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Ali. Noroozi Mobarake <sup>1</sup>, Shayan. Khodajoo <sup>2\*</sup>, Ali Asghar. Eyvazi Heshmat <sup>1</sup>, Aliakbar. Jowkar <sup>1</sup>

1 Assistant Professor, Department of Management, Payame Noor University (PNU), Tehran, Iran

2 Department of Management, Payame Noor University (PNU), Tehran, Iran

Corresponding author email address:  
sh.kh@student.pnu.ac.ir

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## Developing an Inbound Marketing Model for Knowledge-Based Companies Providing Web-Based Services

### ABSTRACT

Inbound marketing in knowledge-based companies providing web-based services can be considered a contextual requirement and a prerequisite for conducting marketing activities and achieving marketing goals. Although this has been practically applied by professionals in the field of web-based services, it is appropriate that it be utilized and implemented in a scientific and well-studied manner. The research is qualitative in nature, and the research method is grounded theory. The data collection tool was interviews. The statistical population of the study included university professors and marketing experts active in the field of knowledge-based companies. Theoretical sampling was used until theoretical saturation was reached, and finally, 16 individuals were interviewed. Data analysis was conducted through coding in three stages. As a result of the data coding process, 62 concepts and 21 categories were identified. The research model was presented based on the dimensions of the grounded theory approach, including causal conditions (customer trust, business competition, application of modern technologies, and commercial information networks), central phenomenon (optimization and SEO, content creation, content marketing, customer interaction, and adoption of online services), contextual conditions (legal limitations and business environment), intervening conditions (market and customer sustainability and market digital orientation), strategies (customer acquisition, content knowledge management, business specialization, and inbound intelligence), and consequences (customer loyalty, business effectiveness, branding, and customer understanding). The inbound marketing model in knowledge-based companies providing web-based services indicates that a variety of organizational, market, customer, technological, and social factors are involved in relation to inbound marketing in knowledge-based companies providing web-based services.

**Keywords:** Inbound Marketing, Knowledge-Based Companies, Web-Based Services

### Introduction

In the rapidly evolving landscape of digital business, marketing has undergone a profound transformation driven by technological progress, changes in consumer behavior, and the emergence of data-driven decision-making paradigms. The proliferation of digital platforms, social media networks, and online marketplaces has reshaped how organizations communicate value to customers and how customers, in turn, engage with brands. In this context, inbound marketing has emerged as a dominant paradigm that prioritizes attracting customers organically through relevant content, personalized engagement, and value co-creation, rather than relying on interruptive, outbound methods that push messages toward passive audiences [1]. This shift represents not only a technological adaptation but also a philosophical reorientation in marketing, where trust, authenticity, and mutual benefit define the interaction between companies and consumers [2, 3]. Inbound marketing has become particularly salient for knowledge-based companies that provide web-based services, as these organizations operate in environments characterized by rapid information exchange, intense competition, and

continuous innovation [4, 5]. For such firms, effective marketing requires an understanding of the digital ecosystem's dynamics and the ability to convert informational value into relational capital.

The origins of inbound marketing are closely tied to the development of permission-based and content-driven strategies, which emphasize user choice, engagement, and consent [1, 6]. These strategies evolved in response to the limitations of traditional outbound marketing, which often generated audience fatigue and declining conversion rates due to its intrusive nature. Inbound marketing, on the other hand, positions the customer as an active participant in the brand communication process. By delivering valuable content through blogs, social networks, email campaigns, webinars, and search-optimized websites, organizations encourage potential customers to seek them out voluntarily [7, 8]. This "pull" approach is supported by an underlying service-dominant logic in marketing, which assumes that value is co-created through interaction between firms and customers rather than unilaterally transferred from producer to consumer [3, 9]. The result is a form of digital relationship marketing that promotes authenticity, transparency, and collaboration, making it especially relevant for the knowledge economy, where intangible assets such as expertise, reputation, and trustworthiness are central to competitive advantage.

Digital transformation has intensified the need for inbound marketing, especially as organizations face an environment of constant technological renewal. The expansion of web-based technologies, artificial intelligence, and data analytics has provided marketers with advanced tools to interpret consumer preferences and predict purchasing behavior [10]. Within this new paradigm, companies are not merely adapting to digital channels but are also redefining their core strategies around them. The use of digital platforms allows businesses to tailor content, track engagement metrics, and build personalized experiences that enhance brand loyalty and long-term customer relationships [11, 12]. Scholars have increasingly highlighted the transformative potential of inbound marketing as an ethical, customer-centric, and performance-enhancing approach that fosters engagement through mutual value exchange [13, 14]. Moreover, inbound marketing's integration with artificial intelligence and analytics-based personalization has sparked renewed discussions about privacy, ethics, and consumer autonomy, raising critical questions about how data-driven marketing can remain transparent and responsible in its use of personal information [10].

The rise of digital ecosystems has blurred traditional distinctions between marketing, customer service, and brand management. In particular, the modern consumer's decision-making journey is nonlinear, often beginning with information search on social media or review platforms and culminating in an online purchase influenced by peer recommendations and user-generated content [15, 16]. This dynamic has positioned content marketing as the core operational mechanism of inbound marketing. High-quality, relevant, and timely content enables firms to educate their audiences, demonstrate expertise, and build trust, all while optimizing search visibility and brand reach [17, 18]. Inbound marketing thus merges creativity with analytics—content creation is guided by insights derived from consumer data, while performance metrics such as engagement rates and conversion funnels guide future content strategies. For knowledge-based companies that rely heavily on intellectual output, this content-driven logic aligns with their fundamental orientation toward knowledge dissemination and innovation [19]. Consequently, inbound marketing provides these organizations with a coherent framework to translate technical expertise into marketable value propositions.

In the competitive environment of web-based services, where user attention is a scarce resource, the capacity to differentiate through inbound strategies becomes essential. Unlike outbound marketing, which focuses on acquiring

customers through paid advertising and direct outreach, inbound marketing emphasizes earning attention through credibility and usefulness [20]. This approach has proven particularly effective in B2B and knowledge-intensive contexts, where purchasing decisions depend on long-term trust and perceived competence rather than impulse [21, 22]. For example, timely digital content tailored to the various stages of the buyer's journey can enhance customer engagement and strengthen relational bonds [16]. These interactions are not limited to transactional exchanges but extend to co-creation experiences in which users contribute feedback and insights that inform product or service development [23]. The cyclical nature of inbound marketing—*attract, engage, convert, and delight*—allows companies to sustain customer relationships beyond the point of sale, turning satisfied clients into brand advocates who amplify the firm's visibility in digital communities [24, 25].

The digital marketing landscape is characterized by high levels of interactivity and customization. Consumers today expect brands to anticipate their needs, deliver relevant content, and communicate seamlessly across multiple touchpoints. This reality has led to the emergence of integrated digital marketing frameworks that combine inbound marketing, content marketing, and social media engagement [18]. Such integration allows companies to manage omnichannel interactions, monitor consumer sentiment, and deliver value in real time. For instance, digital marketing in luxury sectors leverages inbound tactics to create immersive experiences and foster emotional connections with audiences [26]. Similarly, small and medium enterprises have utilized inbound marketing as a cost-effective tool for customer acquisition, brand awareness, and sales growth [24, 27]. The adaptability of inbound marketing models across industries demonstrates their versatility and strategic significance. However, this versatility also poses theoretical challenges, as inbound marketing frameworks must be continuously refined to accommodate technological advancements and contextual differences among sectors [28, 29].

For knowledge-based companies operating in the web services domain, inbound marketing represents both an opportunity and a necessity. These companies rely on intellectual capital and digital infrastructure to create and deliver their products or services, making inbound strategies highly compatible with their operational logic. Content creation, search engine optimization, and customer engagement are integral to their success, not only as marketing tools but as extensions of their core value propositions [2, 5]. Such firms thrive on visibility, credibility, and trust—three attributes that inbound marketing enhances through sustained communication and thought leadership. Moreover, the ecosystem of web-based services often includes complex stakeholder interactions involving clients, partners, developers, and users. Effective inbound strategies facilitate coordination across these networks by providing shared platforms for information exchange and relationship building [30, 31]. In this sense, inbound marketing serves as a relational infrastructure that integrates marketing communication with knowledge management, contributing to both business development and organizational learning [6].

The contextual factors influencing inbound marketing adoption among knowledge-based firms are multifaceted. Legal frameworks, privacy regulations, and ethical standards surrounding digital communication affect how organizations manage data and interact with consumers online [10]. Additionally, the level of digital orientation and infrastructural readiness determines the extent to which firms can implement sophisticated inbound strategies. In many developing contexts, including those with emerging knowledge economies, limitations in technological capacity, human expertise, and regulatory support may impede the effective application of inbound marketing models [9, 14]. Nevertheless, as digitalization progresses, these barriers are gradually diminishing, enabling firms to experiment with advanced tools such as marketing automation, customer relationship management (CRM) systems, and AI-assisted analytics [32, 33]. The convergence of these technologies not only

enhances the efficiency of inbound marketing operations but also strengthens the strategic alignment between marketing, innovation, and knowledge management [11, 15].

The effectiveness of inbound marketing lies in its ability to foster long-term customer relationships and loyalty. Studies have consistently shown that inbound strategies increase customer retention and satisfaction by offering personalized and value-rich experiences [4, 14]. Relationship marketing and inbound marketing share a common objective: to nurture sustained interactions that result in mutual trust and commitment. However, inbound marketing extends beyond traditional relationship marketing by leveraging digital media to automate, measure, and scale engagement activities [25, 29]. In tourism, for example, inbound marketing initiatives have improved customer loyalty and destination trust through storytelling and content personalization [30, 34]. Similarly, in entrepreneurial ecosystems, inbound strategies facilitate start-up growth by combining brand visibility, customer education, and network engagement [23, 35]. In all these cases, the emphasis is on creating authentic connections that transcend the traditional buyer–seller dichotomy and position brands as collaborative partners in the consumer’s journey.

Another key advantage of inbound marketing is its cost-effectiveness compared to outbound advertising. By focusing on organic traffic, search optimization, and content virality, inbound marketing delivers high returns on investment while minimizing resource expenditure [33]. For small and medium enterprises, this is particularly critical, as inbound approaches allow them to compete with larger corporations by leveraging creativity and digital literacy rather than sheer advertising budgets [27]. Furthermore, inbound marketing creates a cumulative effect—content published today continues to attract visitors and generate leads in the long term, contributing to sustainable brand visibility and growth. This sustainability is reinforced by data analytics and continuous performance evaluation, enabling firms to refine their content and engagement strategies based on measurable outcomes [36]. As businesses continue to navigate the digital transformation landscape, inbound marketing offers a strategic pathway for aligning organizational goals with customer expectations, fostering innovation, and achieving enduring competitiveness [11, 26].

The academic discourse on inbound marketing underscores its interdisciplinary nature, bridging marketing communication, digital technology, behavioral science, and organizational learning [5, 31]. As such, developing an inbound marketing model for knowledge-based companies requires integrating insights from multiple domains to capture the complexity of online consumer behavior and the contextual challenges of web-based industries. While prior studies have investigated inbound marketing in retail, tourism, and start-up ecosystems, there remains a research gap in understanding its application to knowledge-intensive firms operating in digital service environments [9, 28]. These firms operate within ecosystems defined by intellectual property, specialized expertise, and technological interdependence, making inbound marketing both a strategic necessity and a mechanism for value creation. By grounding marketing efforts in customer-centric content, inbound strategies can enhance both organizational learning and stakeholder trust, contributing to sustainable competitive advantage [6, 19].

Given these considerations, it is essential to investigate inbound marketing within the specific context of knowledge-based companies providing web-based services. Such an analysis can illuminate how inbound mechanisms—such as SEO, content creation, and digital engagement—interact with organizational capabilities, contextual conditions, and technological infrastructures. Furthermore, the exploration of causal, contextual, and strategic factors influencing inbound marketing can

yield valuable insights for both academic theory and practical application. Therefore, the aim of this study is to develop an inbound marketing model for knowledge-based companies providing web-based services.

## Methodology

This study is conducted using a qualitative research approach, and grounded theory was employed as the research method. Grounded theory is a systematic method for analyzing qualitative data with the aim of generating theory. This method is inductive in nature; in other words, it derives theoretical constructs from specific and detailed data rather than testing pre-existing hypotheses. By employing an inductive strategy, grounded theory emphasizes the simultaneous collection and analysis of data, enabling the theoretical model to emerge directly from the data itself. The research process is based on identifying concepts, categorizing them, and developing theoretical frameworks. In grounded theory, concepts constitute the primary analytical units, as theories are constructed through the conceptualization of data. The initial objective of grounded theory is to understand a phenomenon by identifying its fundamental components and their properties. Subsequently, the relationships among these components are systematically categorized to construct a coherent theoretical model.

In qualitative research, due to the necessity of comprehensively analyzing all dimensions of the issue under investigation in order to provide a conceptual model, it is necessary to conduct in-depth interviews with individuals who are familiar with inbound marketing and knowledge-based companies that provide web-based services. The target population should also have professional experience related to the subject under study. Accordingly, the statistical population for conducting in-depth interviews in the qualitative section of this research includes: (1) university faculty members holding a Ph.D. in marketing or business management with at least 3 years of teaching and research experience in the field of internet and digital marketing, and (2) marketing professionals active in knowledge-based companies offering web-based services, each with at least 5 years of practical (executive) experience.

The sampling method used was theoretical sampling. The essence of theoretical sampling in grounded theory is that the researcher selects data collection forms that provide usable text and visuals for theory development. This means the sampling is purposeful and focused on theory development. Theoretical sampling is a method through which the researcher collects relevant data to refine and construct the categories needed to build a theory. It is considered the best method for theory development. In theoretical sampling, based on the researcher's theoretical sensitivity, in-depth interviews with experts continue until theoretical saturation is reached. Therefore, sample size was determined using the saturation principle, and sampling continued until theoretical saturation was achieved. According to Glaser (1978), theoretical saturation is the stage where no new data emerges related to the studied categories, the category reaches sufficient scope, and relationships between categories are established and confirmed. Theoretical saturation indicates that no additional data is being added to the identified concepts. The snowball sampling method was used in this study, and in total, 16 experts, specialists, and stakeholders were interviewed.

The criterion of credibility was employed to evaluate the grounded theory-based research. Credibility refers to the extent to which the findings authentically reflect the experiences of participants, the researcher, and readers concerning the studied phenomenon. Ten indicators have been proposed for assessing credibility, which are as follows:

1. **Fit:** Do the research findings align with the experiences of domain experts and participants? In this regard, after evaluation and refinement, the findings of this study were validated by three marketing experts specializing in service marketing.
2. **Usefulness:** Do the research findings offer new insights and practical applicability? It can be stated that the findings of the present study have practical value for planning and implementing marketing strategies aimed at improving service delivery within knowledge-based companies.
3. **Conceptualization:** Research findings must exhibit appropriate conceptualization. Concepts such as committed intelligence in human resources and market opacity are examples of novel conceptual developments in this study.
4. **Contextualization:** Findings that lack grounding in context are incomplete; without a defined context, readers cannot understand the reasons behind observed events. The findings of this study were derived from experiences and events related to inbound marketing and are rooted in the operational context of knowledge-based companies.
5. **Logic:** Do the narrative flows portray coherent and logical processes? To meet this criterion, the storytelling process describing inbound marketing in knowledge-based companies providing web-based services was structured with appropriate sequence and logical coherence.
6. **Depth:** Detailed and extensive descriptions add richness to research findings. In this study, effort was made to present the findings of the emergent theory through a comprehensive narrative that includes detailed attention to attributes and dimensions.
7. **Variation:** Do the findings reveal variations or divergences? It can be noted that several data instances obtained during the study were not aligned with the conceptualization of inbound marketing in web-based service providers and were classified separately.
8. **Originality:** Does the research present new perspectives, or merely repackage existing ideas? In this regard, it should be noted that the findings of this study offer an innovative model for inbound marketing within knowledge-based companies providing web-based services.
9. **Sensitivity:** Has the researcher shown sensitivity toward the research subject, the participants, and the findings? Throughout the research process, the researcher approached the topic with seriousness and executed the study diligently and attentively.
10. **Memoing:** Since researchers cannot retain all discussions, insights, and interpretations during data analysis, the use of memos is necessary. In this study, emphasis was placed on referring to memos extracted from the data during various stages of the narrative process of inbound marketing.

In this study, to ensure the validity of the qualitative phase, multiple validation techniques were employed. Peer review was conducted, during which four professors and doctoral students specializing in marketing management reviewed and evaluated the findings of the qualitative phase. Member checking was also utilized; in this process, three university professors and three marketing specialists from knowledge-based companies were asked to annotate the findings and provide their feedback. Additionally, participatory analysis was employed, wherein some of the participants were simultaneously involved in the analysis and interpretation of the data.

Qualitative data analysis was conducted using coding, which was carried out in three phases: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

**Open Coding:** The first step in interpreting data. In this stage, each meaningful data unit from the interviews was identified as a short sentence or specific text fragment.

**Axial Coding:** The statements obtained from open coding were linked to related concepts.

**Selective Coding:** In the final phase, once theoretical saturation of concepts occurred, core categories (causal conditions, central phenomenon, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences) were identified by organizing and clustering the extracted concepts.

**Findings and Results**

Data analysis for the qualitative phase was conducted using coding. Coding was performed in three stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Based on the completed coding process, the identified factors were categorized according to the core dimensions of grounded theory, forming the proposed research model. In the open coding stage, all extracted content and discussions from the interviews were fully transcribed in order to identify the initial concepts embedded in the interview texts. In the axial coding stage, the initial concepts were grouped based on their semantic and conceptual similarity and were presented as main categories. Finally, in the selective coding stage, the main categories were coded into research variables, and the set of identified variables and factors were organized according to the dimensions of the grounded theory model.

The first stage of data coding was open coding. In this stage, after the completion of interviews with the selected participants, all recorded statements and discussions were transcribed in full. During this process, to accurately conceptualize each data proposition extracted from the interviews, individual codes were identified and conceptualized. A sample of the open coding process is presented in Table 1. Based on the concepts discussed during the interviews and through the open coding process, 62 distinct concepts were identified from a total of 429 coded data propositions.

**Table 1**

*Sample of Open Coding*

Concept	Proposition (Data)
Customer engagement	Attracting customers and improving interactions with them through social media, webinars, and podcasts
	Improving customer attraction through educational videos and multimedia content
	Targeted customer attraction by publishing consistent and practical content on social media and websites
	Customer acquisition through publishing educational content on video platforms
Content knowledge growth	Challenges in maintaining quality and innovation in content
	Responding to user needs through quality content
	Continuous updating of content on social networks
	Impact of technological advancement on the quality and type of produced content

Inbound marketing in today's society is a necessity. Given the daily transformations, the expansion of online communications, and technological tools, relying on traditional, predefined, and rigidly programmed routines rooted in classical marketing approaches is no longer effective. It is essential to engage with customers in a dynamic and proactive manner and to utilize up-to-date technological tools to inspire and motivate customers in target markets. A review of the existing theoretical literature indicates the high efficiency and effectiveness of inbound marketing, particularly for knowledge-based businesses that provide web-based services. Furthermore, this issue has implicitly gained attention among marketers and business managers and will likely be welcomed by managers if suitable solutions are available.

Initial findings from the qualitative part of the research also reveal acceptance and belief among experts in the field of web-based service marketing regarding the relevance of inbound marketing. Based on the initial concepts identified in this section, axial coding was conducted to transform these primary concepts into main categories. Out of the 62 initial concepts identified during the open coding stage, 21 categories were extracted. These categories include: customer trust, customer acquisition, commercial specialization, content creation, content marketing, content knowledge management, optimization and SEO, branding, business competition, customer loyalty, customer engagement, legal constraints, digital market orientation, application of modern technologies, business effectiveness, inbound intelligence, market and customer analysis, acceptance of online services, business environment, and business information networks.

**Table 2**

*Categories Identified in the Axial Coding Phase*

No.	Concept	Category	No.	Concept	Category
1	Building trust among target customers	Customer trust	32	Legal limitations in cyberspace	Legal constraints
2	Strengthening and maintaining customer trust		33	Changes in laws and regulations	
3	Improving customer trust		34	International sanctions and restrictions	
4	Conscious customer attraction	Customer acquisition	35	Expansion of digital services	Digital market orientation
5	Relational customer attraction		36	Expansion of digital relationships	
6	Inbound customer attraction		37	Market changes	
7	Specialized human resources	Commercial specialization	38	Use of new technologies	Application of modern tech
8	Specialized content creation		39	Technological transformations	
9	Commercial consulting expertise		40	Recognizing new technologies	
10	Practical content creation	Content creation	41	Inbound value creation	Business effectiveness
11	Educational content creation		42	Business success	
12	Visual and graphical content quality		43	Commercial value creation	
13	Educational advertising	Content marketing	44	Strategic innovation	Inbound intelligence
14	Content-based advertising		45	Data analysis	
15	Sharing content on social media		46	Customer behavior analysis	
16	Acquiring content knowledge	Content knowledge management	47	Customer experience	Customer understanding
17	Growth in content knowledge		48	Customer awareness	
18	Content management		49	Trust in digital space	
19	Customer loyalty	Customer loyalty	50	Provision of web-based services	Acceptance of online services
20	Customer retention		51	Traffic increase	
21	Content optimization	Optimization and SEO	52	Information transparency	Business information network
22	Search engine optimization		53	Information security	
23	Competitive intensity		54	Network management	
24	Online competition	Business competition	55	Market demand	Market and customer analysis
25	Competitive differentiation		56	Daily customer needs	
26	Enhancing brand credibility		57	Stable customers	
27	Improving brand awareness	Branding	58	Consumer behavior change	Business environment
28	Personalization of interaction content		59	Existence of network infrastructure	
29	Personalization of interactions		60	Sustainability of infrastructure	
30	Customer interaction	Customer engagement	61	Resource limitations	Business environment
31	Two-way interactions		62	Economic conditions	

Out of the 21 categories identified during the axial coding phase, the main factors were determined for developing the proposed research model. The analytical method used in the present study is based on the grounded theory approach, in which the identified factors are categorized according to the core dimensions of the grounded theory framework (i.e., causal conditions, central phenomenon, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, strategies, and outcomes). A summary of the selective coding is presented in Table 3.

**Table 3***Classification of Factors Identified in the Selective Coding Phase*

Subcategories	Main Category (Model Dimension)	Subcategories	Main Category (Model Dimension)
Customer trust	Causal Conditions	Market and customer sustainability	Intervening Conditions
Business competition		Digital market orientation	
Application of modern tech		Customer acquisition	Strategies
Business information network		Content knowledge management	
Optimization and SEO	central Phenomenon	Commercial specialization	Outcomes
Content creation		Inbound intelligence	
Content marketing		Customer loyalty	
Customer engagement		Business effectiveness	
Acceptance of online services	Contextual Conditions	Branding	Customer understanding
Legal constraints			
Business environment			

In the conducted coding process, customer trust, business competition, the application of modern technologies, and business information networks were identified as the causal conditions. For the inbound marketing model in knowledge-based companies providing web-based services, causal conditions refer to the factors and variables that establish the prerequisites for inbound marketing and exert influence within this context. In the digital environment and web-based service provision, trust is considered a fundamental condition for sustaining business activities. Without fostering, strengthening, and enhancing customer trust, it is unlikely that effective interactions and relationships between customers and companies can be sustained in the online environment. The companies' inclination toward operating in digital platforms is largely driven by the expansion of competition and the advancement of modern technologies. While using cyberspace may not be deemed sufficient or ideal by many managers and marketers, it is nevertheless essential; without it, companies would effectively be excluded from the arena of competition and technological advancement. Furthermore, business information networks act as incentives for conducting inbound marketing activities, given that such marketing processes require a robust and acceptable informational and communicative infrastructure.

In grounded theory qualitative analysis, the central phenomenon represents the main theme of the model that operationalizes the phenomenon under investigation. Thus, it was necessary to identify the key factors and variables associated with inbound marketing in knowledge-based companies providing web-based services. Accordingly, optimization and SEO, content creation, content marketing, customer engagement, and acceptance of online services were identified as the core phenomenon elements of the model. Focusing on these elements reflects an operational definition of inbound marketing, wherein their interplay shapes the marketing approach. Optimization and SEO enhance the visibility and accessibility of content and desired web pages. Inbound marketing is inherently associated with appropriate content characterized by user education, usability, practical relevance, and graphical and visual appeal. Content creation, alongside strategic content marketing and its dissemination through widely used digital platforms such as social media, constitutes critical components of inbound marketing. In inbound marketing, customer engagement plays a prominent role, and effective interactions are essential for maintaining sustainable relationships. Furthermore, the acceptance of online services is considered a natural extension of inbound marketing, wherein the provision and expansion of online services form an integral part of the strategy.

Marketing activities and service delivery occur within appropriate contexts. Therefore, identifying contextual elements is critical for determining and defining the factors that influence marketing and for guiding the elements of the core

phenomenon. Based on the qualitative analysis, legal constraints and the business environment were identified as contextual conditions. These contextual factors, as expressed by the interviewees, highlight both the legal challenges in implementing inbound marketing effectively and the commercial realities that shape the marketing practices within society and the marketplace. Inbound marketing activities are influenced by existing infrastructural constraints, resource limitations, and prevailing economic conditions, necessitating specific adaptations.

Through the coding process, market and customer sustainability and digital market orientation were identified as intervening conditions. Within the inbound marketing model for knowledge-based companies providing web-based services, certain factors inherent to the web-based market environment exert an intervening influence on inbound marketing activities. The identification and analysis of customer needs, along with the dynamics of market changes, sustainability, and customer behavior variability, play a critical role. The evolution of digital services and relational digital networks further compels marketers to adapt their inbound marketing activities accordingly.

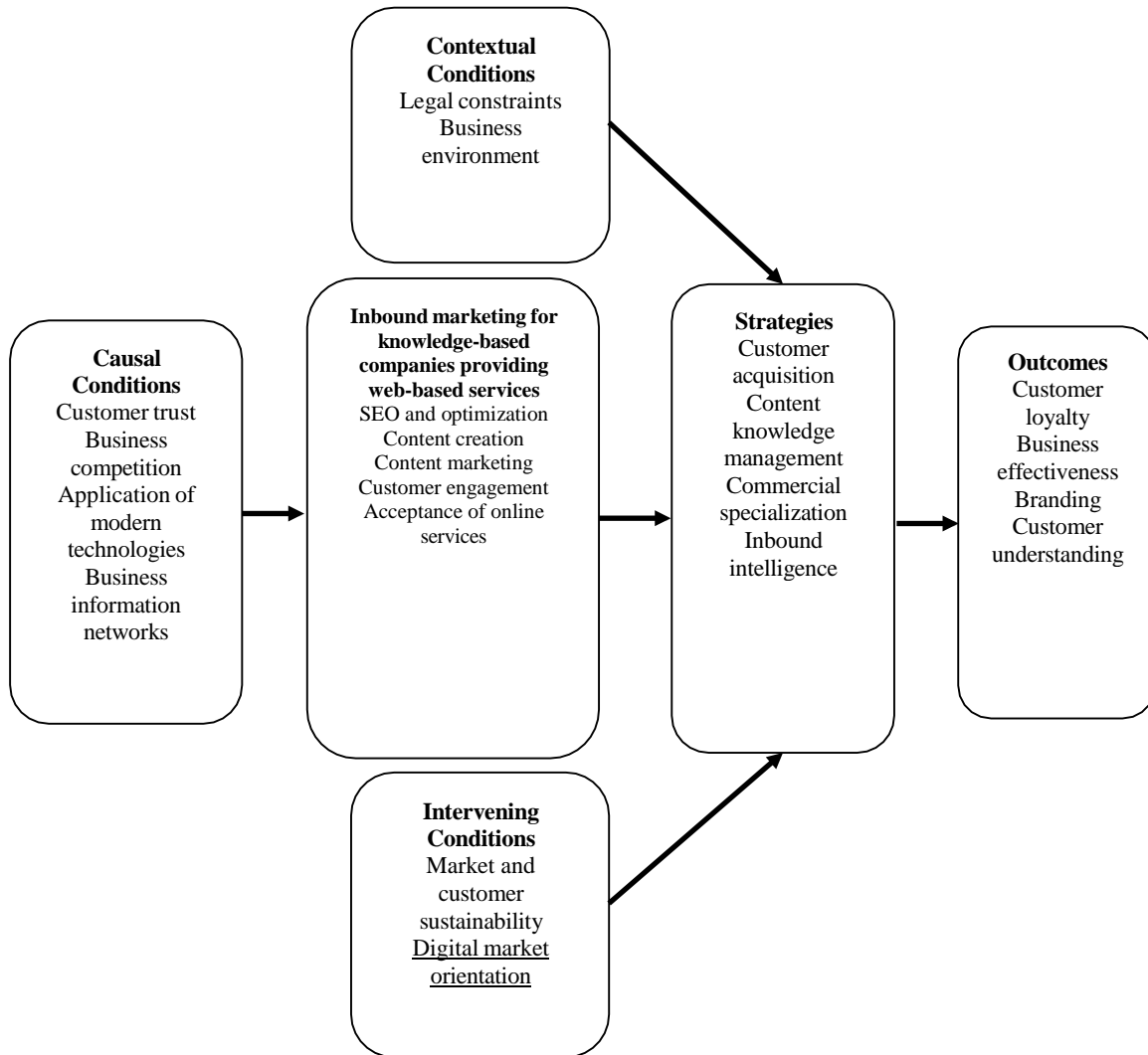
Multiple strategies can be employed for implementing inbound marketing in knowledge-based companies providing web-based services. Based on the interviews, the strategies identified include customer acquisition, content knowledge management, commercial specialization, and inbound intelligence. Customer acquisition remains a fundamental recommendation across all interactive marketing approaches, including inbound marketing. Without effective attraction strategies and the development of positive customer attitudes, the operationalization of inbound marketing would be infeasible. Such acquisition strategies may encompass conscious, relational, and inward-oriented dimensions. Moreover, managing content and associated knowledge has become a necessity for conducting marketing activities within the virtual and online space, reflecting and reinforcing established theoretical perspectives. Commercial specialization is a crucial consideration in today's competitive environment, and its application to marketing practices is emphasized. Notably, inbound intelligence—distinguishing inbound marketing from earlier approaches—enables the strategic use of available data for market and customer analysis, facilitating strategic innovations and improvements in marketing processes over time.

The implementation of inbound marketing in knowledge-based companies providing web-based services leads to valuable outcomes. Based on the qualitative analysis, customer loyalty, business effectiveness, branding, and customer understanding were identified as key outcomes of the research model. Customer loyalty represents a critical endpoint pursued through various marketing activities, and indeed, the ultimate goal of inbound marketing is to achieve a high level of customer loyalty and sustained commercial relationships. Achieving business effectiveness is another outcome, wherein the company generates appropriate value for itself, its customers, and its stakeholders, contributing to overall commercial success. Inbound marketing implementation enhances brand credibility and improves brand awareness, contributing to branding outcomes. Finally, customer understanding emerges as a distinct consequence of inbound marketing; through positive customer experiences and enhanced awareness of the company and its services, customers develop a deeper understanding, thus enabling the continuation and renewal of the inbound marketing cycle.

Based on the qualitative data coding analysis conducted in this study, a total of 62 concepts were extracted and categorized into 21 categories. Following the categorization of these categories into the dimensions of the model according to the grounded theory approach, the proposed research model is presented in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*Inbound Marketing Model for Knowledge-Based Companies Providing Web-Based Services*



## Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to design and develop an inbound marketing model for knowledge-based companies providing web-based services, using a grounded theory approach. The study identified a set of causal, contextual, intervening, and strategic factors that collectively define how inbound marketing operates in this emerging sector. The results revealed that the dimensions of the model—customer trust, content creation, search engine optimization, customer engagement, and acceptance of online services—represent a comprehensive structure that connects organizational, technological, and behavioral components of marketing in digital ecosystems. These findings reinforce the increasing centrality of digital marketing strategies in shaping firm competitiveness and customer relations in the contemporary web-based service economy [11, 26].

The present study confirmed that customer trust serves as a key causal condition in the formation and sustainability of inbound marketing. This outcome is consistent with the principle of service-dominant logic, which emphasizes value co-creation through customer participation [3]. Previous studies have identified trust as an essential antecedent of customer

engagement and loyalty in digital contexts, as trust mediates the effect of perceived content quality and platform reliability on user behavior [4, 14]. Inbound marketing, by offering educational and credible content, nurtures trust and encourages customers to self-initiate interactions with firms. This reflects the conceptual model proposed by [1], who considered inbound marketing a customer-centric paradigm that replaces intrusive outreach with informative attraction.

Another significant result concerns the identification of content creation and optimization (SEO) as the core phenomenon of inbound marketing among knowledge-based firms. This finding echoes the growing academic consensus that digital content functions as the “core currency” of online engagement [16, 17]. According to [18], content marketing and inbound marketing form a hybrid structure that facilitates the creation of user value and long-term engagement. The integration of SEO and content design identified in the current research parallels the results of [21], who found that search visibility and customer-centric online communication significantly influence buying behavior in digital markets. Similarly, [30] emphasized that inbound marketing success depends on delivering customized digital communication that aligns with the informational and emotional needs of target audiences.

The findings also revealed that customer engagement operates as a dynamic component of inbound marketing, mediating between strategies and outcomes such as loyalty and branding. This is consistent with [28], who demonstrated that social media-based inbound strategies create immersive digital experiences for fast-food consumers. Likewise, [9] established that inbound marketing and marketing content jointly improve company image and purchase decisions, with corporate image functioning as a mediating construct. These results highlight the significance of customer participation as an interactive process that transforms inbound marketing from a passive pull mechanism into an active co-creation environment.

The qualitative analysis further underscored application of modern technologies and digital market orientation as intervening and contextual factors influencing inbound marketing performance. These findings are aligned with [10], who argued that the increasing reliance on AI-based digital marketing raises both ethical and operational challenges, yet remains indispensable for personalization and predictive analytics. In the same line, [36] showed that digital marketing innovation enhances firm performance through improved marketing capabilities. The identified role of technological acceptance and digital orientation in the current study reinforces [5], who emphasized customer experience management (CEM) as a driver of digital transformation and marketing effectiveness. For knowledge-based companies, such integration of technology and marketing represents not only a strategic necessity but also a determinant of competitiveness in information-intensive industries.

The recognition of content knowledge management and inbound intelligence as key strategies illustrates how data-driven decision-making is embedded in inbound marketing frameworks. These components confirm that successful marketing in digital contexts depends on managing informational assets and transforming data into actionable insight. This interpretation finds support in [32], who underscored the need to recognize digital content requirements for effective inbound marketing solutions. Likewise, [23] highlighted the macro-dynamic link between digital marketing and startup growth, suggesting that the analytical use of marketing data enhances strategic foresight. The concept of “inbound intelligence” identified in this study extends these arguments by emphasizing the interplay between human creativity and technological analysis in shaping marketing strategies.

The outcomes of the study—customer loyalty, business effectiveness, branding, and customer understanding—mirror those proposed in the literature. [4] demonstrated that inbound marketing significantly enhances customer loyalty, while

[14] reported that relationship marketing combined with inbound strategies fosters brand trust and long-term engagement. The current study's results also correspond with [35], who showed that startups adopting inbound approaches experience improved brand visibility and performance. Similarly, [25] confirmed that inbound social media strategies effectively raise brand awareness in competitive markets. The combination of content-centered interaction, trust building, and personalization therefore provides a logical explanation for the positive outcomes observed in the current research.

The contextual conditions identified—legal limitations and business environment—reflect the broader ecosystem within which inbound marketing operates. Several authors have observed that the digitalization of marketing is influenced by policy frameworks, data protection laws, and competitive pressures [11, 34]. Particularly, [10] discussed the ethical paradox of AI-based marketing in terms of privacy and transparency, suggesting that regulatory constraints can affect firms' ability to use data-intensive strategies. Similarly, [2] proposed a model for inbound and outbound marketing that explicitly incorporates legal and institutional variables affecting implementation. The current findings thus confirm that inbound marketing success requires not only organizational capability but also alignment with the digital governance environment.

Another core interpretation of the findings concerns the integration of content marketing and inbound marketing as complementary rather than separate strategies. The study revealed that the boundaries between content marketing, SEO, and inbound marketing have blurred, producing a holistic framework for digital communication. This is consistent with [19], who demonstrated that content marketing significantly influences customer demand by emphasizing authenticity and storytelling. Similarly, [8] showed that effective inbound marketing implementation depends on content personalization and alignment with customer journeys. This convergence of content and inbound strategies is also reflected in [15], who found that entrepreneurs increasingly use integrated digital tools across the customer journey to enhance engagement and value delivery.

The grounded theory model developed in this research also supports the sequential perspective of inbound marketing proposed in the literature. According to [24], inbound marketing evolves through four stages—attraction, conversion, closing, and delight—each of which requires strategic alignment with customer behavior. This multistage structure corresponds with the causal and strategic dimensions identified in the present study, where attraction and acquisition are realized through trust and content creation, while retention and advocacy arise from loyalty and engagement. Likewise, [20] and [33] found that inbound marketing enhances e-commerce performance through optimized customer journeys that maximize satisfaction and repeat purchase.

Furthermore, the findings extend previous research by emphasizing business specialization and human expertise as unique strategic elements in knowledge-based companies. This aligns with [27], who noted that inbound digital marketing effectiveness in SMEs depends on the integration of specialized expertise and customer-centric innovation. The inclusion of commercial specialization as a strategic category reflects the necessity of aligning inbound marketing activities with the intellectual and technological competencies that define knowledge-based enterprises. Moreover, [6] argued that firms with higher organizational propensity toward inbound-outbound techniques achieve greater adaptability to digital market shifts—a result that parallels the adaptability demonstrated by the companies in this study.

Another theoretical implication of the findings is that inbound marketing represents a transition from transactional to relational marketing. The present study revealed that inbound marketing encourages sustained, bidirectional communication that promotes long-term relationships. [31] identified community building and active listening as mediators between visibility

management and purchase intention, underscoring the relational essence of inbound marketing. Similarly, [29] demonstrated that calls to action and conversational interfaces act as conversion mechanisms in inbound strategies, reinforcing the relational orientation. Thus, the grounded theory model's emphasis on engagement, trust, and co-creation supports the evolving understanding of marketing as a participatory social process rather than a unidirectional promotional activity.

In the broader context, the findings confirm that inbound marketing is an essential component of digital transformation in both developed and emerging markets. Studies such as [26] and [11] highlight the shift from product-based to solution-oriented marketing models driven by digital technologies. Similarly, [33] demonstrated that digital inbound marketing increases economic performance by enhancing efficiency and reducing acquisition costs. The integration of content, technology, and strategy observed in this research exemplifies this transformation. Moreover, [37] and [34] suggested that inbound strategies can serve as post-crisis recovery tools, particularly in tourism, by rebuilding customer confidence through targeted digital engagement—an insight consistent with the study's outcome of customer trust as a causal driver.

Finally, this research reinforces the growing understanding that inbound marketing is not merely a digital communication tactic but a comprehensive business philosophy that merges customer-centricity, technological adaptability, and organizational intelligence. The emergent model demonstrates how inbound marketing fosters sustainable business performance and customer value creation in knowledge-based environments. It confirms that inbound marketing functions as an integrative system of trust, content, engagement, and intelligence, grounded in continuous adaptation to technological and behavioral change [11, 12, 15].

Despite the study's contributions, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the qualitative design limits the generalizability of the findings across industries and countries. The sample consisted of experts in knowledge-based web-service companies, which may not represent other types of organizations or sectors. Second, the use of interviews as the main data collection method may introduce subjective bias due to individual interpretations and contextual differences among participants. Third, while theoretical saturation was achieved, the complexity of digital marketing ecosystems suggests that additional dimensions might emerge in different contexts. Lastly, the dynamic and fast-evolving nature of digital marketing means that the identified relationships could change as new technologies, algorithms, or social media trends emerge.

Future studies could employ quantitative methods to validate the causal relationships between the model's components, particularly the paths linking customer trust, engagement, and loyalty. Cross-industry and cross-national comparative research could enrich the understanding of how cultural, regulatory, or technological differences affect inbound marketing effectiveness. Researchers might also explore the moderating role of artificial intelligence, data ethics, and user privacy in inbound marketing performance. Additionally, longitudinal studies could assess how inbound marketing evolves as digital platforms and customer behaviors transform over time.

For practitioners, the findings underscore the importance of integrating technological capability with customer-centric strategy. Knowledge-based companies should invest in content quality, SEO, and analytics tools to enhance visibility and engagement. Building customer trust through transparency, consistency, and value-driven communication should remain a core focus. Firms must also develop internal knowledge management systems to support continuous learning and innovation in digital marketing practices. Finally, managers are encouraged to align their inbound marketing strategies with the broader digital and regulatory environment to ensure sustainable competitiveness in web-based service markets.

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## Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

## Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

## Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. Written consent was obtained from all participants in the study.

## Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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