

Problem Statement and Research Gap

Brands invest heavily in content marketing on the assumption that valuable content builds trust and drives advocacy, yet the pathway from content to advocacy is neither direct nor uniform. Curris et al. (2023) and Kaushal et al. (2023) provide evidence for both direct and authenticity-mediated pathways, but their studies are concentrated in specific product categories (beauty products, smartphones) and in Pakistan's major metropolitan centres. Whether these relationships hold among social media users in Punjab, and whether brand familiarity and digital engagement jointly condition them, remains empirically untested. Without this evidence, brand managers in secondary markets lack a validated basis for calibrating content strategy to their specific consumer base.

Three gaps motivate the study. First, a *contextual gap*: existing evidence is drawn from major Pakistani cities and from other product categories and countries—for example, the nutrition sector in Lyu et al. (2025) and smartphone brands in Elsotouhy et al. (2025)—leaving mid-tier cities of Punjab underrepresented. Second, an *integration gap*: brand familiarity and digital engagement have each been examined as moderators of isolated pathways (Aljarah et al., 2024), but few studies test both simultaneously alongside authenticity-based mediation in a single structural model. Third, a *boundary-condition gap*: the literature offers competing accounts of how brand familiarity moderates the content value–authenticity relationship—a ceiling effect for highly familiar consumers versus a signalling effect for less familiar ones—that warrants further empirical testing (Curris et al., 2023).

Research Objectives, Questions, and Significance

The study addresses six research questions and corresponding objectives: (1) does content marketing value significantly predict brand authenticity (RQ1/H1); (2) does it significantly predict consumer advocacy directly (RQ2/H2); (3) does brand authenticity significantly predict consumer advocacy (RQ3/H3); (4) does brand authenticity mediate the content value–advocacy relationship (RQ4/H4); (5) does brand familiarity moderate the content value–authenticity relationship (RQ5/H5); and (6) does digital engagement moderate the authenticity–advocacy relationship (RQ6/H6)?

Theoretically, the study builds on previous research by Curris et al. (2023) and Kaushal et al. (2023) by incorporating Signalling Theory, Uses and Gratifications Theory and Social Exchange Theory in a common testable model that accounts for both mediated and dual-moderated pathways from content marketing value to consumer advocacy. In practice, the results can be used by brand managers and digital marketers in secondary urban markets for an awareness level to adjust the content strategy, not following a one-size-fits-all approach.

The study is limited to business-to-consumer marketing, offline consumers and other cities in Pakistan, as well as to adult social media users (18 years and above) who are active users of Facebook, Instagram, TikTok or YouTube and who have interacted with brand-generated content, and who have made a purchase or followed a brand account in the last six months of their life. The study is also conducted as a cross sectional design so that this study does not reflect causal precedence as discussed in Section 5.4.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Content Marketing Value

Content marketing value refers to the perceived value and usefulness that consumers get from the brand's content on social media. It is a multidimensional communication phenomenon that includes informational accuracy and content's ability to entertain, build trust and emotional connection, beyond content's informational component; a perception of content being truly useful and not intrusive in the commercial message. (Curris et al., 2023). These dimensions are not assessed alone, but act in conjunction in influencing the way in which brand content is processed by consumers and accordingly require an integrative view that places the value of the content within the context of the consumer–brand relationship, such as consumers' prior familiarity with the brand and perceived brand authenticity (Curris et al., 2023). **Islam et al. (2026) also explored that** how social media marketing translates into consumer purchase intention, the mechanism through which it operates, and the platform conditions that shape its strength.

Brand Authenticity

Brand authenticity is the consumer's belief that a brand is authentic, transparent, consistent, and keeps to its values. Foroudi et al. (2020) operationalized it as the extent to which consumers feel that a brand is sincere, congruent in the values it communicates and in the behaviors it exhibits, and that a brand has a history that supports the credibility in the marketplace. Therefore, brand authenticity is not a natural property of the brand, but a socially constructed feature that is generated by the interaction of brand communication, consumer expectation, and the sociocultural environment (Deng et al., 2025). Authenticity, as a psychological linking factor between brand marketing stimuli and downstream outcomes, is confirmed by Kaushal et al. (2023), where consumers exposed to authentic brands are likely to experience brand love and brand advocacy, which is similar to the findings of Deng et al. (2025), where brand attachment and brand trust are psychological linkages that mediate the effects of brand authenticity on brand loyalty, in international brand contexts. Authenticity, therefore, relies on the brand's uniformity of communication, the appearance of sincerity in its actions and the fact that the brand maintains its values in business, which is why it is central to this model.

Consumer Advocacy, Brand Familiarity, and Digital Engagement

Consumer advocacy refers to the unprompted voluntary behavior consumers engage in when they recommend, endorse or promote a brand in their social network based on their positive satisfaction and emotional bonds with the brand. It is not just satisfaction or repeat purchases – it's the higher-order relational outcome in which consumers are brand ambassadors, which Kaushal et al (2023) describe as a proactive relational interaction that is social – advocates invest personal social capital, reaching the brand beyond paid media. The result of their study corroborates with Aljarah et al. (2024), who find that the dimensions of authenticity, especially brand love and brand loyalty, have a significant influence on brand advocacy of Gen Z smartphone users in Pakistan.

Brand familiarity is the accumulation of direct and indirect experiences consumers have with a brand, forming a cognitive schema that shapes how brand information is processed and retained. Curris et al. (2023) and Aljarah et al. (2024) treat it as a boundary condition, not a brand-generated asset, that moderates relationships within content marketing and advocacy frameworks by reflecting the depth of prior knowledge a consumer holds toward a brand. Digital engagement, by contrast, is the behavioural, cognitive, and emotional investment consumers make in interacting with brand content online—liking, sharing, commenting, following, and creating user-generated content (Curris et al., 2023)—and functions in the present model as a relational amplifier grounded in Uses and Gratifications Theory, which holds that consumers actively seek content fulfilling specific psychological or social needs.

Hypotheses Development

Content marketing value, brand authenticity, and consumer advocacy (H1–H3). The relationship between content value and authenticity is the pathway that is the basis of the model. Based on Signalling Theory, which posits that brands that consistently create attractive, relevant content send a signal to consumers that they are committed to creating value for them, hence the value of the content in terms of its informativeness and entertainment dimension significantly boosts customer–brand engagement, influencing consumer perceptions of brand authenticity. (Curris et al., 2023) This is a conditional relationship and a formulaic or overly commercialised content, even if it is rich in information, can paradoxically affect perception of authenticity among sceptical audiences, as warned by Foroudi et al. (2020) (as synthesised by Kaushal et al., 2023). We therefore hypothesise:

H1. Content marketing value has a significant positive effect on brand authenticity.

Beyond the mediated pathway, high-quality content may create an intrinsic reward experience sufficient to motivate advocacy even without deeply held authenticity perceptions, supported by Curris et al.'s (2023) finding that content dimensions directly enhance brand loyalty outcomes theoretically adjacent to advocacy:

H2. Content marketing value has a significant positive effect on consumer advocacy.

Authenticity is the model's most consequential pathway, linking perceived brand genuineness directly to willingness to promote the brand. Kaushal et al. (2023) provide robust evidence that authenticity dimensions significantly predict consumer advocacy among Pakistani smartphone users, and Deng et al. (2025) similarly show that authenticity perceptions cascade through attachment and trust into loyalty-relevant outcomes:

H3. Brand authenticity has a significant positive effect on consumer advocacy.

Mediating role of brand authenticity (H4). Because content value shapes advocacy both directly (H2) and by first shaping authenticity (H1, H3), brand authenticity is proposed as the psychological bridge between content stimuli and advocacy outcomes (Kaushal et al., 2023):

H4. Brand authenticity mediates the relationship between content marketing value and consumer advocacy.

Moderating role of brand familiarity (H5). Curris et al. (2023) find that brand-familiar consumers are more receptive to engagement stimuli, since the cognitive shortcuts familiarity affords enhance processing of content marketing value; a robust prior brand schema makes high-quality content more readily interpreted as consistent with an authentic identity. This moderation is nonetheless theoretically contested: for highly familiar consumers, authenticity perceptions may already be well established, producing a diminished incremental effect of content value (a ceiling effect), whereas for less-familiar consumers compelling content may serve as an initial authenticity signal (a signal-amplification effect). Aljarah et al. (2024) similarly identify brand familiarity as a boundary condition on how content drives advocacy-relevant outcomes, lending empirical plausibility to an amplification pattern in this context:

H5. Brand familiarity moderates the positive relationship between content marketing value and brand authenticity.

Moderating role of digital engagement (H6). Digitally engaged consumers are more embedded in social media ecosystems where advocacy behaviours—sharing, recommending, tagging—are normative and socially rewarded. The results from Kaushal et al. (2023) indicate that the relationship between emotional attachment and advocacy is stronger when the consumers actively interact with brand content, which is in line with the Uses and Gratifications theory, which states that consumers who interact with brand content are more likely to translate their positive perceptions into tangible behavior.

H6. Digital engagement moderates the positive relationship between brand authenticity and consumer advocacy.

Conceptual Model

Figure 1 summarises the hypothesised relationships among content marketing value, brand authenticity, consumer advocacy, brand familiarity, and digital engagement.

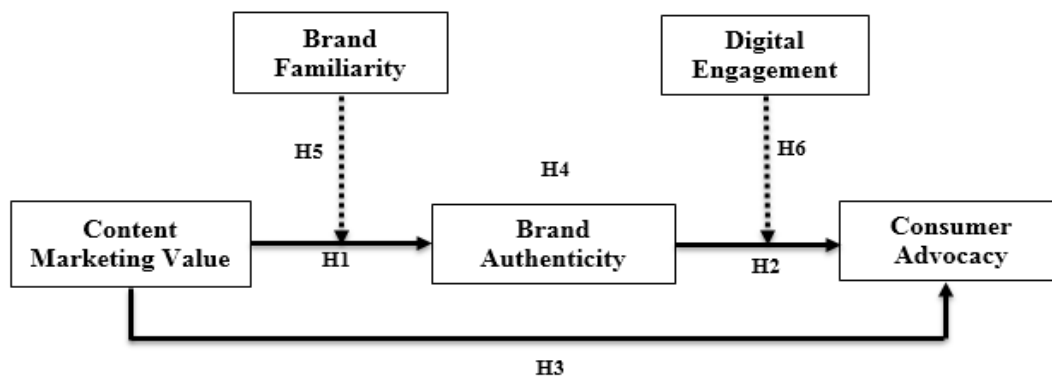


Figure 1 Proposed conceptual model

Methodology

Research Design and Philosophy

Based on the assumption that these social phenomena can be measured and analyzed statistically, this study uses quantitative positivist approach to study the relationships among content marketing value (CMV), brand authenticity (BA), consumer advocacy (CA) and the role of digital engagement (DE) and brand familiarity (BF) as a moderating variable in Pakistan's digital marketing context (Bryman, 2016). A quantitative paradigm allows for systematic measurement, empirical hypothesis testing and generalisable inference (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), which provides the statistical power required to validate a structural model for five latent constructs and two moderation pathways. A cross sectional survey design would be good for collecting attitudinal and perceptual data at one time (Hair et al., 2019). Analytical strategy is based on the partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) as it is appropriate for models involving mediation and moderation with reflective constructs (Hair et al., 2017, 2019).

Population and Sampling

Mid-tier adult (18+) Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and/or YouTube users of a brand in Punjab, Pakistan with purchasing history for a particular brand and who have consumed brand content over the past six months. This is preferred since there is a lack of research, in terms of digital marketing in Pakistan, in mid-tier cities despite their increasing smartphone penetration and social media usage.

Respondents who fulfilled these inclusion criteria were recruited using a non-probability purposive sampling strategy, with snowball sampling used to tap a few respondents where the sampling frame for social media users is not fully available (Etikan et al., 2016). As the number of constructs in the model was five, number of moderate variables was two, and the number of paths was many, 300 respondents were targeted in accordance with the guideline of Hair et al., (2017) that is, 10 respondents per path directed at any one construct which is reasonable for similar PLS-SEM studies conducted in Pakistan (Lyu et al. 2025; Prasad et al. 2025). The aim was to collect 350 complete questionnaires, but 310 valid questionnaires after screening were collected.

Measures and Data Collection

Data were gathered using the structured self-administered online questionnaire developed in Google Forms and sent via WhatsApp groups and Facebook groups to the participants, as the constructs being measured were digital (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The questionnaire consisted of four parts: (A) sociodemographic data; (B) content marketing value on four dimensions (informativeness, entertainment, credibility, and relevance) adapted from Gupta and Dutt (2025); (C) brand authenticity (adapted from Lyu et al., 2025; Prasad et al., 2025); and (D) consumer advocacy (adapted from Shimul et al., 2025); and (D) the moderators brand familiarity (adapted from Aljarah et al., 2024) and digital engagement (adapted from Duffek et al., 2025). A five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree) was used for all items.

Before data collection, a pilot study was conducted with 30 respondents to determine the clarity of the items and the internal consistency of the items from the perspective of Cronbach's Alpha of 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994) and items that were unclear or showed low internal consistency were revised. The informed consent was done online with a checkbox, the participation was voluntary and anonymous, no identification was gathered and the study was conducted according to the ethical guidelines of the affiliated institution.

Data Analysis Strategy

Analysis was done in two stages. The first stage involved preliminary screening in the form of completeness of data, outliers and normality (skewness and kurtosis) conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics (v.26) and descriptive data profile of the sample. The second phase involved the use of PLS-SEM to assess the measurement and structural model in SmartPLS 4 (Ringle et al., 2024). The assessment of the measurement model was done according to Hair et al. (2019) procedures: indicator reliability (outer loadings ≥ 0.70), internal consistency (composite reliability ≥ 0.70 and Cronbach's $\alpha \geq 0.70$), convergent validity (AVE ≥ 0.50), and discriminant validity (HTMT < 0.85 ; Henseler et al., 2015).

The bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals and significance tests of the direct paths (H1–H3), the specific indirect effect (H4; Preacher & Hayes, 2008), and the two interaction terms (H5, H6), were generated using bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples, while the moderator's direct effect was included as a control via the product-indicator approach (Dawson, 2014). The R^2 and f^2 statistics are reported to indicate explanatory and practical significance, and model fit is determined using the standardised root

mean square residual (SRMR). Harman's single factor test and the full-collinearity variance inflation factor (VIF) approach (Kock, 2015) were used to evaluate common method bias.

Results

Sample Profile And Preliminary Data Screening

The data file contains 310 respondents meeting the eligibility criteria described in Section 3.2. No missing data, out-of-range values, or duplicate identifiers were present after screening. Table 1 summarises the respondent profile.

Table 1 Respondent Profile (N = 310)

Variable	Category	n	%
Age	25–34 years	109	35.2%
	18–24 years	107	34.5%
	35–44 years	64	20.6%
	45 years and above	30	9.7%
Gender	Male	155	50.0%
	Female	143	46.1%
	Prefer not to say	12	3.9%
Education	Bachelor's degree	146	47.1%
	Intermediate / A-Levels	72	23.2%
	Master's degree or above	59	19.0%
	Matriculation / O-Levels	33	10.6%
Monthly income (PKR)	30,001–60,000	105	33.9%
	60,001–100,000	81	26.1%
	Below 30,000	69	22.3%
	Above 100,000	55	17.7%
Most-used platform	Instagram	110	35.5%
	TikTok	81	26.1%
	Facebook	73	23.5%
	YouTube	46	14.8%

Measurement Model Assessment

Item-level means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis were within acceptable ranges for PLS-SEM, which does not require multivariate normality but benefits from indicators that are not severely skewed. All indicator loadings exceeded the 0.70 threshold recommended by Hair et al. (2019), and all constructs exceeded the recommended reliability and convergent-validity thresholds (Cronbach's α and composite reliability ≥ 0.70 ; AVE ≥ 0.50), as summarised in Table 2.

Table 2 Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	Items (loading range)	Cronbach's α	Composite reliability (ρ_c)	AVE
Content Marketing Value	16 items (0.755–0.829)	0.961	0.965	0.630
Brand Authenticity	6 items (0.807–0.857)	0.913	0.932	0.697
Consumer Advocacy	6 items (0.806–0.866)	0.910	0.931	0.691
Brand Familiarity	5 items (0.857–0.880)	0.918	0.938	0.751
Digital Engagement	5 items (0.811–0.860)	0.895	0.922	0.704

Note. All values exceed the recommended thresholds (α and $\rho_c \geq 0.70$; AVE ≥ 0.50 ; Hair et al., 2019), indicating adequate internal consistency and convergent validity. Full item-level loadings are available from the authors on request.

Discriminant validity was assessed via the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT < 0.85; Henseler et al., 2015), reported in Table 3. All values fall well below the threshold, supporting discriminant validity between the five constructs.

Table 3 Discriminant Validity (Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio)

	CMV	BA	CA	BF	DE
Content Marketing Value (CMV)	—				
Brand Authenticity (BA)	0.503	—			
Consumer Advocacy (CA)	0.499	0.525	—		
Brand Familiarity (BF)	0.188	0.238	0.195	—	
Digital Engagement (DE)	0.214	0.157	0.342	0.283	—

Common method bias was assessed with two complementary procedures. Harman's single-factor test found the first (unrotated) factor accounted for 35.34% of total variance, below the 50% warning threshold. The full-collinearity VIF approach (Kock, 2015) regressed each construct on all others; all values (CMV = 1.434, BA = 1.473, CA = 1.531, BF = 1.113, DE = 1.165) fell below the conservative 3.3 threshold. Together, these results suggest common method bias is unlikely to be a serious concern in this data set.

Structural Model Assessment

Before hypothesis testing, model fit and explanatory power were examined. The model showed an acceptable fit (SRMR = 0.040 for the estimated model), and, as shown in Table 4, content marketing value and its moderated antecedents explained a moderate proportion of variance in both endogenous constructs (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 4 Coefficient of Determination (R^2) and Predictive Relevance (Q^2)

Endogenous construct	R^2	R^2 adjusted	Q^2 (blindfolding)
Brand Authenticity	0.330	0.323	0.315
Consumer Advocacy	0.384	0.376	0.354

Note. Q^2 values greater than zero for both endogenous constructs indicate the model has predictive relevance (Hair et al., 2017).

Direct Effects and Hypothesis Testing (H1–H3)

Direct effects were assessed via standardised path coefficients with bias-corrected bootstrapped 95% confidence intervals (5,000 resamples). Figure 2 presents the estimated structural model; Table 5 reports the three hypothesised direct paths. All three coefficients were positive and statistically significant, and none of the confidence intervals included zero, supporting H1, H2, and H3.

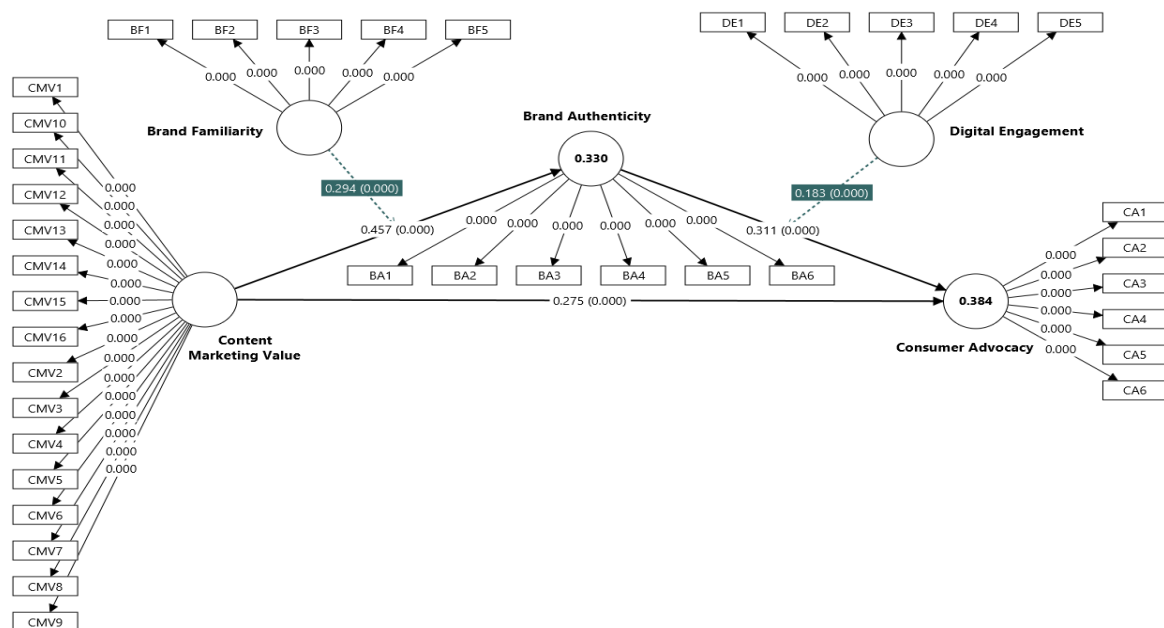
Figure 2: Estimated structural model with standardised path coefficients and R^2 values.

Table 5 Direct Structural Path Coefficients (Bootstrapped, 5,000 Resamples)

Hyp.	Path	β	t	p	95% CI (bias-corrected)	Decision
H1	CMV $\rightarrow$ BA	0.457	9.995	< .001	[0.360, 0.540]	Supported
H2	CMV $\rightarrow$ CA	0.275	5.251	< .001	[0.169, 0.374]	Supported
H3	BA $\rightarrow$ CA	0.311	5.820	< .001	[0.207, 0.415]	Supported

Note. β = standardised path coefficient. Confidence intervals excluding zero denote statistical significance.

Mediation Analysis (H4)

The bootstrapped specific indirect effect of content marketing value on consumer advocacy through brand authenticity (CMV $\rightarrow$ BA $\rightarrow$ CA) was $\beta = 0.142$, 95% CI [0.094, 0.201] (bias-corrected), which excludes zero, indicating a statistically significant indirect effect (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). The direct effect (CMV $\rightarrow$ CA, controlling for brand authenticity) remained significant at $\beta = 0.275$, so the pattern is one of partial (complementary) mediation. The proportion of the total effect explained by the indirect path (variance accounted for, VAF) was 34.1%, as summarised in Table 6.

Table 6 Mediation Analysis: Content Marketing Value $\rightarrow$ Brand Authenticity $\rightarrow$ Consumer Advocacy

Effect	Estimate	95% CI (bias-corrected)	Decision
Indirect effect (a $\times$ b)	0.142	[0.094, 0.201]	Significant (CI excludes zero)
Direct effect (c')	0.275	[0.169, 0.374]	Significant
Total effect (c)	0.417	[0.325, 0.501]	Significant
VAF	34.1%	—	Partial (complementary) mediation

Moderation Analyses (H5, H6)

H5 proposed that brand familiarity moderates the content marketing value–brand authenticity relationship. The CMV $\times$ BF interaction term was significant and positive ($\beta = 0.294$, $t = 6.398$, $p < .001$), and the simple slopes in Table 7 confirm the hypothesised direction: the positive effect of content marketing value on brand authenticity strengthens as brand familiarity increases, from 0.162 at low familiarity to 0.751 at high familiarity. Brand familiarity's direct main effect on brand authenticity was also significant ($\beta = 0.164$, $p = .001$), though not itself hypothesised.

H6 proposed that digital engagement moderates the brand authenticity–consumer advocacy relationship. The BA $\times$ DE interaction term was significant and positive ($\beta = 0.183$, $t = 4.129$, $p < .001$), and the simple slopes confirm the hypothesised direction: the positive effect of brand authenticity on consumer advocacy strengthens as digital engagement increases, from 0.128 at low engagement to 0.494 at high engagement. Digital engagement's direct main effect on consumer advocacy was also significant ($\beta = 0.213$, $p < .001$), though not itself hypothesised.

Table 7 Simple-Slope Analysis for the Two Moderated Paths (± 1 SD; Dawson, 2014)

Moderator level	CMV $\rightarrow$ BA slope (H5)	BA $\rightarrow$ CA slope (H6)
–1 SD (low)	0.162	0.128
Mean	0.457	0.311
+1 SD (high)	0.751	0.494

Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Table 8 summarises the outcome of all six hypothesis tests.

Table 8 Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hyp.	Statement	Result
H1	Content marketing value has a significant positive effect on brand authenticity.	Supported
H2	Content marketing value has a significant positive effect on consumer advocacy.	Supported
H3	Brand authenticity has a significant positive effect on consumer advocacy.	Supported
H4	Brand authenticity mediates the relationship between content marketing value and consumer advocacy.	Supported (partial mediation)

Hyp.	Statement	Result
H5	Brand familiarity moderates the positive relationship between content marketing value and brand authenticity.	Supported
H6	Digital engagement moderates the positive relationship between brand authenticity and consumer advocacy.	Supported

Discussion And Conclusion

Discussion of Findings

The aim of this study was to articulate the value of content marketing and determine the factors that enhance and detract from that value for adult social media users in Punjab, Pakistan. The results showed that the measurement model was reliable, valid and met the recommended cut-off points according to the study by Hair et al. (2019), discriminant validity was confirmed using the criterion of HTMT (Henseler et al., 2015), and the common method bias was excluded using the single factor test and the approach of full collinearity VIF (Kock, 2015). The structural analysis was used to support all six hypotheses against this sound measurement foundation.

Content marketing value's positive and significant impact on brand authenticity ($\beta = 0.457$) is consistent with the findings that consumers' perception of the value of the brand contents is associated with their perception of its authenticity. This aligns with the findings of Curriss et al. (2023) that both dimensions of content marketing, informativeness, and entertainment, help reinforce perceptions of authenticity, and with the findings of Bulmer et al. (2024) that the degree of authenticity of Instagram messaging is largely credited to the extent to which a brand appears sincere, rather than to the amount of posts. The value of content marketing also had a direct and meaningful impact on consumer advocacy beyond the indirect impact of authenticity ($\beta = 0.275$), lending support to the gratification-based pathway that was hypothesized based on the literature review: valuable content can lead to an intrinsic reward experience that can motivate consumers to recommend, even before they establish deep authenticity perceptions. The direct effect is, however, less pronounced than the total effect ($\beta = 0.417$) which verifies that the affectively motivated advocacy due to perceived brand genuineness is the most powerful motivation resulting from content stimuli.

Brand authenticity, in turn, significantly predicted consumer advocacy ($\beta = 0.311$), reinforcing the view that perceived genuineness is a central driver of the move from passive consumption to active brand championing. This finding aligns with Kaushal et al. (2023) and with Deng et al.'s (2025) evidence that authenticity cascades through attachment and trust into loyalty-relevant outcomes, confirming that authenticity functions as a strategic relational asset rather than merely a brand-identity attribute. The bootstrapped specific indirect effect of content marketing value on consumer advocacy through brand authenticity was significant ($\beta = 0.142$, 95% CI [0.094, 0.201]), and because the direct effect remained significant, the pattern is one of partial, complementary mediation, with authenticity accounting for just over a third of the total effect (VAF = 34.1%). This positions brand authenticity as the psychological bridge between content stimuli and advocacy outcomes that Kaushal et al. (2023) describe, while confirming that a meaningful portion of content marketing's influence still reaches advocacy directly.

The content value–authenticity relationship was significantly strengthened by brand familiarity (interaction $\beta = 0.294$, $p < .001$): the simple slope rose from 0.162 at low familiarity to 0.751 at high familiarity. Consistent with Curriss et al. (2023) and Aljarah et al. (2024), consumers with a richer prior brand schema process content more efficiently and more readily interpret high-quality content as consistent with an authentic identity. In this dataset, the strengthening (signal-amplification) pattern dominated the competing ceiling-effect account discussed in Section 2.4, suggesting that, for the sampled consumers, familiarity primarily amplified rather than saturated the authenticity signal. Digital engagement significantly strengthened the authenticity–advocacy relationship (interaction $\beta = 0.183$, $p < .001$), with the simple slope increasing from 0.128 at low engagement to 0.494 at high engagement, supporting the Uses and Gratifications premise that more actively engaged consumers, being more embedded in social media ecosystems where advocacy behaviours are normative and socially rewarded, are better positioned to convert positive authenticity perceptions into visible advocacy—extending Kaushal et al.'s (2023) observation that the attachment–advocacy link is more pronounced among highly engaged consumers.

Theoretical Implications

The study makes three theoretical contributions. First, it integrates Signalling Theory, Uses and Gratifications Theory, and Social Exchange Theory into a single empirically tested model, showing that content marketing value operates as an authenticity signal (signalling), that its behavioural payoff depends on how actively consumers engage (uses and gratifications), and that advocacy emerges as a reciprocal response within an ongoing consumer–brand exchange (social exchange). Second, by testing brand

familiarity and digital engagement as moderators of two distinct paths within the same model, it advances a dual-moderated, mediated account that prior work has largely examined in isolation (cf. Aljarah et al., 2024). Third, it provides evidence on the contested boundary condition of brand familiarity, indicating that, at least in this secondary-market context, familiarity amplifies rather than dampens the content value–authenticity link—a pattern that future replications, discussed in Section 5.5, should test for robustness alongside Deng et al.’s (2025) attachment-and-trust account of how authenticity is shaped.

Managerial Implications

The findings should be a warning for brand managers and digital marketers in secondary urban markets who are expecting a content strategy that will fit a standard form. Content marketing establishes authenticity as a primary building block of its value for driving advocacy, so the content should be created with authenticity and credibility, rather than just information. The familiarity moderation indicates differentiated strategies: less familiar consumers may need a content that creates a tentative, legitimate indicator of authenticity in order to create a sense of authenticity, while more familiar consumers can reinforce and strengthen their existing sense of authenticity. The engagement moderation suggests that investments that will foster active participation (comment, shared content, UGC) will likely improve the return on authenticity efforts, with engagement building being a valuable complementary strategy to authenticity building, not a goal of its own.

Limitations

These conclusions are subject to certain limitations. The cross-sectional design does not give the implication of causal precedence and therefore cannot be verified. The non-probability purposive and snowball sampling methods used in multiple mid-tier cities of Punjab adds to the relevance and accessibility, but cannot guarantee statistical generalisability to the broader population of Pakistan. Common method variance may have had an impact due to the use of self-reports and single-source survey data, but Harman's single-factor test and the full-collinearity VIF approach (Kock, 2015) did not suggest this was problematic.

Directions for Future Research

Several lines of study could be followed for future research that would address these limitations. Either a longitudinal or experimental design would enable more precise causal inferences regarding the content value → authenticity → advocacy sequence. The dual-moderation model could be tested for generalisability across multiple Pakistani cities and across product categories, ideally using probability sampling to gain trust in the results. The generalisability of the dual-moderation model and whether the amplification pattern found for brand familiarity continues in other contexts or starts to give way to a ceiling effect could be tested by running the model across multiple Pakistani cities and across product categories, ideally using probability sampling to gain trust in the results. Individual models can also be developed on each of the four dimensions of content marketing value to see which have the strongest influence on authenticity and advocacy, and to also include behavioral or platform-level engagement metrics in addition to self-report to minimize common method concerns.

Conclusion

This study further contributes to the understanding of the value of content marketing becoming a consumer advocacy by showing that brand authenticity is the main mechanism in connecting the content marketing value with consumer advocacy, while the strength of this relationship relies on brand familiarity and digital engagement. Value of content marketing, whether direct or indirect through its effects of authenticity, were positive and had an influence on advocacy, with authenticity more easily formed by more familiar consumers and more strongly converting to advocacy by more engaged consumers. The study helps provide a more comprehensive understanding of the content-to-advocacy pathway, while simultaneously providing practical advice for brands looking to gain authentic advocacy in non-primary digital markets by placing these relationships within the context of mid-tier Pakistani cities and by incorporating three complementary theoretical lenses.

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