CONTENT MARKETING AND CUSTOMER PATRONAGE OF MOBILE FINANCIAL TECHNOLOGY SERVICES IN CALABAR, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined content marketing and customer patronage of mobile financial technology (FinTech) services in Calabar, Nigeria. It aimed to assess the effect of financial educational content, thought leadership, and social media engagement on customer patronage. The study was underpinned by the dynamic theory of innovation. Using a cross-sectional survey design, primary data were collected from 232 mobile FinTech users in Calabar through a structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics were employed for data analysis, while multiple linear regression was used for hypothesis testing. Findings revealed that financial educational content, thought leadership, and social media engagement significantly and positively influenced customer patronage of mobile FinTech services. Based on these findings, the study recommended that mobile FinTech managers in Nigeria adopt financial education strategies, such as publishing accessible blog posts, personalized newsletters, and hosting interactive webinars to simplify financial concepts. To enhance thought leadership, companies should publish expert articles, trend reports, and opinion pieces on local financial solutions, establishing themselves as trusted advisors. Additionally, social media platforms should be leveraged to share engaging infographics, encourage satisfied customers to share experiences, and collaborate with credible influencers to build trust and broaden their audience. These strategies aim to strengthen customer engagement, boost trust, and increase patronage of mobile FinTech services in Nigeria.

Keywords: Content marketing, Consumer buying behaviour, FinTech, Thought leadership, Social media marketing

INTRODUCTION

In competitive landscapes, consistent customer patronage amplifies and maximizes the competitive capacity of business organizations by fostering customer loyalty, generating steady revenue streams, and facilitating continuous innovation and improvement. This is because customer patronage is the lifeblood that powers the profitability and sustainability of commercial enterprises, without which businesses would face declining revenues, and ultimately risk failure due to the inability to support operational costs and invest in growth opportunities (Anyasor & Njelita, 2020). As such, business organizations, including mobile financial technology (FinTech) companies, have resorted to several marketing approaches to bolster customer patronage. From relevant research, one of such contemporary marketing approaches is content marketing (Wang et al., 2019; Müller & Christandl, 2019; Muriuki et al., 2022).

According to Adomako et al. (2021), content marketing is the strategic creation, distribution, and management of relevant, valuable, and consistent content designed to attract, engage, and retain a clearly defined audience for a business organization, ultimately driving profitable customer actions and enhancing brand loyalty. In the digital age of today, content marketing has emerged as a pivotal strategy playing a crucial role in influencing consumer behaviour and engagement in several industries. Given the growth and proliferation of social media marketing in Nigeria, mobile FinTech companies have amplified their adoption and application of content marketing strategies in their marketing campaigns. However, the problem of this study is that despite the pervasive utilization of content marketing practices by mobile FinTech companies in Nigeria, there remains a substantial gap in comprehending how these practices can drive customer adoption and sustained patronage of these services. This is because of the acute scarcity of relevant research in the Nigerian context relating content marketing with customer patronage of mobile FinTech companies. In fact, most of the available relevant studies done were centered broadly on social media (Anyadighibe & Adepoju, 2023), relationship marketing (Amadi & Philip, 2024), green marketing (Eko et al., 2023), with no linkage to content marketing practices like financial educational content, and thought leadership which are increasingly gaining traction in Nigeria.

This implies that the specific mechanisms through which content marketing influences consumer purchase behaviour, including patronage, in the Nigerian mobile FinTech sector remain largely unexplored by extant scholars. As a consequence, mobile FinTech companies may not be fully leveraging the potential of content marketing to enhance customer engagement, trust, and loyalty. As such, there is a pressing need for empirical research to bridge this knowledge gap and provide actionable insights that can inform more effective content marketing strategies in this rapidly evolving industry. This is critical because the competitive landscape of the mobile FinTech market necessitates innovative marketing approaches to capture and retain customers. Against this backdrop, this study was conducted to examine the effectiveness of content marketing strategies in improving

customer patronage of mobile FinTech services in Calabar, Cross River State. To this end, the following specific objectives were pursued:

i. To examine the effect of financial educational content on customer patronage of mobile financial technology services in Calabar.
ii. To determine the effect of thought leadership on customer patronage of mobile financial technology services in Calabar.
iii. To ascertain the effect of social media engagement on customer patronage of mobile financial technology services in Calabar.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES
Theoretical framework

This study is anchored in the dynamic theory of innovation propounded by Taylor et al. (2002). This is a performance-driven approach designed to guide organizations enhance their corporate performance and gain sustainable competitive advantage through constant adaptation and innovation. It was developed in response to the high rate of failure experienced by conservative business organizations brought on by environmental changes and globalization (Kent, 2004). The basic assumption of the dynamic theory of innovation is that organizations exist in a dynamic environment; one that is fast moving, fast changing and fast evolving, therefore achieving sustainable competitive advantage in such a dynamic environment requires organizations to adapt, adjust and innovate in order to keep abreast of latest trends in the industry (Taylor et al., 2002). According to Taylor et al. (2002), the theory posits that organizations can adapt and innovate in four (4) ways, namely: technology, methods and processes, corporate orientation and personnel.

As an innovative theoretical framework, the dynamic theory of innovation has been applied in different scholarly contexts. In the context of this study, the relevance of the dynamic theory of innovation lies in its basic premise, which implies that business organizations, such as mobile FinTech companies, exist in a dynamic environment, which is fast moving, fast changing and fast evolving. Hence, the theory suggests that achieving sustainable competitive advantage (in terms of improved customers' patronage) in such a dynamic environment requires these companies to adapt, adjust and innovate in order to keep abreast of latest environmental trends. It could be implied from the theory that successful mobile FinTech companies are those that are constantly in the process of adapting, adjusting and innovating their marketing strategies in order to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. Hence, the theory posits that mobile FinTech companies, like any other organizations, could adapt and innovate in four (4) ways, including technology (content marketing), which is the central focus of this study. Therefore, the theory implies that mobile FinTech companies can adapt and innovate technologically, using content marketing strategies to enhance customer patronage.

Conceptual framework

This study examined content marketing and customer patronage of mobile FinTech services in Calabar, Nigeria. It sought to determine the causality between the independent variable (content marketing) and the dependent variable (customer patronage) in the context of mobile FinTech services in Calabar. The independent variable (content marketing) was therefore disintegrated into the following proxies on the basis of extant literature: financial educational content, thought leadership and social media engagement (Ochieng & Achieng, 2019; Tanaka & Suzuki, 2021; Nkosi & Mbatha, 2017; Yildirim & Kaya, 2022). Likewise, the dependent variable (customer patronage) was disintegrated into the following proxies as informed by relevant literature: customer adoption, patronage frequency and repeat patronage (Amadi & Philip, 2024; Anyadighibe & Adepoju, 2023). In the context of this study, financial educational content is operationalized as digital materials and resources provided to customers with the aim of enhancing their understanding and knowledge of financial concepts, issues, and products in order to enable them make informed financial decisions and effectively manage their personal finances.

Thought leadership as a content marketing strategy is also operationalized in the context of this study as the process whereby mobile FinTech companies create and distribute insightful, authoritative content that establishes them as knowledgeable and influential leaders in the industry, aiming to build trust, credibility, and a loyal customer base. Similarly, social media engagement as a content marketing strategy is operationalized as the practice whereby mobile FinTech companies actively interact with users on social media platforms through content such as posts, comments, likes, shares, and direct messages to foster relationships, build brand loyalty, and promote services, thereby driving user acquisition, retention, and overall business growth. In the context of this study, it was hypothesized that these content marketing strategies had some sort of association with customer patronage of mobile FinTech services in Calabar. This hypothesized relationship is portrayed in the conceptual model presented in FIG. 1.
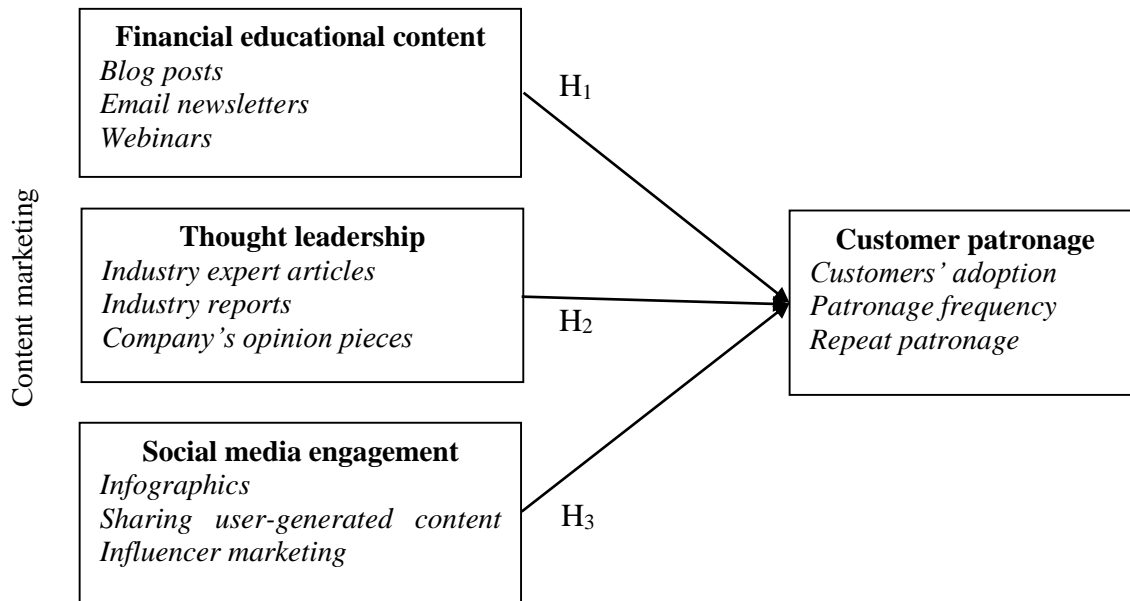
FIG. 1: Conceptual model of the study
Source: Parameters of independent variables adapted from Ochieng and Achieng (2019); Tanaka and Suzuki (2021); Nkosi and Mbatha (2017); Yildirim and Kaya (2022). Parameters of dependent variable adapted from Amadi and Philip (2024); Anyadighibe and Adepoju (2023)

Mobile financial technology services in Nigeria
Mobile financial technology services (mobile FinTech) leverage mobile devices and digital platforms to deliver banking, payments, remittances, and investment solutions (Adekoya & Ajayi, 2020). By utilizing mobile phones and internet connectivity, these services enhance financial inclusion, particularly for the unbanked population (Adeoye & Oyelere, 2021). Nigeria, with its large unbanked population and increasing internet penetration, has seen transformative growth in mobile FinTech, beginning with mobile money services that addressed limited banking infrastructure and high transaction costs (Bello & Suleiman, 2022). Notable platforms include Paga, offering bill payments and savings; OPay, integrating mobile payments with ride-hailing and food delivery; and Kuda, a digital bank targeting youth and SMEs with zero transaction fees (Igwe & Uche, 2021). These services democratize financial access, empower businesses, and drive economic growth. Farmers now receive payments directly, reducing cash transaction risks, while SMEs benefit from microloans and improved cash flow management (Oladimeji & Ogunleye, 2022). Additionally, mobile FinTech promotes financial literacy through user-friendly platforms and agent networks, fostering savings and responsible spending (Olaniyi & Adewale, 2023). Integration with social welfare programs ensures effective distribution of government aid, minimizing inefficiencies (Oyekola & Fagbohun, 2021).

Content marketing
Content marketing is a strategic approach focused on creating, distributing, and sharing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and engage a clearly defined audience, ultimately driving profitable customer actions (Chaffey, 2019). It differs from traditional advertising by prioritizing content that provides genuine value to the audience, such as information, education, or entertainment, rather than directly promoting a product or service. The emergence of content marketing can be traced back to the early days of the internet when businesses started recognizing the potential of digital platforms to reach and engage with consumers (Holliman & Rowley, 2019). The rapid growth of the internet and the proliferation of social media platforms revolutionized the way companies interacted with their audiences. Unlike traditional advertising, which was often intrusive and one-way, digital platforms allowed for more interactive and engaging forms of communication (Tafesse & Wien, 2020). As consumers became more adept at ignoring conventional advertisements and sought more meaningful interactions online, businesses began to understand the importance of providing valuable content that resonated with their target audience. Content marketing is essential for building brand awareness and credibility by offering high-quality content that positions businesses as trusted industry leaders (Yang et al., 2020). Engaging content tailored to audience needs fosters trust, loyalty, and stronger customer relationships (Kumar & Gupta, 2020). It also drives traffic and generates leads cost-effectively through optimized search rankings, outperforming traditional marketing (Li & Xie, 2021). Moreover, content marketing provides actionable insights into consumer behavior, enabling targeted campaigns (Langan et al., 2022). These advantages make content marketing a pivotal strategy in today's competitive landscape.

Financial educational content and customer patronage of mobile FinTech services
Financial educational content involves creating and distributing informative and engaging materials designed to educate consumers about various financial topics (Wambugu & Maina, 2020). This strategy goes beyond traditional advertising by providing value to potential customers through knowledge and insights that can help them make informed financial decisions. Financial educational content can include blog posts, articles, videos, webinars, infographics, e-books, and social media posts covering topics such as budgeting, saving, investing, debt management, and financial planning (Ngigi & Njenga, 2018). According to Takahashi and Ito (2019), financial service providers apply this strategy by integrating educational content into their marketing efforts to build trust and establish themselves as thought leaders in the industry. By offering valuable and relevant information, financial service providers can attract and engage a broader audience (Brown & Choi, 2022). This content not only educates consumers but also positions the provider as a reliable and knowledgeable partner in their financial journey. As consumers become more informed, they are more likely to trust and feel confident in the services offered, leading to increased customer patronage.

Also, when consumers perceive that a provider genuinely cares about their financial well-being and is willing to invest in their financial literacy, they are more likely to develop a positive relationship with the brand and remain loyal over time (Singh & MacDonald, 2017). Moreover, financial educational content can drive organic traffic to the provider's website through search engine optimization (SEO) techniques. By consistently producing high-quality, informative content that addresses common financial questions and concerns, providers can improve their search engine rankings, making it easier for potential customers to find them online (Al-Dmour & Masa'deh, 2020). This increased visibility can lead to higher website traffic and, consequently, more opportunities to convert visitors into customers. The foregoing viewpoint suggests that as a content marketing strategy, financial educational content has the capacity to positively influence customer patronage of financial service providers. This viewpoint is backed by the study of Al-Majali and Al-Azzam (2020), which revealed that financial educational content had a significant positive relationship with customer trust in Jordanian financial technology firms. The viewpoint is also in alignment with the study of Nkosi and Mbatha (2017), which revealed that financial educational content had a significant positive relationship with customer acquisition in South African fintech companies. Hence, the following hypothesis was presented:

H_1:   *Financial educational content has a significant effect on customer patronage of mobile FinTech services in Calabar.*

Thought leadership and customer patronage of mobile FinTech services
Thought leadership involves positioning an individual or organization as an authority and a go-to resource on a particular topic or industry (Yildiz & Kocak, 2018). It entails sharing insights, expertise, and innovative ideas that influence others' thinking and behaviors. In the context of mobile FinTech services, thought leadership is about financial service providers showcasing their deep understanding of financial technology, market trends, and consumer needs. This is achieved through various content formats, including blog posts, email newsletters, webinars, podcasts, and social media engagement, all designed to educate and inspire their audience (Erkan & Yildirim, 2021). For financial service providers, thought leadership is applied by consistently producing high-quality, insightful content that addresses the pain points and interests of their target customers (Alshurideh & Al Kurdi, 2021). They delve into topics such as the future of digital banking, cybersecurity in FinTech, financial inclusion, and the impact of blockchain technology on financial transactions. By doing so, these providers demonstrate their expertise and commitment to innovation, building trust and credibility among their audience.
This strategic approach not only attracts potential customers but also retains existing ones by reinforcing their belief in the provider's capabilities and forward-thinking vision (Al-Maaitah & Bataineh, 2017). Also, Smith and Nel (2023) maintained that enhancing customer patronage through thought leadership involves creating a value-driven relationship with customers. Moreover, by addressing current trends and challenges in the financial sector, thought leaders can anticipate customer needs and offer solutions proactively, thereby improving customer satisfaction and loyalty (Moyo & Mhlanga, 2021). Additionally, thought leadership content often sparks conversations and engagement, fostering a community around the brand. Customers are more likely to engage with and patronize a brand they see as a leader and innovator in the field (Boateng & Narteh, 2019). This active engagement can lead to increased customer advocacy, where satisfied customers recommend the service to others, further expanding the provider's reach and influence. The foregoing viewpoint suggests that as a content marketing strategy, thought leadership has the capacity to positively influence customer patronage of financial service providers. This viewpoint is backed by the study of Al-Majali and Al-Azzam (2020), which revealed that thought leadership had a significant positive relationship with customer trust in Jordanian financial technology firms. The viewpoint is also supported by the study of Yildirim and Kaya (2022), which revealed that thought leadership had a significant positive relationship with consumer behavior in Turkey's fintech sector. Hence, the following hypothesis was presented:

H_2:   *Thought leadership has a significant effect on customer patronage of mobile FinTech services in Calabar.*

Social media engagement and customer patronage of mobile FinTech services
Social media engagement is a dynamic content marketing strategy that involves creating meaningful interactions and fostering connections with an audience on social media platforms (Abdullah & Omar, 2018). It entails a variety of activities, including but not limited to, posting engaging content, responding to comments, sharing user-generated content, running interactive campaigns, and utilizing analytics to fine-tune strategies. The essence of social media engagement lies in its ability to build a community around a brand, enhance visibility, and create a loyal customer base. This strategy is especially critical for mobile FinTech services, where the goal is not just to attract users but to convert them into active and satisfied customers (Wambugu & Maina, 2020). For financial service providers, social media engagement is applied through several key practices. Firstly, they create and share content that resonates with their target audience, such as educational posts about financial literacy, updates on new features, and personalized financial advice (Ngigi & Njenga, 2018). This content is designed to be informative and relatable, encouraging users to interact by liking, sharing, and commenting. Secondly, financial service providers actively engage with their audience by promptly responding to inquiries and feedback. This two-way communication builds trust and demonstrates the provider's commitment to customer satisfaction (Takahashi & Ito, 2019).

Additionally, by consistently providing valuable and relevant content, financial service providers can position themselves as thought leaders and trusted advisors in the financial space. This content-driven approach not only educates customers but also builds brand credibility (Singh & MacDonald, 2017). Similarly, active engagement and prompt responses to customer queries create a positive user experience, making customers feel valued and heard. This personalized interaction fosters a sense of loyalty and encourages customers to use the services more frequently (Bani-Khalid & Al-Rawashdeh, 2019). Furthermore, social media platforms offer advanced targeting and analytics tools that allow financial service providers to tailor their content and engagement strategies to specific audience segments (Erkan & Yildirim, 2021). This precision targeting ensures that the right message reaches the right people, enhancing the effectiveness of marketing efforts. Additionally, social media engagement helps in gathering valuable customer insights through direct interactions and feedback. These insights can be used to improve service offerings and address customer pain points, leading to higher satisfaction and retention rates (Alshurideh & Al Kurdi, 2021). The foregoing viewpoint suggests that as a content marketing strategy, social media engagement has the capacity to positively influence customer patronage of financial service providers. This viewpoint is backed by the study of Ochieng and Achieng (2019), which revealed that social media engagement had a significant positive relationship with customer patronage in the fintech industry in Kenya. The foregoing viewpoint is also backed by the study Tanaka and Suzuki (2021), which revealed that social media engagement had a significant positive relationship with customer loyalty in Japanese fintech services. Hence, the following hypothesis was presented:

H_3:   *Social media engagement has a significant effect on customer patronage of mobile FinTech services in Calabar.*

METHODOLOGY
This study adopted cross-sectional survey research design. Its target population comprised all users of mobile FinTech services in Calabar, Cross River State. However, due to the unavailability of valid up-to-date records of these users in Calabar, the exact numerical size of the population was unknown. Therefore, the study estimated the sample size for the study by applying the Topman sample size determination procedure for infinite populations. Since the population of the study was numerically unknown or infinite, the researcher relied on the Topman sample size determination procedure to statistically determine the sample size of the study. This procedure is based on the Topman formula which states thus:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 Pq}{e^2}$$

Where   n: Sample size required
            Z: Tabular statistical unit (1.96)
            P: Probability of positive response (0.8)
            q: Probability of negative response (0.2)
            e: Margin of error (5 percent)

To obtain the probabilities of positive and negative responses (P and q respectively), the researcher conducted a pilot survey in June, 2024 by interviewing a random selection of 30 students on campus of the University of Calabar. These respondents were asked to identify whether or not they were users of mobile FinTech services during the pilot survey. Out of the 30 respondents interviewed, 24 respondents representing 80 percent said they were active users of at least one mobile FinTech services, while 6 respondents representing 20 percent said they

would rather prefer traditional banking options for their transactions. From the result of the pilot survey above, the Probability of Positive Responses (P) is 0.8, while the Probability of Negative Responses is 0.2. By simple substitution, the Topman formula was applied thus:

$$n = \frac{1.96^2 (0.8 \times 0.2)}{0.05^2}$$

$$= \frac{3.8416 (0.16)}{0.0025}$$

$$= \frac{0.6147}{0.0025}$$

$$= 245.88$$

n = 246 users of mobile FinTech services approximately

The study adopted convenience sampling technique to locate and include users of mobile FinTech services into the sampling frame. Since anyone with a smartphone and an active bank account could use mobile FinTech services, we randomly selected respondents along the branch offices of commercial banks who identified as users of the services. Therefore, the researcher visited Calabar Road, which has a large concentration of commercial banks and bank customers. At this location, we randomly approached potential respondents as they entered and exited bank premises and verified from enquiry that they were actual users of mobile FinTech services before including them in the study. Importantly, the researcher ensured that only potential respondents who verbally identified as users of mobile FinTech services participated in the questionnaire survey. In doing so, the convenience sampling technique ensured that respondents who ultimately took part in the survey were actual representatives of the target population.

To obtain primary data for the study, the researcher used a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire adapted from existing studies. The instrument was content-validated through authority vetting. It comprised two sections; namely: Section A (which collected data on respondents' demographic characteristics) and Section B, which contained statements adapted from existing studies to measure the variables of the study: financial educational content, thought leadership, social media engagement and customer patronage. The parameters for measuring these variables as well as their empirical sources are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1

Variables, parameters and empirical sources

SN	Variables	Parameters	Empirical sources
1	Financial educational content	Blog posts Email newsletters Webinars	Ochieng and Achieng (2019); Tanaka and Suzuki (2021)
2	Thought leadership	Industry expert articles Industry reports Company's opinion pieces	Nkosi and Mbatha (2017)
3	Social media engagement	Infographics Sharing user-generated content Influencer marketing	Yildirim and Kaya (2022)
4	Customer patronage	Customer adoption Patronage frequency Repeat patronage	Amadi and Philip (2024); Anyadighibe and Adepoju (2023)

Source: Authors' compilation from empirical review

In terms of reliability, the questionnaire was validated for consistency using the Cronbach alpha reliability method. Preliminary copies of the questionnaire were given to a randomly chosen group of 30 students at the University of Calabar campus for a pilot test. The collected data were then inputted into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 23) for reliability analysis. As a result, the instrument was deemed dependable and appropriate for primary data collection in the field, as all its measurement scales yielded Cronbach's alpha values of 0.7 or higher. Furthermore, the research employed descriptive statistics to evaluate and interpret the primary data gathered from participants through the questionnaire survey. To derive findings for the study, the null hypotheses formulated for the research were statistically tested using multiple linear regression with the aid of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 25). The regression model states thus:

$CUSTOPAT = a + \beta_1 FINEDU + \beta_2 THOLEAD + \beta_3 SMENG + e$

Where:

CUSTOPAT =	Customer patronage
a =	The intercept
$\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3$ =	Coefficients of the independent variable
e =	Error margin (5 percent)
FINEDU =	Financial educational content
THOLEAD =	Thought leadership
SMENG =	Social media engagement

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

A total of 246 questionnaire copies were administered to users of mobile FinTech services in Calabar. Out of the 246 questionnaire copies administered, 232 copies representing 94.3 percent were successfully retrieved, while 14 copies representing 5.7 percent were not returned, therefore resulting in a total response rate of 94.3 percent. Subsequently, the null hypotheses developed for this study were subjected to statistical testing through multiple regression method as follows:

Hypothesis one

Ho: Financial educational content has no significant effect on customer patronage of mobile financial technology services in Calabar.

Hypothesis two

Ho: Thought leadership has no significant effect on customer patronage of mobile financial technology services in Calabar.

Hypothesis three

Ho: Social media engagement has no significant effect on customer patronage of mobile financial technology services in Calabar.

Decision criteria: Accept the alternative hypothesis if $(P < .05)$ and reject the null hypothesis, if otherwise.

TABLE 2

Model summary of the effect of content marketing on customer patronage of mobile FinTech services in Calabar, Nigeria

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.795[a]	.633	.626	1.673

a. Predictors: (Constant), Financial educational content, thought leadership and social media engagement

TABLE 3

ANOVA[a] of the effect of content marketing on customer patronage of mobile FinTech services in Calabar, Nigeria

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1093.773	3	364.591	130.304	.000[b]
	Residual	635.106	227	2.798		
	Total	1728.879	231			

a. Dependent Variable: Customer patronage

b. Predictors: (Constant), Financial educational content, thought leadership and social media engagement

TABLE 4

Coefficients[a] of the effect of content marketing on customer patronage of mobile FinTech services in Calabar, Nigeria

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.156	.857		12.349	.000
	Financial educational content	1.425	.093	.687	5.323	.000
	Thought leadership	.195	.049	.483	3.949	.000
	Social media engagement	.176	.045	.564	3.878	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Customer patronage

Tables 2, 3 and 4 present the results of a multiple linear regression analysis on the effect of content marketing on customer patronage of mobile FinTech services in Calabar, Nigeria. Table 2 shows a strong correlation (79.5 percent) between content marketing and customer patronage of mobile FinTech services, with an R^2 value of 0.633, indicating that 63.3 percent of the variation in customer patronage of mobile FinTech services can be

explained by content marketing. The F-test result (130.304, P < 0.05) in Table 3 confirms the statistical significance of this relationship.

Also, Table 4 details the contributions of all content marketing dimensions tested (financial educational content, thought leadership and social media engagement) to the dependent variable (customer patronage). The results presented in that table revealed that all the dimensions of content marketing tested significantly predicted customer patronage of mobile FinTech services, with p-values less than 0.05. Financial educational content is the most influential (beta coefficient 0.687), followed by social media engagement (beta coefficient 0.564), and thought leadership (beta coefficient 0.483). Consequently, we reject all the null hypotheses for the alternative ones, thereby concluding that financial educational content, thought leadership and social media engagement have significant positive effects on customer patronage of mobile FinTech services in Calabar, Nigeria.

Discussion of findings
Financial educational content and customer patronage
The test of hypothesis one revealed that financial educational content has a significant positive effect on customer patronage of mobile financial technology services in Calabar. This finding is backed by the study of Al-Majali and Al-Azzam (2020), which revealed that financial educational content had a significant positive relationship with customer trust in Jordanian financial technology firms. The finding is also in alignment with the study of Nkosi and Mbatha (2017), which revealed that financial educational content had a significant positive relationship with customer acquisition in South African fintech companies. This finding underscores the critical importance for managers of mobile FinTech services in Nigeria to prioritize the creation and dissemination of financial educational content. As evidenced by the significant positive effect on customer patronage observed in Calabar, providing users with valuable information and knowledge about financial products and services can enhance their understanding and confidence, thereby increasing their likelihood of using these services.

Thought leadership and customer patronage
The test of hypothesis two revealed that thought leadership has a significant positive effect on customer patronage of mobile financial technology services in Calabar. This finding is backed by the study of Al-Majali and Al-Azzam (2020), which revealed that thought leadership had a significant positive relationship with customer trust in Jordanian financial technology firms. The finding is also supported by the study of Yildirim and Kaya (2022), which revealed that thought leadership had a significant positive relationship with consumer behavior in Turkey's fintech sector. This finding underscores the importance for mobile FinTech managers to invest in building and showcasing their expertise and authoritative presence in the industry. By positioning themselves as thought leaders, managers can enhance their brand's credibility and trustworthiness, which in turn fosters customer loyalty and increases patronage. This entails consistently sharing valuable insights, innovative solutions, and expert opinions through various channels, thereby establishing a strong, knowledgeable presence that resonates with customers and differentiates their services in a competitive market.

Social media engagement and customer patronage
The test of hypothesis three revealed that social media engagement has a significant positive effect on customer patronage of mobile financial technology services in Calabar. This finding is backed by the study of Ochieng and Achieng (2019), which revealed that social media engagement had a significant positive relationship with customer patronage in the fintech industry in Kenya. The finding is also backed by the study Tanaka and Suzuki (2021), which revealed that social media engagement had a significant positive relationship with customer loyalty in Japanese fintech services. This finding underscores the critical importance for managers of mobile FinTech services in Nigeria to invest in robust and dynamic social media strategies. This entails leveraging social media platforms to foster meaningful interactions, address customer queries, and build a strong online presence. By actively engaging with customers on social media, managers can enhance customer satisfaction, loyalty, and trust, ultimately driving higher patronage and positioning their services competitively in the market. This insight suggests that social media is not merely a promotional tool but a pivotal channel for customer relationship management and business growth in the FinTech sector.

CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS
As observed earlier, the expansion of internet connectivity and proliferation of mobile communication devices as well as innovation in the financial service sector have fueled the emergence of content marketing strategies applied by firms in this sector. Having observed that contemporary customers tend to ignore conventional promotional campaigns, financial services providers resorted to the development and dissemination of valuable, informative and useful content to attract customers' attention through value creation. This content marketing approach was investigated in this study with a view to determining its effect on customer patronage of mobile FinTech services in Calabar, Nigeria. To this end, the study statistically analyzed primary data obtained from active users of mobile FinTech brands in Calabar. The findings of the study revealed that financial educational content, thought leadership and social media engagement had significant positive effects on customer patronage of mobile FinTech

services in Calabar. Hence, the study concludes that content marketing is a contemporary marketing strategy suitable for effective promotion of mobile FinTech services in Nigeria due to its proven capacity to enhance customers' adoption and patronage. Guided by the findings of this study, the following practical steps are recommended for possible implementation in the Nigerian mobile FinTech industry:

1. Managers of mobile FinTech services in Nigeria should implement a robust financial education strategy by regularly publishing engaging blog posts that simplify complex financial concepts, sending personalized email newsletters that address individual financial goals and highlight relevant features of the services, and hosting interactive webinars that offer live interactive sessions with financial experts, thereby increasing customer trust, knowledge, and engagement with their platforms.

2. To enhance customer patronage of mobile FinTech services in Nigeria, companies should consistently publish industry expert articles and reports on emerging trends and financial literacy, alongside opinion pieces that showcase innovative solutions to local financial challenges, positioning themselves as thought leaders and trusted advisors in the FinTech space. This will build customer trust and enhance companies' credibility, thereby helping to attract and retain more customers to the companies.

3. Managers of mobile FinTech services in Nigeria should leverage social media by creating visually appealing infographics to explain complex financial products, encouraging satisfied customers to share their positive experiences and user-generated content to build trust, and partnering with credible influencers to reach a wider audience and add credibility to their services, thereby creating a more engaged and informed customer base. This will improve customer patronage by increasing brand visibility, fostering trust, and enhancing the overall customer experience through relatable and easily digestible content about mobile FinTech services.

Limitations and future studies

This study was geographically limited to Calabar, in the sense that only FinTech users that were resident in Calabar participated in the survey. This means that the study's findings may be difficult to generalize to explain the dynamics of FinTech users on a nationwide basis regarding the interplay between content marketing and customer patronage. This is because the unique socio-economic, cultural, and technological characteristics of Calabar may not accurately represent the diverse and heterogeneous nature of FinTech users across Nigeria, which varies significantly in terms of demographic profiles, consumer behaviors, and market dynamics. To address this limitation, future research should aim to conduct studies with broader geographic coverage to include FinTech users from various regions across Nigeria. Such studies should adopt a more inclusive sampling framework that captures the diverse socio-economic and cultural contexts of the country. This would ensure a more representative dataset, enabling researchers to draw conclusions that better reflect the national landscape.

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