

Analysis of the Influence of Digital Educational Content and Content Marketing Strategies on Brand Awareness of IQOS Products in Medan City

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the influence of digital educational content and content marketing strategies on brand awareness of IQOS products in Medan City. With the rapid development of digital technology and changing consumer consumption patterns, alternative tobacco companies like IQOS need to adopt effective digital marketing strategies. This research uses a quantitative approach with a survey method on 150 respondents in Medan City aged 21-45 years. Data was collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using multiple regression analysis. The results show that digital educational content has a significant positive effect on IQOS brand awareness ($\beta = 0.542$, $p < 0.05$), as well as content marketing strategies which show a significant positive effect ($\beta = 0.387$, $p < 0.05$). Simultaneously, the two independent variables can explain 68.4% of the variance in IQOS brand awareness. These findings imply that the right combination of digital educational content and content marketing strategies can increase consumer awareness of alternative tobacco products in the Medan market.

Keywords: Digital Educational Content, Content Marketing, Brand Awareness, IQOS

BACKGROUND

The rapid development of digital technology has fundamentally transformed the marketing landscape across various industries, including the alternative tobacco product sector. Digital platforms have become the primary medium through which organizations communicate product value, educate consumers, and establish long-term brand relationships. This transformation is particularly important for products that require extensive consumer education due to their technological complexity and regulatory restrictions. According to Kumar and Sharma (2023), digital educational content serves as an effective communication tool by enhancing consumers' knowledge, reducing information asymmetry, and facilitating informed purchasing decisions. Similarly, Katz et al. (2023) explain through the Uses and Gratifications Theory that modern consumers actively seek digital information that satisfies their cognitive and informational needs before making purchasing decisions.

One of the alternative tobacco products that faces this communication challenge is IQOS (I Quit Ordinary Smoking), a heated tobacco product developed by Philip Morris International. Unlike conventional cigarettes or electronic cigarettes, IQOS utilizes heat-not-burn technology, which heats tobacco without combustion. Consequently, consumers require adequate educational information to understand the product's characteristics, usage, and differences from other nicotine products. In Indonesia, particularly in Medan, consumer understanding of heated tobacco products remains relatively limited due to strict tobacco advertising regulations and the lack of accessible educational information.

Medan, one of the largest metropolitan cities in North Sumatra, represents a strategically important market for innovative tobacco products. With a population exceeding 2.4 million and internet penetration reaching approximately 78.2% in 2024, digital communication has become the dominant source of consumer information. Nevertheless, preliminary observations conducted between January and February 2025 revealed several significant challenges affecting IQOS brand awareness. A

preliminary survey involving 50 respondents indicated that only 23% recognized the IQOS brand. Furthermore, approximately 67% of respondents mistakenly perceived IQOS as identical to electronic cigarettes or vaping devices, reflecting a considerable lack of product knowledge. The survey also found that approximately 84% of consumers aged 21–45 relied primarily on digital content when searching for product information before making purchasing decisions. These findings further revealed a substantial shortage of comprehensive educational content explaining heat-not-burn technology and its distinction from other tobacco products.

These conditions suggest that brand awareness remains a major challenge for IQOS in Medan. According to Keller (2023), brand awareness refers to consumers' ability to recognize and recall a particular brand within a product category, forming the foundation of brand equity and influencing subsequent purchasing behavior. Likewise, Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2021) argue that strong brand awareness consists of two essential dimensions: brand recognition, referring to consumers' ability to identify a brand when exposed to it, and brand recall, referring to the ability to retrieve a brand from memory without external cues. Consumers cannot develop favorable attitudes or purchase intentions toward a product unless they first become aware of its existence.

To improve brand awareness, companies increasingly rely on digital educational content rather than traditional promotional messages. Digital educational content consists of informative materials distributed through digital platforms to increase consumer understanding of products, services, or technologies (Kumar & Sharma, 2023). Zhang et al. (2024) identified four critical characteristics of effective digital educational content: relevance to audience needs, accessibility across multiple digital platforms, interactive engagement, and source credibility. Supporting this perspective, Robertson and Lee (2023) found that educational digital content increased brand awareness by approximately 45% more effectively than conventional promotional advertising because consumers perceived educational information as more trustworthy and valuable.

Beyond educational content, an effective content marketing strategy plays a crucial role in strengthening brand awareness. Chen and Wang (2024) define content marketing strategy as a systematic process involving the creation, distribution, and optimization of valuable content to attract and retain target audiences. Hollebeek et al. (2021) emphasize that successful content marketing integrates storytelling, customer engagement, and personalized communication throughout the customer journey. Furthermore, Martinez and Thompson (2023) identified five essential components of effective content marketing: strategic content planning, multi-channel distribution, audience segmentation, continuous performance measurement, and ongoing optimization. In regulated industries such as alternative tobacco products, content marketing must also comply with legal and ethical standards while maintaining educational value. Adams et al. (2022) argue that compliance-based content marketing enables organizations to communicate product information responsibly without violating regulatory frameworks.

Recent empirical evidence further supports the relationship between digital educational content, content marketing, and brand awareness. Park and Kim (2024), through a meta-analysis of 150 digital marketing studies, concluded that digital content marketing significantly improves both brand recognition and brand recall, with average increases of 67% and 52%, respectively. Similarly, Wilson et al. (2023) demonstrated that educational content strategies generated stronger brand awareness for alternative tobacco products than purely promotional campaigns because consumers responded more positively to informative and transparent communication.

The theoretical foundation of this study can also be explained through the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) proposed by Ajzen (2020). TPB suggests that individuals' behavioral intentions are influenced by their attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Educational digital content contributes to more positive attitudes by increasing consumers' understanding of IQOS technology, while strategic content marketing shapes favorable perceptions and strengthens brand familiarity. Consequently, higher levels of consumer knowledge are expected to increase brand awareness and facilitate future purchase intentions.

Although previous studies have extensively examined digital educational content, content marketing, and brand awareness across various industries, empirical research focusing specifically on heated

tobacco products in Indonesia remains relatively limited. Existing studies predominantly examine healthcare products, consumer goods, or general digital marketing contexts, leaving a significant research gap regarding alternative tobacco products operating under strict regulatory environments. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the influence of digital educational content and content marketing strategy on IQOS brand awareness in Medan City. The findings are expected to contribute to digital marketing and brand management literature while providing practical recommendations for companies operating in regulated industries to develop effective educational communication strategies that enhance consumer awareness and brand equity.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Approach

This study adopts a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design to examine the causal relationship between the independent variables (digital educational content and content marketing strategy) and the dependent variable (IQOS brand awareness).

Population and Sample

The population of this research consists of residents of Medan City aged 21–45 years who are active digital platform users and have the potential to be consumers of alternative tobacco products. The sample size was determined using the Slovin formula with a 5% margin of error, resulting in a sample of 150 respondents, selected through purposive sampling technique.

Data Collection Techniques

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale. The questionnaire underwent validity testing ($r > 0.3$) and reliability testing (Cronbach's Alpha > 0.7). Secondary data were obtained from literature reviews, industry reports, and online databases.

Data Analysis Technique

Data were analyzed using multiple regression analysis with the help of SPSS version 25. Prior to the regression analysis, classical assumption tests—including normality, multicollinearity, heteroscedasticity, and autocorrelation tests—were conducted to ensure data validity. Based on the analysis results and the research framework developed from the theories of each variable, the research framework can be formulated as follows :

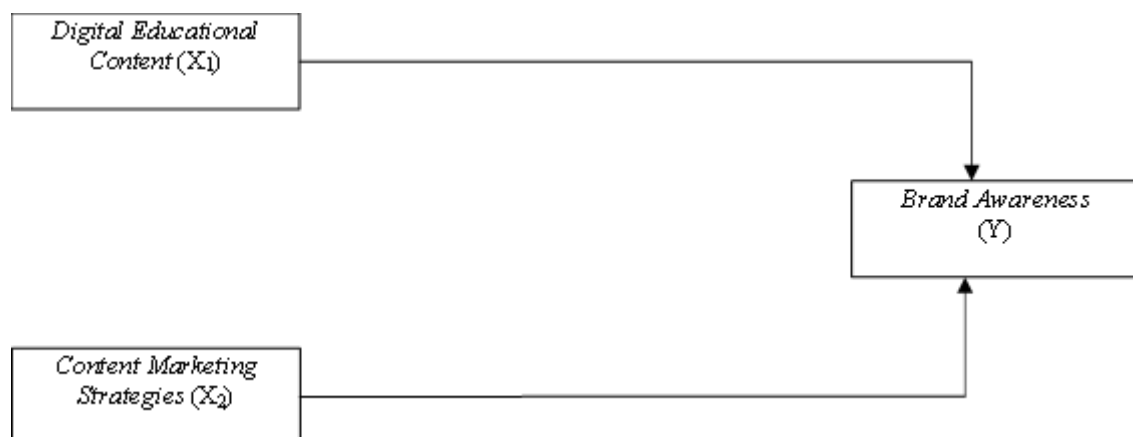


Figure 1. Research Model

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Validity Test

Table 1. Validity and Reliability Test

Variabel	Cronbach's Alpha	Status	Number of Valid Items
Digital Educational Content	0,847	Reliabel	12 item
Content Marketing Strategy	0,823	Reliabel	10 item
Brand Awareness IQOS	0,876	Reliabel	8 item

Source: Processed data, SPSS version 25

The validity test results showed that all items had factor loadings greater than 0.7, indicating good validity. The reliability test results demonstrated that Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values met the minimum criteria, thus confirming that the research instrument is reliable.

Multiple Regression Analysis Results

Table 2. Multiple Regression Analysis Results

Model	Coefficients	Std. Error	t-value	Sig.	Results
(Constant)	2,341	0,987	2,372	0,019	Significant
Digital Educational Content	0,542	0,078	6,949	0,000	H1 Accepted
Content Marketing Strategy	0,387	0,089	4,348	0,000	H2 Accepted

Source: Processed data, SPSS version 25

Model Summary:

R = 0.827

R Square = 0.684

Adjusted R Square = 0.680

F-statistic = 158.742 (Sig. 0.000).

DISCUSSION

The Influence of Digital Educational Content on IQOS Brand Awareness

The analysis results indicate that digital educational content has a significant positive effect on IQOS brand awareness, with a regression coefficient of 0.542 and a significance level of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). This finding confirms the first hypothesis (H1): the more effective the digital educational content delivered, the higher the level of consumer awareness toward the IQOS brand. This result aligns with the study by Zhang et al. (2024), which demonstrated that digital educational content possesses greater persuasive power compared to traditional promotional content—especially for products that require in-depth consumer education, such as IQOS.

The Influence of Content Marketing Strategy on IQOS Brand Awareness

The content marketing strategy also shows a significant positive effect on IQOS brand awareness, with a regression coefficient of 0.387 and a significance level of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). This result validates the second hypothesis (H2): the implementation of an appropriate content marketing strategy can enhance

brand awareness of IQOS in Medan City. These findings support the study by Martinez & Thompson (2023), which emphasized the importance of an integrated content marketing approach in building brand awareness—particularly within highly regulated industries such as alternative tobacco products.

The Simultaneous Influence of Digital Educational Content and Content Marketing Strategy

The simultaneous analysis shows that both independent variables collectively explain 68.4% of the variance in IQOS brand awareness ($R^2 = 0.684$). The F-statistic value of 158.742 with a significance level of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$) indicates that the regression model is statistically fit, thereby confirming the third hypothesis (H3).

CONCLUSION (BOLD, 11)

Based on the research findings and discussion, it can be concluded that digital educational content has a significant positive effect on IQOS brand awareness in Medan City. High-quality, credible, and easily accessible educational content distributed through digital platforms effectively enhances consumers' understanding and recognition of the IQOS brand. In addition, content marketing strategy also has a significant positive effect on brand awareness. The implementation of an integrated content marketing strategy, supported by multi-channel distribution, audience-focused messaging, and compliance with regulatory requirements, contributes substantially to strengthening consumers' awareness of the brand. Furthermore, digital educational content and content marketing strategy simultaneously have a significant positive influence on IQOS brand awareness, jointly explaining 68.4% of the variance in brand awareness. These findings indicate that the integration of educational digital content with a well-planned content marketing strategy creates a strong synergy in improving consumer awareness and positioning IQOS more effectively within the Medan market.

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