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**SUPPORTING DEALERS' SELLING WITH DIGITAL CONTENT MARKETING IN B2B
CONTEXT**

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ABSTRACT

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The aim of this study was to assist companies within B2B sector to gain deeper understanding of how different forms of digital content and digital channels can be utilized to enhance marketing activities, as well as supply chain performance. Furthermore, this study attempted to contribute to the still evolving digital content marketing literature in B2B field, and create foundation for further studies of digital content marketing within a supply chain setting.

This study was conducted as a qualitative research, and the empirical data was acquired by interviewing eight dealers of the case company. For interviews, semi-structured interview method was used, and all interviews were recorded and transcribed. The theoretical framework was based on different forms of digital content and channels, B2B marketing, and supply chain marketing.

The results of this study suggest that digital content created by the supplier is essential for dealers, and digital content can take various forms and shared through various channels. Visual content is the most important form of content, and main source of content for dealers is suppliers' website. Even though usage of social media and different applications and their importance as marketing channels have increased in recent years, dealers still favor traditional channels like email and mobile in their selling and communication. Since there are limitations in this study due to limited amount of data, further studies are suggested to gain more comprehensive view regarding the topic.

TIIVISTELMÄ

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Tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli avustaa B2B asiakasympäristössä toimivien yritysten ymmärrystä erilaisen digitaalisen sisällön ja kanavien käytöstä markkinoinnin ja toimitusketjun toiminnan parantamiseksi. Lisäksi tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli tukea kehittyvää kirjallisuutta liittyen digitaaliseen sisältömarkkinointiin B2B asiakasympäristössä, ja luoda pohjaa digitaalisen sisältömarkkinoinnin jatkotutkimukselle toimitusketjun tapauksessa.

Tutkimus toteutettiin kvalitatiivisena tutkimuksena keräämällä empiiristä dataa haastattelemalla case-yrityksen kahdeksaa jälleenmyyjää. Haastatteluissa käytettiin puolistrukturoitua haastattelumenetelmää, ja kaikki haastattelut nauhoitettiin ja kirjoitettiin puhtaaksi. Teoreettinen viitekehys keskittyi eri digitaalisen sisällön ja kanavien muotoihin, B2B markkinointiin, sekä toimitusketjun markkinointiin liittyvään kirjallisuuteen.

Tutkimuksen tulokset viittaavat toimittajan tuottaman sisällön olevan tärkeää jälleenmyyjille, ja että digitaalista sisältöä voi olla monessa eri muodossa ja sitä voidaan jakaa monen kanavan kautta. Jälleenmyyjille visuaalinen sisältö on tärkeintä ja sitä hankitaan lähtökohtaisesti toimittajan verkkosivuilta. Vaikka sosiaalisen median ja erilaisten sovellusten käyttö ja tärkeys markkinoinnissa ovat kasvaneet viime vuosien aikana, jälleenmyyjät suosivat yhä perinteisiä kanavia, kuten sähköpostia ja puhelimia, myyntiin ja yhteydenpitoon. Tutkimuksen ja datan rajallisuuden takia jatkotutkimukset ovat suositeltuja kokonaisvaltaisemman näkemyksen saavuttamiseksi.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

B2B	Business to business
B2C	Business to consumer
DMC	Digital marketing communications
eWOM	Electronic word of mouth
KPI	Key performance indicator
UGC	User-generated content
WOM	Word of mouth

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1 INTRODUCTION

For marketers, creating content has always been vital, but since the rapid increase of digital platforms, building a digital reputation and creating digital content in different channels have become increasingly important in order to succeed in today's markets (Solomon 2013). The rise of interactive media has also made customers content creators and participants in the communication process of organizations. The evolution of marketing communication channels and consumer behavior have shifted power from organizations to customers (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2010; Karjaluoto, Mustonen & Ulkuniemi 2015). Creating valuable content encourages customer-centric approach on their propositions, which is also in line with service-dominant logic where customers are viewed as co-creators of the firm's marketing and part of an extended enterprise (Holliman & Rowley 2014). However, this development has also created a situation where marketers are not able to fully control the information related to their brand, which has increased the complexity and challenges of marketing activities (Lipiäinen & Karjaluoto 2015; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2010). The growing role of digital communication channels has also affected customer purchasing decisions in B2B environment, creating a need for new marketing strategies (Järvinen & Taiminen 2016; Holliman & Rowley 2014; Wiersema 2013).

Even though digital content is a rapidly rising trend in marketing field and there are multiple books and surveys conducted by marketing research agencies, peer reviewed academic research of digital content marketing is limited, and almost non-existent in B2B context (Holliman & Rowley 2014). It is suggested that content marketing represents changing role for B2B marketers, where brands have to change from product-based selling messages to relevant and engaging content that educates or entertains customers (Holliman & Rowley 2014; Halligan & Shah 2010). The core purpose of content marketing can be viewed as telling the story of the brand, and differentiating that story from competitors (Rose & Pulizzi 2011; Pulizzi 2012). Other trend that is changing the marketing field is that companies are transitioning towards more network-based business models, which requires integration between marketing and supply chain strategies (Jüttner, Christopher & Godsell 2010). Understanding and identifying customer needs and expectations are key in successful marketing, both in terms of digital content and supply chain market integration (Holliman & Rowley 2014; Green, Whitten & Inman 2012).

Changes in competitive landscape and business models have created pressure for companies to develop new ways of creating value for their customers and presenting their offering through various digital channels. For marketers, adopting to these new realities is not something that happens overnight, especially in B2B environments where business relationships are more complex than in B2C. Academic research regarding B2B customers' expectations of digital content marketing is currently extremely limited, especially in a supply chain context. However, there are multiple studies related to digital marketing in general, as well as some studies regarding the usage of certain digital channels, such as social media, in B2B marketing. The aim of this study is to build on the existing literature and shed light on dealers' perspective on B2B digital content marketing in a supply chain context through a qualitative case study.

1.1 Literature review and research background

Digital content marketing in B2B setting has remained rather understudied phenomenon (Järvinen & Taiminen 2016), with exception of study by Holliman and Rowley (2014). They were first to provide a definition for B2B digital content marketing, which they built on multiple interviews from B2B marketing practitioners. (Holliman & Rowley 2014) In addition, they made several recommendations for effective content marketing, as well as contributed to the theoretical understanding of digital content marketing. The foundation of their study is built on earlier definitions of content, and content marketing (Table 1).

Table 1. Earlier definitions of content and content marketing

Author	Definition of content
Handley & Chapman (2011, 21)	Content can be anything created and uploaded to a website, such as words, images or other things
Halvorson & Rach (2012, 13)	What the user came to read, learn, see or experience to your website
Wuebben (2012, 5)	The story of your product or service that leads your brand in the hearts and minds of prospects, customers, and others
Author	Definition of content marketing
Pulizzi & Barrett (2008, 8)	The creation and distribution of educational and compelling content in various formats to attract customers
Rose & Pulizzi (2011, 12)	Strategy focused on creating a valuable experience

As can be seen from Table 1, the earlier definitions of content focus mainly on content created on company's website. However, later studies have expanded the definition of content, to include any digital content created by the company (Holliman & Rowley 2014; Järvinen & Taiminen 2016). Recently there have been studies that focus on overall usage of digital channels in B2B context (Karjaluo, Mustonen & Ulkuniemi 2015), usage of marketing automation for B2B content marketing (Järvinen & Taiminen 2016), and studies focusing on individual digital channels in B2B setting with social media being the most studied (Cawsey & Rowley 2016; Keinänen & Kuivalainen 2015; Michaelidou, Siamagka & Christodoulides 2011; Huotari et al. 2015).

Outside the scope of academic research, content marketing has generated massive amounts of online articles, blogs and social media posts due to rapid increase of its importance in marketing activities both in B2C and B2B context. One of the leading publishers of this content is Content Marketing Institute and its founder Joe Pulizzi, who also has published academic literature about content marketing, as can be seen in Table 1. Content Marketing Institute also conducts annual surveys and research about the state of B2C and B2B content marketing in different market areas, such as North America and UK.

In general, DMC is closely associated with digital content, and it refers to the usage of digital communication channels to create targeted and measurable communication process that helps companies build deeper relationship with customers, as well as acquiring and retaining customers (Mulhern 2009). Terms like e-marketing, Internet marketing and new media have been closely associated with DMC, and sometimes used instead of it since different definitions overlap. However, as a concept, terms like e-marketing and Internet marketing are more limited. (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2010) Content and interactivity have been identified main pillars of DMC by several earlier studies (DuFrene et al. 2005; Godfrey, Seiders & Voss 2011; Srinivasan, Anderson & Ponnayolu 2002)

According to Karjaluo, Mustonen and Ulkuniemi (2015), many B2B marketers still favor heavily offline channels over new online channels, and the amount of innovative marketing is still limited in B2B environment. Mulhern (2009) states that due to the rise of digital media, understanding customers has become essential. Rogers and Clark (2016) combined importance of value creation and possibilities of technological development in B2B sales operations in their study, where they created a new sales model utilizing context-aware technology. Utilization of social media in sales processes has also began to interest academics, such as Niedermeier, Wang and Zhang (2016), and Andzulis, Panagopoulos

and Rapp (2012). In general, the shift from transaction-based selling to more collaborative relationships between buyer and seller has also changed the nature of B2B transactions (Åge 2011).

In order to combine supply chain marketing into this study, background from literature regarding marketing and supply chain strategies integration is utilized. Companies have transitioned towards a more network-based business model over the past few decades, creating need for integration of marketing and supply chain strategies (Jüttner, Christopher & Godsell 2010). From this need, studies regarding marketing alignment in a supply chain have emerged (Green, Whitten & Inman 2012; Jüttner, Christopher & Godsell 2010; Jüttner, Christopher & Baker 2007; Martin & Grbac 2003; Min & Mentzer 2000). In their study, Jüttner, Christopher and Godsell (2010) reviewed the literature of the integration between marketing and supply chain management, and proposed a strategic framework that captures the integration between marketing and supply chain strategies involving four levels of integration. Since academic research regarding digital content marketing is still scarce, it is not surprising that there are no existing studies that connects it to integration of marketing and supply chain strategies.

Increased importance of online channels has created demand for academic research. To answer this, Makkonen and Vuori (2014) focused on the role of information technology in buyer-supplier relationships. They identified that information technology affects intra- and inter-organizational landscapes, and managing it in strategic buyer-supplier relationship requires a holistic approach, top management support and commitment. Rocco and Bush (2016) recognized both opportunities and challenges related to development of new digital communication possibilities in these relationships. Literature about dyadic buyer-supplier relationships recognizes the importance of long-term relationships and mutual benefit (Hingley, Lindgreen & Grant 2015; Tanskanen 2015). However, according to Su and Yang (2017), future research about buyer-supplier relationships should combine perspectives from both marketing and management fields since supply chains can be more complex nowadays and dyadic perspective might not be enough.

Literature about B2B marketing has well developed background, and marketing alignment in supply chains has also generated some academic research. However, academic literature about digital content marketing is still quite limited. Research that combines these concepts together is non-existent, and even literature that combines some of them is scarce with some exceptions like the study by Holliman and Rowley (2014) that combines digital

content marketing and B2B marketing. The research gap and background of this study emerges from this lack of research that combines these concepts (Figure 1), and utilizes the literature from each of these fields in order to contribute to the still evolving digital marketing field.

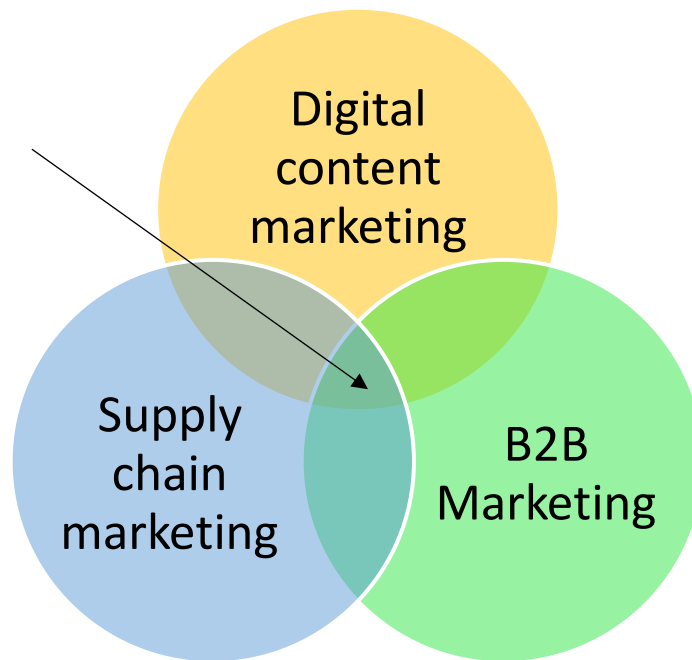


Figure 1. Research gap and background

1.2 Research questions

The purpose of this study is to identify how supplier can utilize digital content marketing, including both different form of digital content and digital channels, to support the sales of its dealers in a B2B setting. In addition, this study aims to contribute to the limited academic literature in B2B context by identifying the importance and possible best practices of digital content marketing. Furthermore, this study contributes to the creation of theoretical foundation regarding digital content marketing in a supply chain setting. The managerial objective of the study is to provide information regarding the current best practices of digital content marketing in a supply chain setting. Currently, the case company has a strategy for their digital content creation in terms of supporting sales of their international dealers, but the needs of the dealers are not studied before, and the strategy is based on assumptions of dealers' needs. Based on the objectives of this study, as well as existing literature, the main research question is set as follows:

Main research question: *How can digital content marketing be used to support dealers' selling in B2B context?*

In order to develop valid answer to the main goal of this study, the additional sub-questions will focus on how dealers view digital content coming from the supplier, what kind of content dealers find the most useful, as well as what is the role of different digital channels in dealers' business. The basis for these questions is created by existing theoretical literature, and in order to answer them, dealers of the case company will be interviewed.

Sub-questions:

What dealers think about suppliers' content?

What kind of digital content is most useful for dealers?

What is the role of different digital channels in dealers' business?

1.3 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this study is formed based on the key concepts and earlier literature. B2B digital marketing is the wider context of the study, and the focus is on digital content, consisting of different forms of content and channels. The more specific setting of the study is marketing within a supply chain, and thus theory related to supply chain marketing is also utilized in the study. The study conducted by Holliman and Rowley (2014) is widely used in this study as its research setting and findings are relatively close to this study, even though it focuses on B2B environment in general, and does not concern supply chain marketing. Furthermore, findings of Karjaluoto, Mustonen and Ulkuniemi (2015) provide background for this study, as they described the usage of DMC in industrial (B2B) marketing context, and identified content as a key part of DMC. Figure 2 presents the theoretical framework, where dealers utilize digital content created by their supplier, in order to enhance their marketing and selling activities towards the end customer of the supply chain.

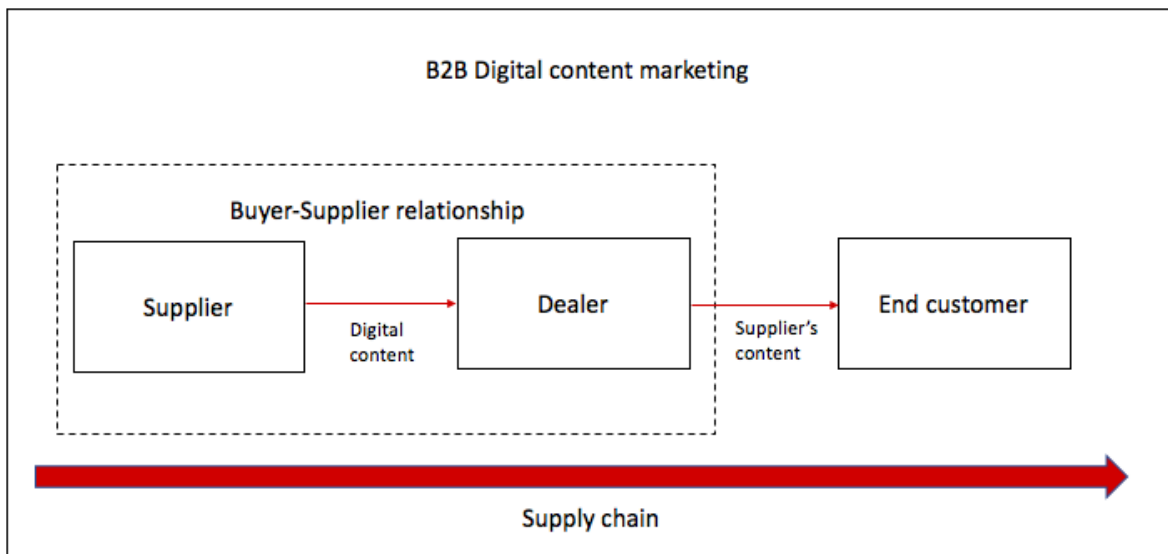


Figure 2. Theoretical framework

1.4 Delimitations

The empirical part of this study focuses on digital content and channels that the case company and its dealers are currently utilizing in their marketing since the dealers of the case company are interviewed. The questionnaire and answers are mostly based on the current marketing activities of the case company in order to get usable results for the case company regarding their dealers' expectations of digital content marketing. In addition, even though concepts like supply chain marketing are discussed in theoretical part of the study, the empirical part does not stretch to customers' customers and suppliers' suppliers, and thus does not represent the whole potential supply chain. This is mostly due to practical reasons, since that would expand the scope of this research too much. In addition, the contextual delimitation is the focus on B2B context and digital content. The case method of the study also limits the generalizability of the results, as the goal is rather to gain deeper understanding of the described concepts, and provide a base for further research.

1.5 Definitions

Key concepts of this study will be briefly defined in this section, which will help the reader to understand the context and relevant concepts related to the topic of this study. These will be discussed more in-depth in the theoretical part of this study.

B2B refers to business to business relationships. In B2B marketing (also referred as industrial marketing), managing various types of interaction is complex due to involvement of multiple people and organizational levels. (Karjaluoto, Mustonen & Ulkuniemi 2015) The complex nature of B2B relationships also affects transactions between organizations (Åge 2011).

Digital content: Digital content that companies provide can be in any digital form, such as webpages, articles, videos, blogs or podcasts. In addition, it can also be UGC regarding the company in social media. (Holliman & Rowley 2014; Järvinen & Taiminen 2016)

Digital channels: Digital channels are technology-based communication channels, that are emerged from development of new technologies, such as mobile Internet and social media. These channels can be viewed as routes of communication between an organization and its customers. (Straker, Wrigley & Rosemann 2015) Digital channels can be further categorized into one-way (e.g. website and email newsletter), and two-way (e.g. company generated blogs and social media) channels (Taiminen & Karjaluoto 2015).

B2B Digital content marketing “involves creating, distributing and sharing relevant, compelling and timely content to engage customers at the appropriate point in their buying consideration processes, such that it encourages them to convert to a business building outcome” (Holliman & Rowley 2014).

Supply chains can be defined as value chains that extend from supplier’s supplier to end customer. **Supply chain management** includes processes like purchasing, manufacturing, marketing, logistics and information processes. The goal of effective supply chain management is to maximize the value of products or services to ultimate customers, as well as to achieve a relatively low total cost of the product or service. (Green, Whitten & Inman 2012)

Dealer can be defined as an “individual or firm that buys goods from a producer or distributor for wholesale and/or retail reselling, and unlike a distributor, is a principal and not an agent” (Businessdictionary 2017).

Marketing strategy alignment can be defined as development and implementation of a supply chain level marketing strategy by supply chain partners aiming for the highest total value for the ultimate customers (Cavinato 1992; Min & Mentzer 2000; Natarajan & Weinrauch 1990).

Buyer-supplier relationships are inter-organizational dyadic relationships between channel members in supply chain (Kim et al. 2010). Some studies also refer to buyer-seller relationships when discussing the same concept, but it can also refer to different situations. In this study, both terms refer to same situation and a connection between channel members, as the dealers buy from the supplier (the case company), and then resell.

1.6 Structure of the study

The structure of this study is presented in Figure 3.

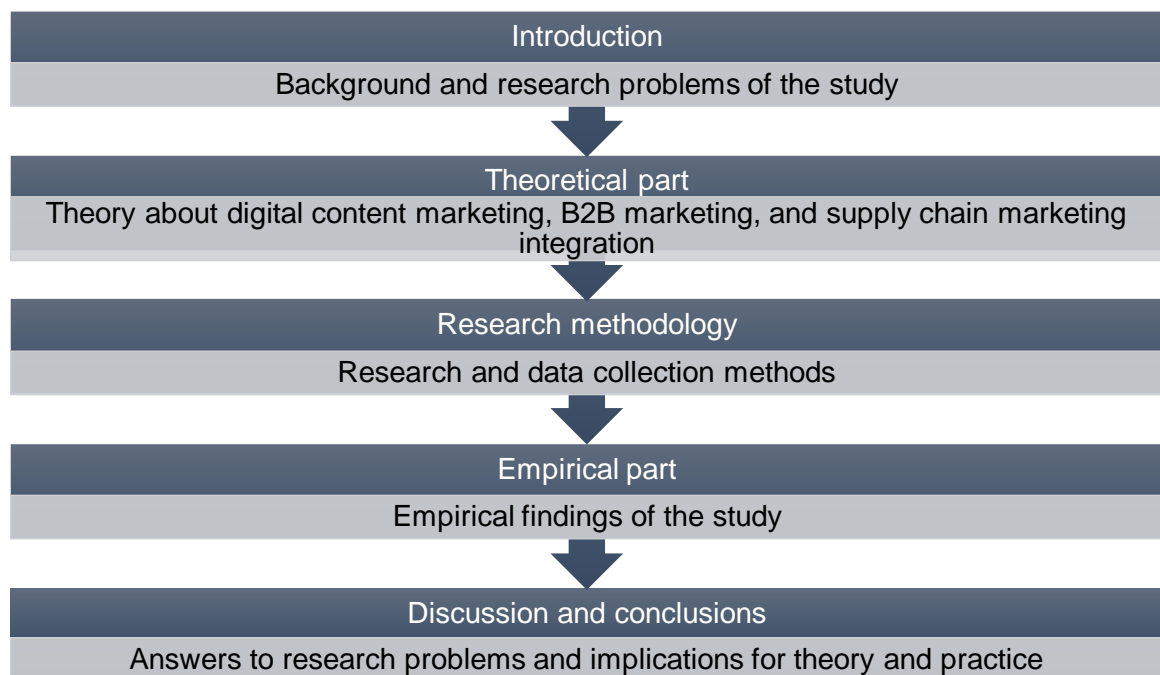


Figure 3. Structure of the thesis

2 DIGITAL CONTENT MARKETING

Digital marketing is nowadays a major part in the marketing activities and strategies in organizations since the technological advancement has increased rapidly. Digital marketing can be defined as “an adaptive, technology-enabled process by which firms collaborate with customers and partners to jointly create, communicate, deliver, and sustain value for all stakeholders”. Digital technologies enable adaptive processes that can create value in new ways and environments, as well as interaction between the company and its customers. (Kannan & Li 2016) This increased interacting has made it also vital for marketers to track these interactions and adopt new ways of measuring their performance (Järvinen & Karjaluoto 2015).

Content marketing is a term that has emerged from the development of digital channels and the growing importance of Internet for customers’ buying decisions, which has motivated companies also in B2B environment to create content in order to communicate with potential buyers (Järvinen & Taiminen 2016). In their study, Holliman and Rowley (2014) defined digital content marketing in B2B context to “involve creating, distributing and sharing relevant, compelling and timely content to engage customers at the appropriate point in their buying consideration processes, such that it encourages them to convert to a business building outcome”. They state that content marketing is a form of inbound marketing with the goal of capturing the interest of potential buyers who are searching information regarding a product or service. This encourages organizations to seek more customer-centric solutions in their brand building and content creation, attracting customers and prospects that are actively seeking information.

As a concept, content marketing has been around for a very long time. The recent growth of content marketing emerged from breaking major barriers that used to prevent brands from engaging in content marketing. According to Pulizzi (2012), these barriers included content acceptance, talent, and technology. Nowadays any brand can create content that customers accept and engage with, whereas earlier creating content was left to large medias. Majority of journalism jobs are shifted to brand side from the traditional media, and media business model is struggling in many markets. Lastly, new technologies enable any person or brand to publish digital content even with minimal investment. (Pulizzi 2012)

Creating content can be made through three types of different media channels, which are paid, owned and earned media. In online context, examples of paid media are display advertising, search advertising, and social network advertising (e.g. Facebook ads). Owned media can be viewed as company's own website, blogs, and company-owned social media accounts, whereas earned media refers to online WOM referrals, ratings and reviews, and posts in online communities. (Stephen & Galak 2012) Lusk (2014) suggests that companies should aim for situation where most of the customers are attracted by earned and owned media, since they are more authentic, converts at a higher rate, usually represents higher lifetime value, and are typically cheaper.

2.1 Different types of digital content

Digital content that companies provide can be in any digital form, such as webpages, articles, videos, blogs or podcasts. In addition, it can also be UGC regarding the company in social media. (Holliman & Rowley 2014; Järvinen & Taiminen 2016) Järvinen and Taiminen (2016) state that content and social media marketing are closely related since they both include storytelling as a way of reaching potential customers. According to Holliman and Rowley (2014), the two most important aspects of digital content marketing is community and value. This is due to content being central in brand-building processes, and it is vital for the audience that the content they are searching for is valuable and useful for them. Next different types of content are introduced in more detail. These include articles, blogs, videos, and podcasts. Even though the digital channels that are discussed later are also different forms of digital content, they are discussed later as digital channels, which can also be used to create, share, and comment digital content.

2.1.1 Articles and blog texts

Companies can write various types of articles and share it in multiple channels, such as their own website or social media. Articles can discuss for example the products and services of the company, or future trends and practices of their industry. Based on analysis by BuzzSumo (2014), the key elements of articles that get big number of views and shares are longer form rather than short articles, using images, inspiring awe or amusement, including lists and infographics since the article must be easy to skim, ensuring that the article inspires trust by including byline or bio in the article, trying to get influential people to share your content to generate more exposure, and writing timeless articles that stay relevant and regularly promoting them after publishing.

According to Patel (2017), the main success factors in creating high-quality articles are creating content that the audience is interested in, distributing time between projects to enable multitasking, promoting content, taking feedback and listening to it, and setting and adjusting goals. He also suggests creating an editorial-only calendar that is dedicated to content planning and management. In addition, it is vital to give everyone involved in content creation access to editorial calendar and to be open in receiving ideas from people that are contributing to content creation. Articles are a flexible way of creating content since they can be created and shared in many different platforms.

A lot of Internet traffic nowadays consists of browsing different kind of blogs and some of them can have as many as millions of regular visitors. Since reading and communicating on blogs create close relationships between visitors and blog-writers, the readers are likely to trust and apply information that is published on blogs. In addition, blogs often effect on customers' buying decisions, and therefore they are becoming effective marketing channel for companies. (Ho et al. 2015; Karjaluoto, Mustonen & Ulkuniemi 2015) Based on earlier studies, Wu, Kao and Lin (2013) define E-Blog (enterprise blog) as a channel to communicate with customers and provide them with product- or service-related information, share expertise with employees, and exchange business ideas.

Different blog types can be categorized into different types, such as celebrity blog, expert blog, and typical consumer blog. Expert opinions can deepen consumers' impressions about certain product or service, and as the professionalism of the information source gets higher, the influence of its WOM recommendation increases. In addition, when searching product information, consumers are likely to consider the professionalism, credibility, and attractiveness of each source. (Ho et al. 2015; Reingen & Kernan 1986) If companies do not feel enterprise blog as a viable option, blogs can also be utilized as a marketing channel in the form of sponsored blogs, where firms offer compensation to bloggers for positive content. This is typically done through product recommendations. However, for successful blog marketing it is vital to take into account the needs of the blogger, the firm, and the reader. (Liljander, Gummerus & Söderlund 2015)

2.1.2 Videos

Development of streaming video technology and increased popularity of video-sharing platforms like YouTube and Google Video have made videos viable form of viral marketing and creating online presence for companies (Hsieh, Hsieh & Tang 2012). YouTube is one of the best tools for advertising business messages, communicating with people, and expressing feelings (Khan & Vong 2014) Content created in video sharing websites can be categorized into user-generated amateur videos, and videos produced by media firms and advertisers (Cha 2014). In B2B marketing context, companies can create their own videos and share them on video sharing websites, social media channels, such as Facebook, Instagram or Snapchat, or their own website. Videos can also be streamed live to different channels. In addition, it is possible to share videos made by other companies or individual users, if the content is appropriate, and there are no restrictions regarding sharing the video, sharing it can create positive effect.

When videos are used as content marketing, it is vital to consider both the needs of the viewer, and the needs of the marketer since focusing too much on the brand can be a turn off for consumers. Experimenting with various types of content and observing consumer habits and feedback are critical success factors in video marketing. (Savitz 2013) According to Botha and Reyneke (2013), video content should not be too specific since when consumers are unfamiliar with the topic, the videos are less effective. In addition, in order to increase the possibility of consumers sharing videos, they should connect emotionally on some level with the content.

2.1.3 Podcasts

Podcasts are series of digital audio files that are distributed over the Internet. They are downloaded through web syndication and usually released with episodes with the goal of making audio available to people anywhere at any time. (De Sarkar 2012) Main principles for creating relevant and useful podcasts for companies are knowing their audience and what works for them, knowing the goals of the podcast and each individual episode, and implementing podcasts into company's larger content marketing strategy. In addition, in order to make podcasts more creative and appealing, marketers should consider things like connecting with customers with a dynamic speaker, regularly asking customers what works for them, and coming up with a catchy name that is also relevant to the subject to make it easier to find with searching. (Chylinski 2011)

2.2 Digital content channels

Internet has changed the ways of communication with customers for companies, and there are various digital channels that can be used to interact with customers in new ways. However, many companies struggle with the decision of what digital channels they should utilize in their operations and how. The main problem for companies has been to make their digital channels and content valuable and engaging to their existing and potential customer base. (Straker, Wrigley & Rosemann 2015) In this study, the digital channels described for content creation and delivery are website, social media, email, and mobile. These channels are certain types of content themselves since as it was broadly defined by Järvinen and Taiminen (2016), content can be used to refer to all forms of digital content.

2.2.1 Website

The first impression of company's website can have long term effects on website users. Therefore, an appealing layout of the website is vital since it is more likely to attract visitors, stimulate and increase positive buying decisions, and establish higher standards of trust and usability. Figure 4 shows the elements that effect on website appeal. General website elements refer to for example the aesthetics and usability of the website, update frequency, customization features, as well as reliability of information. Marketing mix elements refer to tools used by a firm to achieve marketing objectives on websites. The element of product is evaluated based on product description and availability, price based on competitiveness and multiplicity of payment options, place based on delivery times and geographical coverage, promotion based on online advertisements, special offers, and social networking options, processes based on adaptive design features and ease of order confirmation, people based on customer support, physical evidence based on physical cues such as brand name and signs of physical presence (for example pictures of the headquarters), and partnerships based on degree and nature of environmental services and external affiliations. (Abdallah & Jaleel 2015)

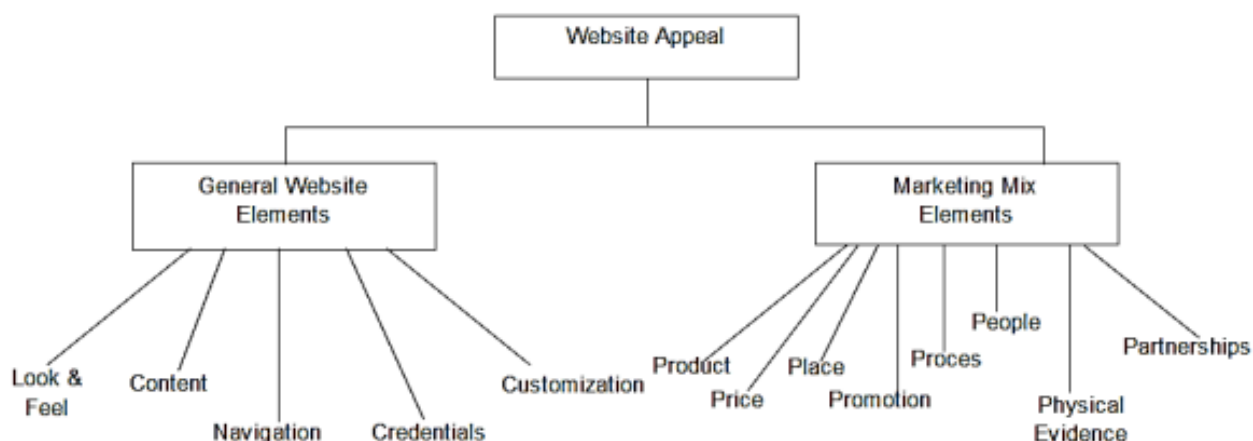


Figure 4. Elements of Website Appeal (Abdallah & Jaleel 2015)

According to Díaz et al. (2013), the three most important success factors for websites are system quality, information quality and service quality. These success factors are in line with the dimensions of website quality presented by Rocha (2012), which are contents' quality, services' quality, and technical quality. System quality means that the platform is easy to use and access, process speed is good, and response times quick. Information quality is measured with content and the quality of the content that is available on the website, which nowadays can also mean interactive user-customized or multi-media contents. Service quality refers to assisting users, solving problems, suggesting complementary products or service, and accepting and handling user complaints. (Díaz et al. 2013) Karjaluoto, Mustonen and Ulkuniemi (2015) also highlight the importance of presenting necessary information on company websites for potential buyers.

In B2B context, the constraints for effective website adoption identified by Lin, Huan and Stockdale (2011), are financial resources, technical expertise and managerial expertise. In addition, they state that other vital aspects to considerate for the website owners are security issues and employees' resistance to new systems and websites. Sila (2013) suggests that larger firms have advantages in implementing new electronic commerce technologies since they have more resources and can achieve economies of scale more easily, they are able to handle risks better than smaller firms, and they can pressure trading partners to adopt same technologies.

In many firms, new customer adoption is supported by using client references as a part of their general marketing and sales efforts. Reference marketing is especially used in B2B sector since referencing behavior is considered being more important in purchasing decisions than other social influences, such as WOM or referrals from other businesses,

which are vital in B2C sector. (Kumar, Petersen & Leone 2013) It is common to have list of references in company websites, where potential buyers can see them before making purchasing decisions. Reference portfolio should cover current and future key offerings, different customer types and segments, application areas and geographic regions (Terho & Jalkala 2017).

The visibility of websites is nowadays in close relation to how high a certain website is ranked in different search engines. Over half of all Internet traffic begins with a search engine and majority of all Internet users use search engines on a regular basis since searching is one of the most vital functions of Internet (Dou et al. 2010; Shih, Chen & Chen 2012). Search engine marketing is one form of digital marketing with the aim of increasing the visibility of a certain website on search engine result pages with the usage of search engine optimization, paid placements, contextual advertising and paid inclusion. Search engine optimization means manipulating web page in order to make the website appear more relevant than other web pages in the search engine. Key word marketing or Pay-Per-Click allows marketers to buy more visibility in the search engine when certain key words or phrases are used. For search engine sponsors, it is a way of generating revenue and most search engines offer the possibility of Pay-Per-Click, such as Google with Google AdWords, Yahoo! with Yahoo! Search Marketing and Bing with Microsoft AdCentre (Kritzinger & Weideman 2013). The efficiency of search engine marketing is measured by click through rates from the search engine to the websites, generating customer leads, leading to sales and competitive bench marking. (Panda 2013; Boughton 2007)

2.2.2 Social media

Rapid development of social media has changed the ways of communication and information gathering drastically. In today's business environments, social media has acquired a critical role in interaction with customers and providing a variety of services. On social media sites, there is a massive amount of UGC content available. For example, user-generated reviews are increasingly important for consumers when they are evaluating products and services prior making purchase decisions. (He et al. 2015) Due to the viral nature of social media, it is a great way of gaining positive WOM and brand awareness. However, there is also a risk for negative WOM if customers are left unsatisfied. (Killian & McManus 2015) In order to succeed in today's digital environment and establish long-term relationships, relationship-based interactions with customers are vital (Tiago & Veríssimo 2014).

Social media can be defined as a group of Internet-based applications that allow creation and exchange of user generated content, building on the technological and ideological foundations of Web 2.0 (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010). In their study, Felix, Rauschnabel & Hinsch (2017) suggested that social media marketing can be defined as an interdisciplinary and cross-functional concept that uses social media (often in combination with other channels) to achieve goals by creating value for stakeholders. Social media can be further categorized in profile-based and content-based social media. Profile-based means that individual members are the point of media and connections are made mainly because the person behind the profile is interesting. Some examples of profile-based social medias are Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp. In content-based social media, posted content is most important and users make connections to different profiles based on the content they provide. For example, Instagram, Pinterest and YouTube are more content-based. (Zhu & Chen 2015)

Content-based social media can be further categorized into creative outlets and collaboration based on their features and usage. Social media channels that are used to broadcast content to as many people as possible, such as YouTube or Pinterest, are called creative outlets. Collaboration means that the media is content-based, but customizable to user demands. Collaboration channels usually provide answers to users' problems, such as question-answering entity Quora. (Zhu & Chen 2015) Figure 5 shows how communication process can be viewed in content-based social media communities, and what kind of language should be utilized to make posts as effective as possible. Content-based platforms allows consumers to spread eWOM, and respond to posts created by companies. For companies, eWOM referrals are superior compared to traditional marketing activities since they produce longer effects. (Noguti 2016)

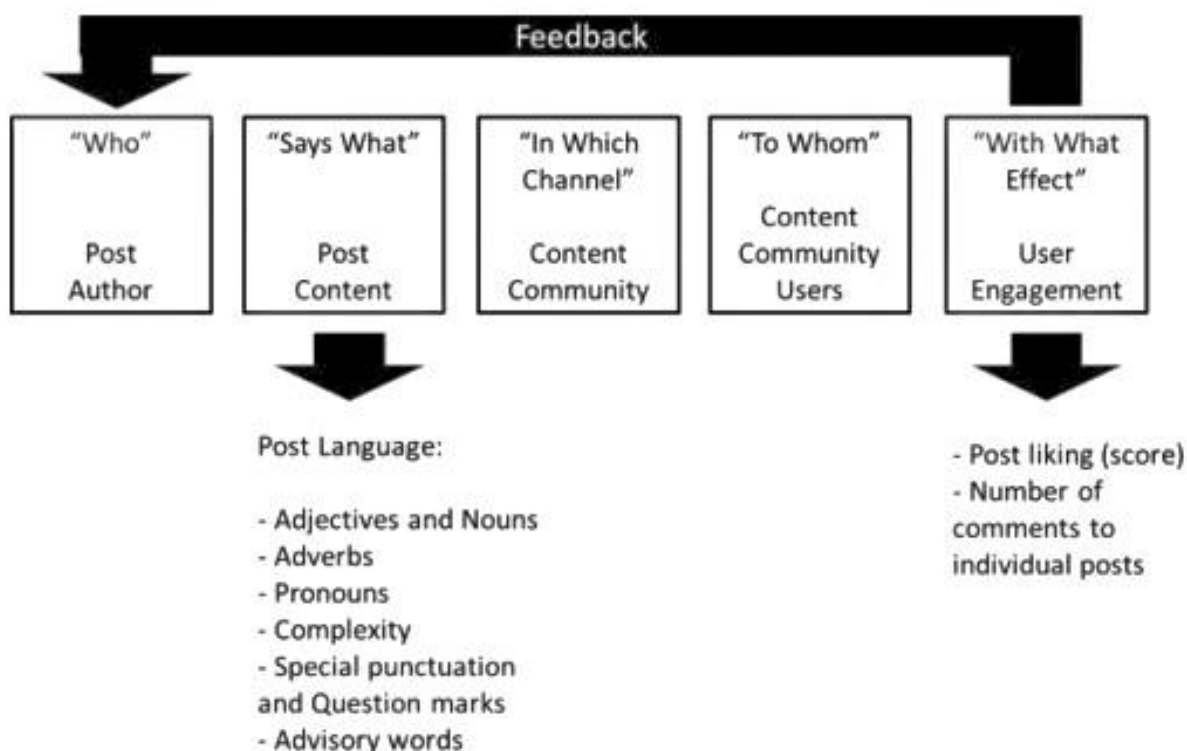


Figure 5. Communication in online content communities (Noguti 2016)

Social media marketing objectives can include increasing sales and brand awareness, improving brand image, building relationships with customers, generating traffic to online platforms, reducing marketing costs, and creating communities and user interactivity, as well as monitoring consumers' conversations (Felix, Rauschnabel & Hinsch 2017; Oviedo-Garcia et al. 2014; Michaelidou, Siamagka & Christodoulides 2011). However, according to Zhu & Chen (2015), social media marketing campaigns often lead to unsatisfactory results and objectives remain unachieved. They state that the main challenges for effective utilization of social media in marketing activities are lack of knowledge. In order to be successful, precise insight of product, social media platform and social media users that are targeted should be possessed since different social media channels might be more effective with certain products or audiences.

Marketers must consider both internal and external users of social media when planning their content creation. Internal users can be categorized into corporate and employee users. Corporate users cannot be identified as specific employees since they represent the voice of the company, whereas employee users communicate in a more personal way and can be identified. External users can be corporate users (other companies), customer users

(employees of potential customers), professional users (other business-related stakeholders), and civilian users (interested in the company but not professionally connected to it). (Huotari et al. 2015) Figure 6 demonstrates how B2B company can influence social media content creation.

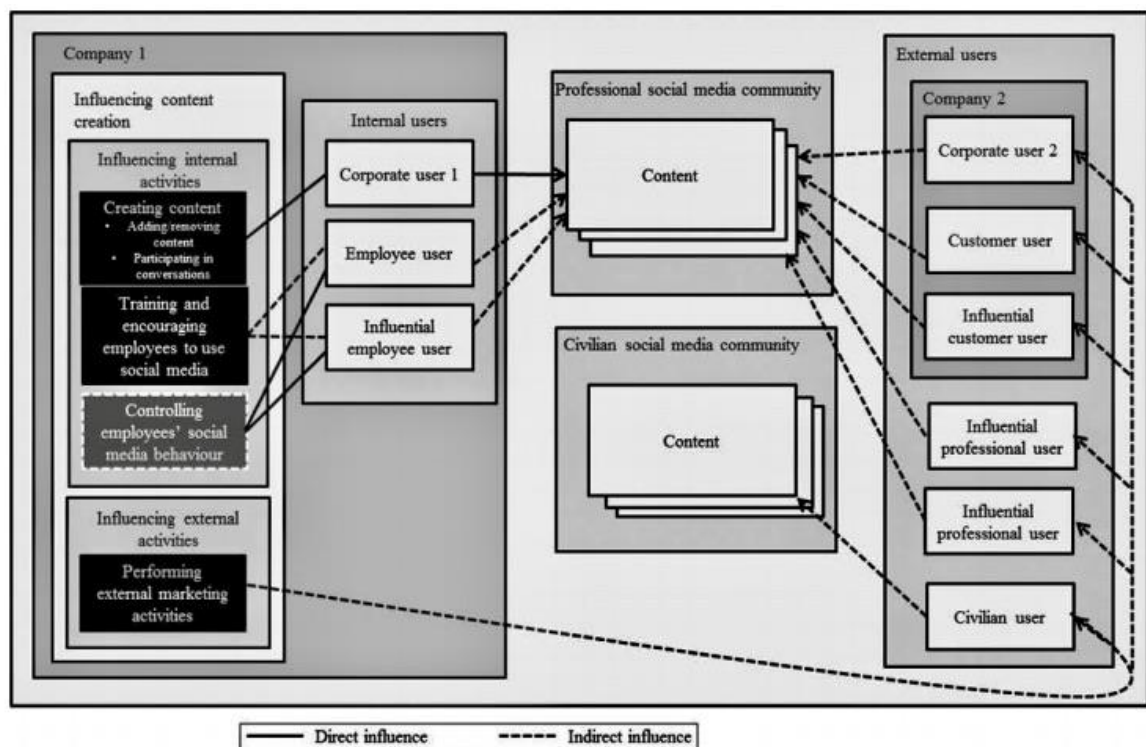


Figure 6. Framework of B2B company influencing social media content creation (Huotari et al. 2015)

Based on their study, Huotari et al. (2015) recommends that companies should encourage prospective and current customers to engage in content creation, for example giving references or leads for relevant content for potential customers. They also discuss that companies should avoid participating conversations in civilian communities, and rather focus on B2B communities, due to unpredictability of civilian conversations and the amount of resources required to successfully engaging in them. In addition, they state that it is better to train and encourage employees to use social media instead of controlling their social media behavior.

Instant messaging refers to Internet-based applications that create possibility for real-time communication over the Internet between two or more participants with the combination of text messages, voice, and video, making them currently the closest substitute for face-to-face communication (Wang, Hsieh & Song 2012). Instant messaging can be used to

improve collaborative work practices, and in many companies, it is the most used channel for fast informal business communication. Even though instant messaging is currently mostly used in internal communication, the usage with external clients and business partners is increasing. (Kobsa, Patil & Meyer 2012)

In their study, Cawsey and Rowley (2016) proposed B2B social media strategy framework where they identified key components of a successful social media strategy, which can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Summaries of key components of successful social media strategy (Cawsey & Rowley 2016)

Component	Summary
Monitoring and listening	Doing market research and increasing customer knowledge by listening and monitoring what people are talking about. Vital in the start-up phase of social media strategy creation.
Empowering and engaging employees	Empowering employees to engage in social media, especially customer support and sales. Training staff and developing social media policies and guidelines.
Creating compelling content	Putting a personal "face" to the brand, changing culture from selling to problem-solving and development of long-term relationships.
Stimulating eWOM	Building a community of brand influencers who will generate and stimulate eWOM by engaging bloggers and other influencers.
Evaluating and selecting channels	Finding right channels to target specific audience by evaluation and monitoring of channels for their contribution to search engine optimization, content delivery and eWOM.
Enhancing brand presence through integrating social media	Increasing online presence with social media by creating more touch points, which enhances search engine optimization and general web traffic.

In order to utilize these components successfully, B2B organizations should experiment to understand which strategic and marketing objectives social media can help to achieve, evaluate to assess the performance of social media activities and return of investment, embed social media marketing and communication customers across all departments and activities in the organization where it might be useful, and engage organization's social media users with above mentioned key components. (Cawsey & Rowley 2016)

2.2.3 Email

Email marketing is extremely popular method of contacting prospects due to its cost-efficiency, ability to deliver and capture valuable data, and possibility of behavioral tracking. In order to produce effective and personalized emails, it is vital to possess information

regarding organization's customer base, especially in B2B context. (Dawe 2015) One advantage of email marketing is also its potential to create viral marketing between the customers that have received emails from the company. In ideal situation, the targeted prospects spread the message of the email further to people who are not in the company's email listings, which generate large coverage cost-efficiently. (Miquel-Romero & Adame-Sánchez 2013) However, generating WOM through email marketing requires that the content of emails is relevant and optimized for certain prospects.

Even though email marketing can be a great tool for marketing from the company's perspective, customers often find it irrelevant and even annoying (Hartemo 2016). Main reason for this is that most of the daily email traffic is sent to receiver without permission, which is referred as spam. Often it is not possible for receivers to opt-out of these spam listings, and thus violating privacy of people. (Reimers, Chao & Gorman 2016) Many emails are thus deleted without further reading since they are considered as spam. Therefore, it is vital for companies to avoid spamming and sending mass emails to consumers who have not expressed interest in receiving emails from a certain company. (Miquel-Romero & Adame-Sánchez 2013) In addition, emails should always include the possibility for opt-out, so that the receivers have the power of unsubscribing themselves out of the email listings when they are not willing to receive emails anymore.

For customers who have made the decision of opt-in, which means that they have left their contact information for the company or subscribed its email lists, regular email newsletters can have positive effect. However, the content and frequency of newsletter should be optimized based on customer preferences in order to be effective. (Ting & A 2012; Hartemo 2016) Customization and optimization of email marketing might present some challenges since it is not always easy task to find out about customer preferences. Companies should try and test different kind of practices and measure their effectiveness. For example, optimizing subject lines in order to maximize opening rate of emails, can be tested with A/B split testing. This means that same email is sent to two equal groups with different subject lines and some days later the open rates will reveal which one was more effective. When using A/B split testing, it is vital to only split one attribute to alternatives in order to avoid unclear data. Some studies suggest that effective subject line should be rather short and include numbers, such as dates. (Dawe 2015)

2.2.4 Mobile

Mobile marketing can be defined as any marketing activities made through ubiquitous network to which potential customers are connected with their personal mobile devices (Kaplan 2012). Since the use of mobile devices increased enormously, marketers have been able to reach potential customers at any given time and place. Majority of mobile device owners have it with them all the time, which makes mobile marketing extremely viable channel for companies. However, from the consumers' perspective mobile devices are for personal and private use, and therefore marketers must be careful and thorough when planning their mobile marketing efforts. (Ström, Vendel & Bredican 2014; Persaud & Azhar 2012) Effective mobile marketing is also challenging due to differences in devices and operating systems, and it should be adjusted according to limitations of mobile devices, such as screen and keyboard sizes (Berman 2016).

There are three major advances in mobile marketing from the strategic viewpoint, which are the fact that mobile devices are always with consumers and connected, the possibility of using location-sensitive offers, and the possibility of personalizing messages and offers (Berman 2016). Especially location-based marketing and its possible applications are viable, yet challenging, way for marketers to build brand relationship and loyalty with consumers, especially since smartphones are used more and more in daily tasks and they are the primary channel nowadays for reaching and serving consumers (Persaud & Azhar 2012). According to Kaplan (2012), mobile marketing is extremely useful when combined with social media marketing since the new generations grow up using social media and mobile devices with global reach in their hands from the beginning.

Mobile devices also allow consumers to experience buying and online shopping in new ways, removing limitations of location. For companies, this means that there are no longer physical limitations for selling processes. Development of mobile devices has changed customers' expectations, as well as their shopping behavior and experiences. (Pantano & Priporas 2016) The development of mobile devices has also influenced B2B relationships by creating potential new ways of efficiency and value creation. For example, integrating mobile technology into business intelligence systems, the relevance and timeliness of information exchange could be improved. This could improve value exchange and problem solving, and thus having positive effect on both customer experience and sales performance. (Rogers & Clark 2016) However, creating and integrating systems and applications for smartphones and tablets with access to corporate data might be

challenging, since they should be connected to desktop systems and easy to use on a smaller screen, they should work on different systems (such as Android, iOS and Windows Phone), and information security should be high level (Lobaziewicz 2015).

Context-aware applications use the context of a person or object in order to utilize available resources to satisfy current needs. Development of mobile technology is leading to new opportunities for these applications since smartphones can nowadays detect location, physical and environmental information, such as movement, air pressure, light and temperature, surroundings with cameras and identity with fingerprint scanners. When this data is combined with channels like social media, products and services can be highly individualized. Context-aware technologies have potential to improve customers' shopping experience and suppliers' operational performance in the retail environment. Context-aware B2B selling refers to integration of information about the customer's situation with business intelligence to enable useful recommendations and communications throughout the sales process. (Rogers & Clark 2016)

2.3 Challenges of digital content marketing

In digital marketing, one of the main challenges for organizations is how to measure the effectiveness and return of investment of their marketing activities (Royle & Laing 2014; Keegan & Rowley 2017; Leeflang et al. 2014) Even though most digital marketing activities can be measured with "inbuilt" systems, such as number of webpage hits, click through rates, and number of likes and followers on different social media channels, more efficient tools for measuring and analyzing are needed (Royle & Laing 2014). KPIs and metrics should be utilized to measure effectiveness of social media marketing and how well a certain website is contributing to the overall digital strategy of the organization (Keegan & Rowley 2017; Loftus 2011). KPIs indicate the overall performance of organization's digital marketing performance in relation to its most vital objectives. To support KPIs and evaluate specific actions, other metrics are used as well. (Järvinen & Karjaluoto 2015; Chaffey & Patron 2012) Metrics quantify or describe a state, and metrics used for measuring social media marketing effectiveness should be connected to organization's marketing actions and financial consequences in order to be appropriate (Peters et al. 2013). Recognizing the most important metrics from the organization's point of view is vital in order to gain relevant data and measurements to analyze further (Järvinen & Karjaluoto 2015; Chaffey & Patron 2012).

In their study, Holliman and Rowley (2014) found challenges regarding the development of effective digital content marketing strategy. These include recruiting and developing subject expert capable of “journalistic” story-telling and generating good quality content. In addition, it was recognized challenging to create “great” content that helps customers to solve problems or do something better since it is vital that the content has value for customers. Lastly, the culture change in B2B organizations related to changing the selling mindset of traditional marketing to support long-term reputation and partnership building was identified to cause some difficulties. (Holliman & Rowley 2014) It can take time to get to the point of frequently creating valuable content in different channels, and hence companies should not start randomly producing content without thinking customer needs and proper strategy, since creating wrong kind of content will not be useful.

Specific challenges related to effective social media strategy were identified by Cawsey and Rowley (2016) in their study, where they suggested the key components for successful social media strategy. These included challenges related to participation in social media conversations, integrating social media strategy to overall marketing strategy of the company, understanding perceptions of their customers regarding useful, relevant, compelling, and timely content, accepting the lack of control over the brand message when engaging bloggers and other influencers, choosing and interpreting appropriate metrics to ensure that social media efforts align with marketing and campaign objectives, finding enough time to maintain presence in multiple social media channels and tailoring content for different channels. Confidentiality between business partners also limits the use of social media in business relationships (Karjaluoto, Mustonen & Ulkuniemi 2015).

2.4 Summary of digital content marketing

The following tables present summaries of earlier discussed forms of digital content, as well as digital channels that can be used to share them. Table 3 presents different types of digital content, which in this thesis are categorized as articles and blogs, videos, and podcasts. Pros and cons of using each type of content in marketing are summarized based on earlier presented theory. As it can be seen from these tables, each type of content and channel presents its own benefits and challenges for marketers. Even though some of them can be used with free accounts without investing money, each one of them requires time and expertise of employees in order to be effective.

Table 3. Summary of different types of digital content

Type of digital content	Pros	Cons
Articles and blog texts	Since articles are quite informal, companies have a lot of options regarding the topic and publishing platform. Interesting articles can have a lot of exposure provided that sharing them in different channels, such as social media, is made easy. Articles can also be written to enterprise blog, which is a great channel for showcasing expertise related to the industry. Blogs can also be used to communicate and share ideas with customers, as well as own employees.	Writing good articles can be time consuming and it requires some planning since it is vital to understand customer needs and preferences. If blog is used as a digital marketing tool, it should be updated frequently.
Videos	Popular type of content and requires less effort from the viewer than reading articles or blog texts which may lead to greater number of views and shares. Large number of different channels to release videos give a lot of possibilities for marketers, as well as live streaming certain events.	Choosing right type of channels for each video and producing good quality videos requires a lot of expertise, experimenting, time and resources.
Podcasts	Content of podcasts can be listened to while doing other things, which makes them effortless for audience.	Need a lot of planning and insight of customer preferences in order to be effective. In addition, requires time to create and listen, as well as dynamic and knowledgeable speaker.

Table 4 discusses different digital channels, which are website, social media, email and mobile. As with the Table 3, pros and cons of using these channels are discussed.

Table 4. Summary of digital channels

Digital channel	Pros	Cons
Website	Good website is likely to give great first impression for visitors and increase trust and brand image. Should include detailed information about products and services. Companies can showcase their business in various ways on their websites, for example with references that are vital in B2B context. Websites are also good platform to share information and links to different digital channels, such as social media.	Requires resources and planning to create smoothly operating website with good quality of information and service. Also need commitment from customer service to quickly respond to any questions or issues. Security issues for internal and external web services also requires resources and constant monitoring.
Social Media	Potential channel for massive visibility, WOM and brand awareness. Various channels with large user-bases and simple ways of measuring visibility, such as likes, shares, views and comments. Can be used for creating content like videos and articles, or for sharing content from other sources such as websites and blogs.	Requires customer-knowledge to identify most potential social media channels, as well as what kind of content is most suitable. Need employees with good social media skills in order to be effective. UGC can be hard to control, and negative content can also go viral rapidly creating negative WOM.
Email	Popular and cost-effective method of delivering content to prospects. Can be used as regularly sent newsletters that contain relevant information. In addition, emails give possibility for behavioral tracking. For example, A/B split testing can be used to optimize subject lines in order to maximize opening rates.	Requires email list of customers and prospects, which takes some time to gather. Emails sent without receivers' permission or relevant information can be found annoying, and there should always be a possibility to opt-out of email list.
Mobile	Different digital channels can be used with smartphones, and sensors of smartphones and new applications enables personalized marketing that reaches customers anytime and anywhere. Business intelligence systems can also be integrated to them.	Creating systems for smartphones can be challenging and it requires lot of resources due to size of screen and keyboard, differences in devices and operating systems, and security questions.

3 B2B MARKETING & SUPPLY CHAIN MARKETING

In B2B marketing, the most vital part of the marketing communication mix has traditionally been personal communications tools, especially the sales force of the company. Since the decision and communications processes are more complex in B2B than in B2C context due to participation of multiple people and organizational levels, managing and integrating multiple marketing channels have been challenging. Recently the integration and coordination of channels have become even more complex and challenging due to the rise of digital media. (Karjaluoto, Mustonen & Ulkuniemi 2015; Huotari et al. 2015) Digitalization and technological development have also affected B2B sales processes (Rogers & Clark 2016). According to Adamson, Dixon and Toman (2012), approximately 60 per cent of the buying decisions in B2B environment are made before even contacting potential suppliers.

Unprecedented challenges are also created by the importance of global markets since development of new and emerging markets are changing buying patterns and business conditions globally. Since different marketing approaches might be needed in different markets, both local and global companies must develop innovative marketing practices in order to stay competitive. (Wiersema 2013) Therefore, it is vital for marketers to develop new tools and ways of thinking in order to integrate and structure their marketing activities in this new constantly changing environment (Batra & Keller 2016).

Co-operation and collaborative innovation are critical success factors in building long-term relationships in B2B markets, since there are not as many customers as in B2C markets, but the customers are larger. Building online brand presence has become essential, because the key roles of brands in online environment is trust-building, and trust is particularly important in today's digital world. Good brand image is also associated with product quality and confidence in successful long-term relationships. (Cawsey & Rowley 2016) However, it is not a simple task to build positive brand image online, since negative content can spread as fast as positive, Therefore, companies need to carefully plan their digital content marketing strategies to avoid negative eWOM.

In their study, Karjaluoto, Mustonen and Ulkuniemi (2015) identify four main objectives of digital marketing based on earlier research from both B2C and B2B context, which are increasing efficiency of communications, fostering customer relationship communications and interaction, creating awareness and building brands, and generating sales leads. However, they state that there is a lack of innovative marketers in B2B environment, and

many marketers still favor heavily the use of offline tools in their marketing efforts. Still, companies should utilize and integrate digital marketing in their marketing mix, since the possibilities and versatility of digital media are limitless. In addition, the role of media in marketing communications practices is increasingly shifting towards deeper consumer understanding. (Batra & Keller 2016; Mulhern 2009) Karjaluoto, Mustonen and Ulkuniemi (2015) identified three main areas where DMC are already used or seen important by B2B marketers (Figure 7).

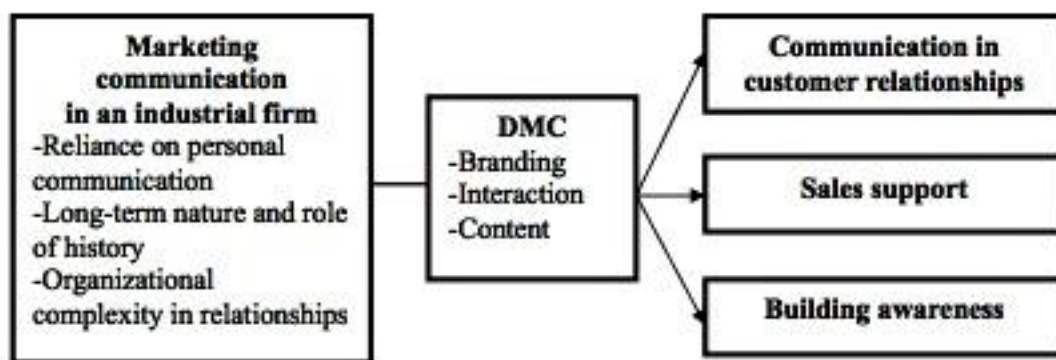


Figure 7. Usage of DMC in industrial marketing context (Karjaluoto, Mustonen & Ulkuniemi 2015)

Communication in customer relationships and sales support were identified as the most important goals of DMC. Using digital channels in general brand marketing is not effective unless the provided content is helpful for companies. It is essential for marketers to identify marketing communication objectives and choose the most suitable channel for each objective to ensure the effectiveness of marketing. Personal selling is still essential in B2B marketing communication mix, and tools like digitized sales-support materials and equipping salespeople with mobile devices that exploit customer relationship management systems could be potential ways of making personal selling more effective. (Karjaluoto, Mustonen & Ulkuniemi 2015)

3.1 Digital marketing in B2B context

In their study, Holliman and Rowley (2014) identified some general guidelines that B2B digital content marketers should try to implement and understand in this new era of digital communications:

- Acknowledge that there is a paradigm change from selling to the customer to helping the customer, and it is vital to learn how to achieve this through content in digital channels.
- Creating a long-term strategic approach on content marketing with emphasis on building authentic relationships, rather than focusing on short-term goals and campaigns.
- Acknowledging that in content marketing, building a trusted brand status is more important than short-term sales or lead generation.
- Understanding how digital content marketing can be used to complement other marketing activities.
- Recognizing that in order to make something valuable and useful for the customer, it should be relevant, compelling and timely.
- Information regarding customer needs at various points in time and in their buying process is needed in order to provide valuable content.
- Recognize and understand the role and effectiveness of different types of content for different audiences.
- Developing metrics and measurements relevant to digital content marketing objectives.

In addition to findings of Holliman and Rowley (2014), the importance of solving customers' problems and rather trying to help them than to sell them, is also recognized in studies by Järvinen and Taiminen (2016), and Karjaluoto, Mustonen and Ulkuniemi (2015). Importance of long-term relationships and co-operation between organizations in B2B context were discussed in many studies presented earlier, and it is also identified in studies by Derrouiche et al. (2010) and Chang et al. (2012).

The use of social media in B2B sales processes is also increasing. Traditionally, social media has been significantly more important in B2C context. However, it also has huge potential in B2B situations to affect every step of sales process. (Niedermeier, Wang & Zhang 2016) According to Andzulis, Panagopoulos and Rapp (2012), social media can be used in six potential ways to enhance the sales process, which are understanding the customer, approaching the customer, needs discovery, presentation, closing, and follow-up. When combining social media with other technologies, such as context-aware applications, the possibilities for technologies that can support selling processes are limitless.

There are some differences in social media usage between B2B and B2C sectors, such as privacy and security issues. In B2B context, it is vital to consider how much information can be given on public social media platforms without jeopardizing relationships with business partners or revealing competitive advantages. Active dialogue in social media is also limited compared to B2C sector, and hence it can be beneficial to innovate ways of activating business social media. At the moment, social media serves more as a way of gathering information regarding certain products or services. (Keinänen & Kuivalainen 2015) For prospects and other stakeholder groups, social media is vital for building brand awareness. However, in existing relationships, it is more important to support and aim for personal and interactive communication. Currently it is more common to implement social media internally first with channels like blogs, social bookmarks and instant messaging. (Karjaluoto, Mustonen & Ulkuniemi 2015)

The key factors that B2B marketers identified to contribute most to their increased success in content marketing, based on a survey from North America with total of 1102 B2B marketer respondents, can be seen from Figure 8. Based on this survey, successful B2B content marketing requires making good quality content based on company's overall marketing strategy and identified customer preferences. It is vital to allocate enough time and resources for content marketing to make it work. (Content Marketing Institute 2016) Pulizzi (2016), highlights the importance of documenting content marketing strategy before trying to apply effective content marketing. It is difficult to choose the most appropriate content marketing tactics and reach audience without careful planning. In addition, he states that it is possible that without adequate strategy, companies can produce too much content that does not have the effect that marketers are looking for. It is better to create only the amount of content that is required for achieving the results that the company is after.



Figure 8. Factors contributing to B2B content marketers' increased success (Content Marketing Institute 2016)

To summarize the results of various studies regarding best practices of B2B digital content marketing, the most important factors seems to be the quality of the content from the customer's point of view. The content should be something that has value for customers and their operations, rather than just promoting the products and services of own company. However, this requires identifying customer needs and the type of content they appreciate, as well as content sharing channels that are the most effective, which can be challenging. Different kind of measurement metrics and KPIs should be utilized to keep track on the effectiveness of marketing efforts, as well as frequently asking the opinions of customers. It is also vital to aim for long-term relationships that create value for both sides and innovate ways of creating content and developing business strategies in collaboration. However, these actions are impossible to implement successfully without digital content marketing strategy that is in line with other objectives and marketing strategies of the company.

3.2 Supply chain and dealers

Supply chain management includes activities associated with the integration of supply and demand management within and across companies, including collaboration with different channel partners and customers, as well as sourcing, procurement, conversion, and logistics. As supply chain management has developed and examined over time, it has started to include practices related to marketing and marketing management. Even though this development has benefitted both marketing and supply chain management research, the nature and implications of the interrelationships between marketing and supply chain management still remains rather underexplored in marketing literature. (Mentzer & Gundlach 2010)

One of marketing's main goals is delivering value to the end customer (ultimate customer) of the service or product (Kozlenkova et al. 2015). This makes effective supply chains crucial for successful marketing, since mistakes in any part of the supply chain can affect both ways of the chain, potentially leading to situations like disruption to production, forecasting errors, inventory imbalances, or stock-outs and damaged goods, all of which resulting to increased costs for each part of the supply chain, as well as the ultimate costumers, and thus decreasing their satisfaction and loyalty (Ellis 2011, 109). Since effective supply chains can have opposite effect and increase value for end users, marketing should be at the center of supply chain management strategy and operations (Kozlenkova et al. 2015).

Supply chains can be defined as value chains that extend from supplier's supplier to end customer. In order to satisfy and respond to changes in demand of the ultimate customers, integration and coordination of business processes throughout the supply chain is vital. These business processes include purchasing, manufacturing, marketing, logistics and information processes. The goal of effective supply chain management is to maximize the value of products or services to ultimate customers, as well as to achieve a relatively low total cost of the product or service. (Green, Whitten & Inman 2012) According to Powers and Reagan (2007), strong long-term relationships between supply chain partners, especially buyers and sellers, lead to competitive advantage. Implementing and executing an integrated and coordinated marketing strategy at the supply chain level focusing on the end customers of the supply chain also leads to competitive advantage (Min & Mentzer 2000).

There are a lot of different intermediaries that are often able to outperform manufacturers in specific distribution functions, such as transportation, storage sales, financing, and relationship building, such as retailers, wholesalers, distributors and dealers. (Krafft et al. 2015) In this thesis, dealer is the most suitable term to describe the intermediaries that sell company's products outside its domestic markets, and it is also a term that is widely in use in the industry of the case company according to company representative. Dealer can be defined as an "individual or firm that buys goods from a producer or distributor for wholesale and/or retail reselling, and unlike a distributor, is a principal and not an agent" (Businessdictionary 2017). In this case, the intermediaries of the case company also make their profits based on the difference between the buying and selling prices of case company's products, rather than getting paid by commission. Therefore, the relationships between buyers and suppliers are also discussed.

3.3 Marketing alignment

Competitive advantage resulting from strong relationships between supply chain partners and aligned marketing strategies based on demands of ultimate customers will eventually lead to improved organizational performance in each part of the supply chain. However, the effects of marketing strategy alignment will not directly enhance organizational performance, and therefore marketing managers should focus on improving the overall supply chain before improvements in marketing and financial performance can be expected. Marketing strategy alignment will indirectly improve organizational performance through supply chain performance. (Green, Whitten & Inman 2012; Jüttner, Christopher & Baker 2007; Martin & Grbac 2003) According to Min and Mentzer (2000), the success of the supply chain is dependent on satisfying the ultimate customers of the supply chain, which can only be done successfully through long-term inter-firm relationships that are based on information exchange and communication regarding the changing demands of ultimate customers.

Marketing strategy alignment can be defined as development and implementation of a supply chain level marketing strategy by supply chain partners aiming for the highest total value for the ultimate customers (Cavinato 1992; Min & Mentzer 2000; Natarajan & Weinrauch 1990). Successful marketing strategy alignment requires marketing representative to collaborate with supply chain partners in order to plan the conception and pricing, promotion, and distribution strategies for new products and services. In addition, developing integrated processes that create and communicate value to ultimate customers

are vital (Chen & Paulraj 2004; Ho et al. 2002; Keefe 2008). Since it is rather difficult to determine what the ultimate customer values and effectively communicate changing demands to all supply chain partners, marketing strategy alignment can be difficult to achieve. According to Barczak, Griffin and Kahn (2009), the most successful companies in terms of profits and sales exhibit higher levels of inter- and intra-organizational collaboration, which helps them to identify and respond to changing demands faster than their competitors.

Over the past few decades companies have transitioned towards a network-based business model, where there are multiple connections with different partners, such as suppliers. One driver for this has been the trend of outsourcing activities where the company lacks sustainable competitive advantage, increasing the need for multiple partnerships. Integrating strategic decisions across the network requires integration of marketing and supply chain strategies. Generally marketing strategies concern decisions related to customer, market segmentation, targeting and positioning based on product, price, distribution and promotion decisions, whereas supply chain strategies include behavioral orientation towards collaborative partners in the network, including process configurations across the key supply chain process. (Jüttner, Christopher & Godsell 2010)

In their study, Jüttner, Christopher and Godsell (2010) proposed a conceptual framework for marketing and supply chain strategy integration (Figure 9) consisting of management of four levels of integration, which are corporate integration, strategic customer integration, strategic supplier integration, and marketing supply pipeline strategy integration.

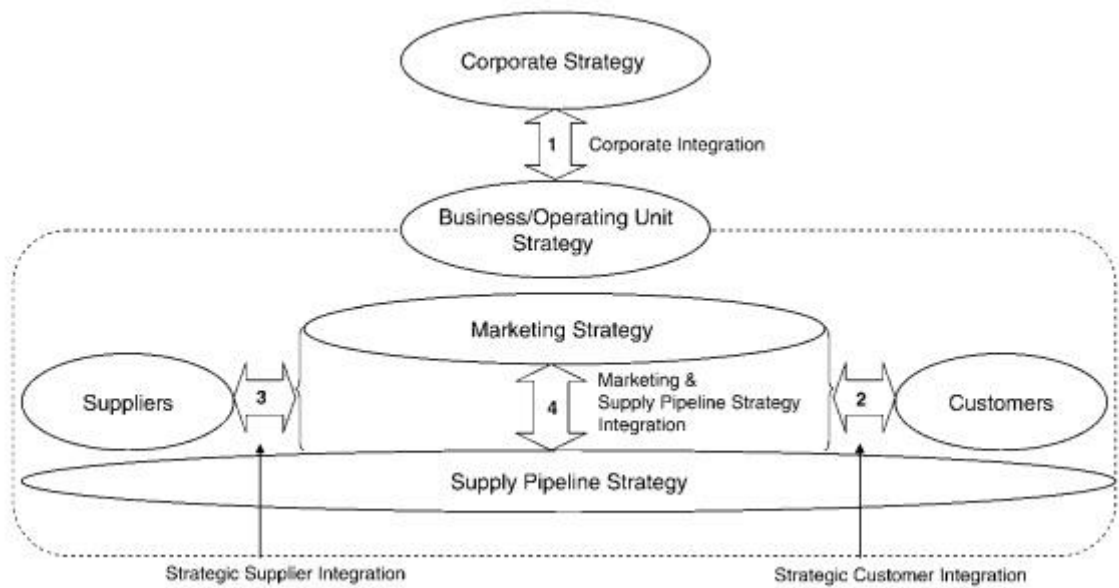


Figure 9. A conceptual framework for marketing and supply chain strategy integration (Jüttner, Christopher & Godsell 2010)

To summarize the framework, corporate integration should translate corporate objectives into business unit objectives shared by marketing and supply chain management, and leverage the link between customer and shareholder value. The objective of strategic customer integration is creating a co-creation-based segmentation approach with the goal of identifying co-creation value opportunities through both marketing and supply chain management. Strategic supplier integration is the extension of the customer integration to suppliers through a strategic supplier partitioning approach, as well as interactive marketing and supply chains strategies. The integration of marketing and supply pipeline strategies reflects process configurations designed to deliver the value propositions for defined customer segments with the support of strategic marketing and supply chain decisions. The aim of the framework from a practical level is to provide guidelines for customer and ultimately shareholder value creation through an aligned marketing and supply chain approach. (Jüttner, Christopher & Godsell 2010)

3.4 Buyer-Supplier relationships

The most important long-term trend in the business world is the rapid development of Internet-based technologies, which have lowered entrance barriers and reduced switching costs, paved the way for new entrants, enhanced market reach, decreased transaction costs, and increased intra-industry competition (Thompson, Ranganathan & Dhaliwal 2006). These new technologies are also affecting business transactions between

consumers and suppliers since organizations are increasingly implementing Web technologies in their business processes and new applications (Chang, Lee & Lai 2012). In addition, digital communication channels have acquired major role in customers' purchasing decisions in B2B sector (Järvinen & Taiminen 2016).

Development of information technology has affected business relationships, and their development and management. Aligning systems between channel members enhances responsiveness to the marketplace, customer value creation, and firm's competitive advantage. (Makkonen & Vuori 2014) Successful long-term buyer-supplier relationships increase possibilities for cross-selling, long-term transactions, and positive WOM, which increases possibilities of acquiring new customers even without marketing activities making these relationships vital (Kim 2014). Increased possibilities to communicate in the dyadic relationship enables salespersons to add value for mutual benefit of both parties, as well as enhancing productivity. However, new technologies in general and especially new sales technologies also present new challenges regarding management of buyer-seller interactions amidst organizational changes and increasing buyer demands. (Rocco & Bush 2016)

Since different firms increasingly utilize other organizations' resources and capabilities nowadays, successful buyer-supplier relationships are major factors in firm's performance (Tanskanen 2015). Dyadic relationships between individual organizations, built on trust and commitment, can create value for both parties, when they derive from shared values and information, mutual dependence, communication, and relationship benefits. Successful supplier strategy from a buyer's perspective includes four basic operational dimensions, which are identifying, analyzing, selecting suitable strategies for, and developing operational-level capabilities in order to sustain beneficial relationships with key accounts on the long-term. (Hingley, Lindgreen & Grant 2015) Marketing channel relationships between suppliers and buyers can consist of complex networks, and considering dyadic relationships might not always be enough if there are more intermediaries involved in the supply chain. In addition to business ties, political ties can also affect the performance of certain supply chain, especially in international trade. (Su & Yang 2017)

In buyer-seller relationships, power can be defined as the ability of one channel member to influence other channel member's decisions. Unequal share of power can lead to ineffective supply chains with unrealistic expectations from one member of the relationship. (Hingley, Lindgreen & Grant 2015) According to Tanskanen (2015), in complex buyer-supplier

relationships one member of the relationship cannot gain benefit at the cost of the other member. To maximize trust and effectiveness, it is vital for each party to make itself as attractive partner as possible, since this will increase the effort that the other party will make to create value for the relationship. However, each relationship has different kind of determinants of attractiveness, and recognizing these unique aspects requires looking the relationship from other party's perspective. (Tanskanen 2015)

According to Chang et al. (2012), in B2B markets the most important factors in creating trust and dependence in relationships, are social bonding and relationship termination costs (switching costs). This means that it is extremely vital to have frequent communication with customers and look out for their best interests. In addition, creating collaborative operations and systems with customers increases their switching costs and can lead to longer and more profitable relationships. One way of doing this is building electronic networks with customers, which also helps to receive orders in time and decrease the amount of unnecessary work. (Chang et al. 2012) Importance of close relationship and building barrier to prevent switching for other companies is also identified by Kim (2014). According to Åge (2011), traditional transaction-based selling process has become more complex since the emphasis in the relationship between buyers and sellers is increasingly on developing collaborative relationships, and many manufacturing firms also have expanded their offering to include various types of service elements that are difficult to specify, which adds an extra dimension of complexity.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The empirical part of this study aims to gain understanding of what kind of expectations dealers have regarding digital content marketing, and how digital content and digital channels can be used to support selling to the ultimate customers in the supply chain. Empirical results were acquired by interviewing dealers of the case company. Interview questions were formed based on the theoretical part of the study, as well as research questions. Qualitative research method was used to gain real-life examples and deeper understanding of current state of digital content marketing in B2B context.

4.1 Research approach

Data collection and analysis methods in business and management research are often categorized into qualitative and quantitative. In general, quantitative methods use or generate numerical data, whereas qualitative method can include any data collection or analysis technique, that uses or generates non-numerical data. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2007, 145) Interviews, observation, and text analysis are typically used methods for data collection in qualitative research (Metsämuuronen 2005, 222). The objective of qualitative study is to develop an in-depth understanding of a certain real-life phenomenon or situation (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2004, 152). Qualitative method was chosen, since the aim of this study is to gain more comprehensive view of the state of digital content marketing in B2B context.

Case studies are a strategy used to answer “how” or “why” questions when focusing on contemporary real-life phenomenon, where the researcher has no control over events and results (Yin 2003, 1, 41). Case studies can be categorized into single case and multiple case studies. This study utilizes the multiple case method, where there is more than one case that is analyzed. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2007, 140) Case studies can be further categorized into exploratory case studies, descriptive case studies, or explanatory case studies. If the research questions of the study focus mainly on “what” questions, that are exploratory in nature, such as most of the research questions of this study, exploratory study can be used. For exploratory study, case study is suitable research method, with the goal of developing pertinent hypotheses, as well as propositions for further inquiry. (Yin 2003, 5)

Since the concept of digital content marketing is rather new, and the amount of research combining it with B2B and supply chain context is scarce, and almost non-existent, exploratory case study method is suitable in order to add to existing literature, and identify issues for further research. The goal of this study is to further understand digital content marketing in B2B context, and especially within a supply chain. For this purpose, multiple dealers of the case company were interviewed to gain deeper understanding of this phenomenon. As the empirical data consists of opinions and practices of multiple different dealer, and can therefore vary from one dealer to other, qualitative method serves the purpose of gaining more comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon since each dealer has a different relationship with the case company in terms of level of collaboration and shared history. However, most of the represented dealers have rather long history with the case company, as can be seen later from Table 5.

4.2 Case company

The case company of this study is a Finnish-based company that operates in working place management sector. The company provides a wide variety of interior designs and furniture, as well as multiple services that support the modification and maintenance of its products. It is among the largest companies in Nordic countries in its sector. Currently, the case company has a strategy for their digital content creation based on assumptions, rather than research, regarding dealers' demands, which created the need to interview dealers in order to gain knowledge regarding what kind of marketing actions are needed and expected.

4.3 Data collection and analysis

For this study, eleven dealers of the case company were approached, and interviews were conducted with eight of them. The three dealers who did not participate either did not answer at all, or did not answer within the timeframe set to conduct this study. The criteria for choosing the interviewees required that they were operating outside of Finland, and that they represented as many different countries as possible in order to get diverse and geographically broad sample. The contact information of interviewed dealers was provided by the case company. Interview questions were sent beforehand via email, in order to give the interviewees possibility to get familiar with the subject and consider their answers beforehand. Data was also acquired from multiple informal conversations with the international sales manager and marketing manager of the case company, as well as from different public channels of the case company, such as website and social media.

Interviews can be executed in multiple ways, and they can be categorized as structured interviews, semi-structured interviews, and unstructured or in-depth interviews. Structured interviews use standardized set of questions, and the questions are asked and answered in strict order, without further social interaction excluding only preliminary explanations related to questions. In semi-structured interviews, the questions and themes are listed, but the order and content can vary between interviews based on the context and flow of conversation. Semi-structured interviews might require asking additional questions, and the discussions should be captured by audio-recording or notes. Unstructured interviews are informal and questions are not predetermined, and the interviewee can talk about events, behavior, and beliefs related to the topic without limitations. Structured interviews can be referred as quantitative research interviews, and semi-structured and unstructured interviews can be referred as qualitative research interviews. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2007, 311-312)

In this study, semi-structured interviews were used to get deeper understanding of the importance of digital content marketing in B2B context. Semi-structured method was chosen since it was suitable for the qualitative nature of the study, and it was vital to present the most important themes and main questions of the interviews for the interviewees in order to keep the discussion relevant, but it was also vital to let the discussion flow freely without strict structure since all interviewees had different situations and opinions, and some were more familiar with certain topics than other. Semi-structured discussion enabled each interviewee to focus on the parts they had the most knowledge and opinions. Non-standardized interviews are used to gather data that helps to answer “what” and “how” questions, and also to put emphasis on “why” questions (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2007, 313). Due to the nature of this study and the interviews, predetermined set of questions was vital to ensure that the gathered data is relevant. Interview questions were based on the theoretical part of this study, as well as the current situation of the case company and its dealers, since those provide the context and background for this case study. Interview questionnaire is attached to Appendix 1.

The case company and their dealers, the interviewees in this case, were kept anonymous. For background information, the industry is mentioned in the case company introduction, and the background information of the interviewees include the job title of the interviewee and experience in that position, how long personal experience the interviewee has with the case company, and how long relationship the organization that the dealer represents has with the case company. The interviewees were first contacted via email by a representative

of the case company, and after they had agreed to participate, the author of the study contacted them to arrange a suitable time for the interview. The questionnaire was sent beforehand via email to ensure that the interviewees were familiar with the themes of the interview. Since all interviewees were located outside of Finland, the interviews were done via Skype, mobile phone, or WhatsApp call based on the preference of the interviewee. Interviews were done in English with the exception of the interview with Estonian dealer, which was done in Finnish. All interviews were recorded.

Out of eleven dealers contacted, eight agreed to participate in the study. One out of these eight interviewees could not find suitable time for the interview, and sent answers to questions briefly via email. Details about the interviews can be seen from Table 5 listed in the order in which the interviews were conducted. The countries where certain dealers operate are excluded from Table 5 due to wishes of the case company. The countries included in this study in an alphabetical order were Australia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Holland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Russia.

Table 5. Research interviews

Interviewee number	Title / Experience	Personal experience with the case company	Organization's experience with the case company	Interview duration (minutes)
1	Managing director / Co-owner, 2 years	1 year	10 years	35
2	Sales director, 16 years	16 years	26 years	47
3	Executive director, 4 years	7 years	Part of the case company	38
4	Owner / Director client services, 19 years	2 years	2 years	20
5	Owner, over 20 years	Over 20 years	Over 20 years	30
6	Marketing assistant, responsible for social media, 1 year	1 year	25 years	40
7	Director / CEO, 26 years	9 years	9 years	32
8	Owner / Managing director, 24 years	22 years	22 years	Email

After each interview, the recorded files were transcribed by the author in order to categorize and analyze the material. Transcribing was generally done immediately after each interview and verbatim, since this allowed objective and reliable view of the interview-situation. The procedures conducted in analysis of qualitative data often include categorization, unitizing data, identifying relationships and developing categories, and testing and developing theories to reach conclusion. Acquired data is usually grouped into categories before further analysis, which allows the researcher to comprehend and manage the data, integrate data from several transcripts and notes, identify key themes or patterns, develop and/or test theories, and draw and verify conclusions. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2007, 474, 479) Since semi-structured interview method was used and each interview had a different flow and order depending on the interviewee, the data acquired from the interviews was first organized loosely to match the theoretical part of the research, as data related to each different form of content and channel were separated. The second part of handling the data included categorization of the data to the main themes, emerging both from the theoretical and empirical part. After the analysis and categorization of the data, answering the research questions was rather straightforward.

4.4 Reliability and validity

Research design should aim for representation of logical set of statements, and quality of empirical research can be judged based on certain logical tests. Internal validity concerns causal and explanatory studies, where the goal of the study is to establish causal relationships between certain events, thus being inapplicable to exploratory studies, whereas external validity concerns the generalizability of the results of the study. Case studies have been criticized for not providing enough data for generalizing. However, as case studies rely on analytical generalizations rather than statistical generalizations, the criticism of sample sizes is often quite irrelevant. Reliability aims for ensuring that if the same case study would be conducted again by a later investigator with the same procedures, the same findings and conclusions were achieved. The objective of reliability is in minimizing errors and biases in a study. (Yin 2003, 32, 35-36)

The chosen research method is one of the main aspects in examining the reliability and validity of the research. This study used qualitative method, in more detail an exploratory case study method, which was well suited due to the research setting based on the background of the case company, as well as the contemporary nature of the concepts used. The main focus of the study was to gain deeper understanding of how digital content

marketing can be used to support marketing of company's dealers to the end customer. Semi-structured interviews were used to allow interviewees to freely answer the questions, and not limit them in any way. There should also be no need to limit the given answers or avoid certain topics, since the interviewees and the case company were kept anonymous. The research background and research questions were based on earlier literature and in the need of expanding the theoretical foundation regarding digital content marketing in B2B context, and in a supply chain marketing context.

Interviewed dealers represented geographically different parts of the world, and the company sizes they represented also varied a lot. In addition, each dealer had a different background and different history with the case company, which led to diverse experiences and needs regarding digital content and usage of channels. Some dealers were more familiar with case company's digital marketing efforts than others, and thus some interviews provided more detailed data regarding the topics of this study. The questionnaire was same for each interviewee, and it represented the current marketing efforts of the case company, and therefore provided a familiar background for each interviewee. However, each interview had a different flow and order of going through each topic depending on the interviewee. Some misunderstandings are always possible since the interviews were mainly conducted in English, which was in many cases neither the first language of the interviewee or the author, and in some cases, there were some technical difficulties related to quality of audio due to problems in Skype / mobile phone connections, or background noises. To combat this, additional questions were asked and during the transcribing process unclear parts were listened multiple times.

5 EMPIRICAL RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This section uses the data gathered from both the theoretical insights, and the conducted interviews with the dealers of the case company. The following subchapters go through the perspective of dealers regarding digital content of the supplier in general, different types of digital content and how content is utilized, as well as different content channels. Based on these findings, the research questions of this study will be answered in the later part of the study.

5.1 Dealers' view of suppliers' content

Digital content in general, and digital content created by the case company is used to varying degrees by all of their international dealers. It was acknowledged by almost all interviewees that in general, company's content should not only include material about products and services of the certain company, but also about trending issues regarding the industry, and content that might be helpful to customers and their business. When it comes to content related to company's own offering, all interviewees agreed that it should help the customer to understand the concept behind the product or services, and why it is valuable and useful. For example, one effective way of doing this is different instruction videos. In addition, digital content in general was considered vital in B2B context, and one interviewee summarized its importance as follows:

"In terms of its (digital content) importance (in B2B marketing), I think that the content is key." (Interviewee 7)

As Holliman and Rowley (2014) stated in their study, community and value are the most important aspects of digital content marketing. The importance of value of the content was directly acknowledged by several interviewees. According to one interviewee, digital content should communicate the value proposition to customer:

"But in furniture business it is important that it (digital content) comes hand in hand with your promise because digital content for me is a promise to customers." (Interviewee 1)

In addition, Interviewee 1 stated that it is extremely vital that this promise is kept with product and service deliveries in order to be effective. Delivering value propositions with combining strategic marketing and supply chain decisions was also identified as one key parts of the framework for marketing and supply chain strategy integration by Jüttner, Christopher and

Godsell (2010), thus making effective delivery of value proposition vital. According to two interviewees, it is important to have as much digital content available online as possible since large visibility for the brand and its products is extremely important. One interviewee mentioned that in order to ensure that content is valuable to a certain customer, it should be tailor-made for that specific customer's situation. To conclude, the interviewee stated:

"Quality (of content) rather than quantity." (Interviewee 5)

Content marketing includes storytelling as a way of reaching potential customers (Järvinen & Taiminen 2016), and according to one interviewee, stories sell, since they make it easier to create emotional connections for products, which helps to sell that certain product. The more different stories there are, the better. However, the interviewee mentioned that there are not that many background stories about the case company's products. The importance of content that provides different background stories were also recognized by two other interviewees. In addition, since building a trusted brand status and creating brand awareness are vital goals of content marketing (Holliman & Rowley 2014; Cawsey & Rowley 2016; Wuebben 2012), content should not be limited to product-information, and there should be enough good content for brand-building, especially in market areas where the brand of the company is not that well recognized, as was said in interviews:

"Because if you are trying to establish a brand, which we really are trying to do, we have to have content." (Interviewee 7)

Regular communication between supply chain partners was mentioned important by many interviewees, since this leads to stronger relationships and it makes it easier for dealers to stay updated on new products and services, which they can offer to end customers. Higher level of inter- and intra-organizational collaboration also enhances possibilities for identifying and responding to changing customer needs (Barczak, Griffin & Kahn 2009). Since companies have transitioned towards a network-based business model with increased amount of connections to different partners (Jüttner, Christopher & Godsell 2010), effective information exchange has become even more important. Information processes is one of the important business processes that should be coordinated throughout the supply chain (Green, Whitten & Inman 2012). In addition, strong relationships between buyers and sellers are likely to lead to competitive advantage (Powers & Reagan 2007). If the information between supply chain members is not working as effectively as possible, there might be situations where the end customer is asking for additional information about certain products, and the dealer is not aware of the existence

of that certain product as one interviewee stated. Since one of the main goals of marketing is delivering value to the ultimate customer (Kozlenkova et al. 2015), it is vital that knowledge of different solutions is possessed by each member of the supply chain in order to communicate the value proposition. Without content from the supplier, it is not possible for the dealers to communicate the value proposition for the end customers, or build brand awareness, and as one Interviewee states, supplier's content is vital:

“So for us the content coming from our supplier (the case company) is really important. We rely very heavily on that.” (Interviewee 7)

5.2 Usefulness of content from dealers' perspective

Digital content discussed in this part includes articles and blogs, video, and podcasts. Currently the case company utilizes each of these forms of content, with the exception of podcasts or any other audio-based content. However, as digital content can be in any form (Järvinen & Taiminen 2016), they are also discussed briefly based on the interviews.

Articles and blogs are both used by the case company. Articles are used on different forms mainly on the website. There are different types of article texts, such as news, press releases, articles about the company and its offering, and articles related to the industry. In addition, the case company has a separate site for blog texts, and there is a link to the blog in the website. In the blog, there are articles related to trending issues regarding the industry, and for example articles related to design. There are multiple people writing articles on the blog, such as employees of the case company, as well as people who are not employed by the case company, such as business partners, designers, and other industry experts. New articles are often shared on different social media channels in order to get more exposure.

Many interviewees mentioned utilizing case company's blog to support their own marketing to some degree, two did not mention it at all or said that it is not used, and one only noticed that the case company has a blog from this interview. Only one of the dealers has their own blog, but according to the interview it is rather inactive. It was mentioned by multiple dealers, that it is vital to always have a version of blog texts and articles in English or in appropriate language to a certain market area, since otherwise they have little value and are impossible to share forward. Sharing blog texts and articles written by the case company is typical way of using them as a part of marketing, and social media channels are used as primary platforms for sharing. Especially Facebook and LinkedIn were mentioned as good channels

for sharing links to articles since depending on the size of the network, there are potential for large exposure and increased traffic on the company website. It was noted that when sharing an article or blog text, an appealing image can be used to attract interest from the audience to click further. One interviewee also noted that if possible, it is great to have someone with a lot of followers and a big network to share content, which is also in line with the analysis by BuzzSumo (2014).

One interviewee stated that the level of articles that the case company is producing is high, and that they are hoping for producing similar content in the future:

“And as far as the content goes, you know I think that the case company is already doing a good job, they have good people writing articles, good respect level. I am envious because we would like to do more of that kind of things ourselves.” (Interviewee 7)

However, according to other interviewee, the blog of the case company is too much like an advertisement for the products:

“The case company is expert in working environment, but I don’t see expertise from the case company’s brand in web. For example, the blog is weak. It is same people writing about same things and looks more like advertisement. Nobody needs advertisement anymore.” (Interviewee 3)

In addition, one interviewee states that the blog does not provide enough interesting and valuable content regarding the industry, such as current and future trends, or stories from different events that the company has attended, and new people and projects from different locations. In addition, the interviewee stated that the expertise of the case company regarding the industry is not visible enough in the blog texts. Since expert opinions are more likely to have an effect on consumers and generate more influential WOM (Ho et al. 2015; Reingen & Kernan 1986), it is vital to showcase the expertise of the company in articles and blog texts written by the company. The importance of articles being valuable to the target audience, as well as interesting or inspiring, was also recognized by BuzzSumo (2014) and Patel (2017).

As can be seen from different answers, it is quite difficult to produce article texts that are valuable for every dealer since there are differences in selling and marketing processes, as well as market areas, which can also lead to opposing views.

Videos are utilized as an important part of the case company's digital content marketing. The main channel where videos are uploaded is their YouTube channel, which is not surprising since YouTube is one of the most popular and effective channel for creating business-related content (Hsieh, Hsieh & Tang 2012; Khan & Vong 2014). YouTube videos are also shared on other social media channels, and some of the YouTube videos are also embedded on the company website when there are news or articles related to the topic of the video. The focus in video marketing is on company-created videos, rather than user-generated video content.

Videos seems to be widely used content type since only one of the dealers did not mention using them in marketing. One interviewee briefly mentioned that videos are used to some degree, but did not specify further. In general, videos were mentioned to be effective, and the most used way of utilizing videos is to share YouTube videos from case company's channel on social media, or post links to these videos for clients on email. Instant messaging applications like WhatsApp and Telegram are also used in some cases for sharing links to videos by two interviewees. In addition, YouTube videos are used on background in dealers' showrooms to showcase case company's products by several interviewees. According to one interviewee, the most used social media channels for sharing videos are Facebook and LinkedIn. Creating own videos is currently done by one of the interviewees, and one other mentioned that it would be great to create own video content, but that it is not possible currently due to limited resources.

Videos are mostly used as supportive material rather than advertising, for example explaining concepts or how certain products work and how to adjust them. Using videos are a great way of creating additional value for customers, as well as supporting after-sales processes according to almost all interviewees. Video content should also provide background stories for products and services, as well as showing the culture and thinking behind the products. In addition, since sustainability is a trending issue currently, videos could also include information about the sustainability of the supply chain, and what the case company is doing in order to ensure that they are producing "green" or sustainable products. Based on the interviews, videos should be rather short in order to be effective:

"Yes if it is short videos so it is a fast way of explaining or showing something"
(Interviewee 1)

"Very short videos, if text very short. Lot of content very quickly everyday online. Visual content." (Interviewee 3)

“And videos no longer than ten seconds. Because I believe that’s the Facebook style, you swipe, and you see a photo you like, or you see a video you can click and then you decide within three seconds if you like it or not, or will you swipe further... Short videos are good content.” (Interviewee 6)

Live streaming was also mentioned as a one possible way of providing audience more of a window to different office spaces by one interviewee, and for example connecting different spaces through video screens, making it appear almost like two different offices are in one space. In addition, Snapchat was mentioned as a potential tool to integrate additional reality to different spaces to present new products in a new way, but it was not utilized yet by any interviewees. These are examples of creating new kind of content for customers with different digital channels, and likely new ways of using video content will be more popular in the future. As many interviewees mentioned, the most popular way of using videos are supportive content regarding products and services of the company, which is also in line with the statement of Savitz (2013) that it is vital to consider customer needs rather than focusing on the brand of the company, as well as observing consumer habits and feedback. Based on the interviews the most useful video content is rather short and supportive videos, followed by content that provides background for company’s products, culture, and trending issues like sustainability.

Podcasts or other audio-based digital content are not currently utilized as a part of case company’s digital content marketing. According to the interviews, using podcasts as a part of the digital content marketing mix in this industry is not a good option, since podcasts and audio content in general was never mentioned before directly asked about it, and even then, it was not considered as a good approach:

From time to time when I sit in a car I listen something when I can’t watch video but it is also old fashioned. Video and pictures are more important. (Interviewee 3)

I don’t think that they can be useful for our products and customers. I don’t think that in this industry that is not a right mix. Videos and presentations are more useful. (Interviewee 5)

I think that it will be the younger generation who will use the podcast. I don’t think that it will help that much, because the majority of architects and salespeople are +30 years old. I don’t think that it will make a difference. (Interviewee 6)

5.3 Dealers' utilization of digital channels

Digital channels can be used to share and produce different forms of digital content. As Straker, Wrigley and Rosemann (2015) defined, digital channels emerged from technological development, and can be viewed as routes of communication between organization and its customers. Digital channel can be both one-way (such as website and email newsletter), and two-way (such as blogs and social media) channels (Taiminen & Karjaluoto 2015). In this study, empirical part focuses on existing digital channels of the case company, which are the web services, social media, email, and mobile.

The web services of the case company consist of three different areas, which are website, image bank, and blog. The image bank and the blog of the case company can both be accessed from the website of the case company, and therefore this part discusses the general website and the image bank of the company. Blog of the case company was also discussed in the earlier part with articles, and thus it is not discussed in detail in this part. Web services are extremely vital part of case company's digital content marketing since all interviewees mentioned using them as a part of their own marketing and selling, and especially the image bank was mentioned by all interviewees as an important tool. For many interviewees, the website and the image bank are the most important content for them, and for some, the only content from the case company that they use regularly:

"We use only the website... Website and image bank." (Interviewee 4)

"We can use the website to understand sizes, dimensions, images, because we generally go to the website to get to the image bank." (Interviewee 7)

"We use mainly (case company's) website and image bank." (Interviewee 8)

Visual content is the most utilized content according to the interviews, and many interviewees specifically stated that images are the most important form of content. According to one interviewee, the more visual content (both videos and images) the case company can create online, the better since architects need to be visually stimulated, and visual content also provides inspiration and reminds of the products and brand of the case company. According to other interviewee, it would also be beneficial to have three dimensional drawings of the products available on the website, since those drawings are vital for designers when they are planning projects, and something that a lot of their competitors have. Client references are often used in B2B marketing (Kumar, Petersen & Leone 2013), and references on the case company's website are used by many dealers.

There are some differences regarding which references are presented and how they are presented on the website, depending on whether the website visitor is browsing the global website, or if some specific country is chosen on the given options. According to one interviewee, photo references are more useful than video references. Two interviewees mentioned that it is good to have references from different projects, segments, and countries, which makes using them more effective, and creates possibility to use different references for different customers depending on customer preferences, which was also noted by Terho and Jalkala (2017). One interviewee highlighted the importance of including most relevant references in tailor-made presentations for each specific customer.

In general, the website of the case company is considered to be quite good by two interviewees, and very good by also two interviewees. According to rest of the interviewees, the website design could be simpler. All of them mentioned that finding more information regarding company's products should be easier and they should be more visible on the front page. Since case company provides both services and products, and some of the dealers sell only products of the case company, finding good balance in the website might be difficult. However, it is vital to present necessary information for potential buyers (Karjaluoto, Mustonen & Ulkuniemi 2015). Since the services part of the business is more important in market areas closer to Finland, one solution could be adding more possibilities for selecting the country in which the customer is located, and customize the website more based on that. According to the interviews, the general website elements (Figure 3, Abdallah & Jaleel 2015), that the case company should focus on are look and feel (aesthetic appeal), navigation (referring to easy to use and clearly defined concepts), and customization features of the website. Need for more frequent updates on the website regarding new products and images were mentioned by two interviewees. Regarding marketing mix elements, one interviewee mentioned that there should be more details about the product.

Website is important channel for the case company since it is used by all their dealers, and different forms of content can be created on the website. According to several interviewees, the best practice for content like articles and blogs is to write them on the website, and then share the link to the website in different social media channels to generate more traffic to the website. LinkedIn and Facebook are most used for sharing content from the case company. One interviewee mentioned using also Google AdWords for generating website traffic as a part of digital marketing. Since that dealer utilizes the case company's website for that specific market area as their homepage, investing on search engine marketing will also benefit the case company to get more visibility for their global page on search engines.

Social media is one of the main digital marketing channels for the case company. They are currently using YouTube, Facebook, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Twitter, and Instagram in their marketing. For each social media channel, they have a global account where the posts are in English, and for some of the channels they also have a channel focusing on a certain country and language, for example Finland-centered accounts mainly have posts in Finnish. According to the categorization by Zhu and Chen (2015), the case company utilizes both profile-based social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn), and content-based channels (YouTube, Pinterest, and Instagram). Table 6 shows case company's global social media channels their approximate audience, and utilization by dealers.

Table 6. Case company's social media channels, subscribed audience, and utilization

Social media channel	Number of likes / followers	Number of dealers utilizing company's channel	Number of dealers utilizing channel in general for business
YouTube	300 (over 200 000 views)	6	6
Facebook	5000	3	5
LinkedIn	2500	2	4
Pinterest	300	0	1
Twitter	1000	0	1
Instagram	1000	1	1

The usage of social media varies a lot between interviewees. One interviewee mentioned never using social media for business, and one interviewee mentioned using it very seldom. Social media usage among rest of the interviewees varied a lot from using one social media channel to using multiple channels and having social media strategy. Different social media channels from the interviewees' perspective are discussed separately.

YouTube channel of the case company is used by all the interviewed dealers excluding two interviewees. However, one of these interviewees mentioned using video content to support selling without directly mentioning YouTube, and thus it is likely that they are also utilizing case company's YouTube to some degree, since the video content of the case company is posted there. According to the interviews, YouTube is the most used social media channel among the interviewees. The views of YouTube videos are a good indicator of the importance of content being valuable and inspiring, since some of the case company's videos have less than hundred views, and some have several thousands, even tens of thousands of views for a working ergonomics related video. Hence, even though instruction videos are used by the dealers, it should be notified what kind of videos get the most views to get the most benefits of video marketing.

Facebook channels of the case company are used by many interviewees. Since two interviewees are representing the case company in their market area, they are using official Facebook pages of the case company. One interviewee stated that Facebook page of the case company can be utilized to enhance their own Facebook page. In general, Facebook is used by most of the dealers, making it the second used social media among dealers. Facebook is used to write news and share posts from suppliers by half of the interviewees, and also creating events and sending invitations by one interviewee. Some comments were also given regarding how the case company could improve its Facebook usage:

“(Case company’s) Facebook is not also very good, there is not a lot of actual uploading, no analytics, no empowering messages.” (Interviewee 3)

“The Facebook page is not very effective because it is a mix of Finnish news, Finnish text and Finnish news in English text so there is very little international content in the (case company’s) Facebook page. So it is not very effective.” (Interviewee 5)

Based on the interviews, the case company should be more active on Facebook, and like with articles and blog texts, ensure that there is always an English version of posts in order to maximize visibility and value for network partners and potential customers outside Finland.

LinkedIn in general is used by half of the interviewed dealers. LinkedIn is mainly used for sharing different content, and connecting with business partners and checking company or person backgrounds. In Russia, LinkedIn is banned and therefore not used at all. LinkedIn of the case company is not used that much by the dealers. One interviewee mentioned sometimes tagging the case company in LinkedIn posts, and other mentioned using LinkedIn in general quite a lot in marketing, and mentioned it being one of the best social medias for B2B environment:

“I think that they (the case company) could be more active on LinkedIn because I see that as a more professional social media. And especially in B2B sales and presentations.” (Interviewee 5)

Pinterest is currently regularly used by one interviewee for creating more online visibility for products and brand. Even though using Pinterest for own marketing, the interviewee was not sure if the case company has an own account on Pinterest. Other interviewee mentioned that they are planning to start utilizing Pinterest for marketing, but are not familiar enough with it yet to comment on how effective it can be.

Twitter in general is only used by one interviewee, and there were no mentions of using Twitter of the case company in any way. Based on the interviews Twitter is not critical channel for the case company from dealers' perspective.

Instagram of the case company is used by one interviewee for showing customers visual content and supporting the brand of the case company. Other interviewee mentioned not having Instagram as a part of their own marketing yet, but stated that it can be beneficial in situations where good quality photo material can be attractive, such as sharing content from different fairs. It was mentioned by one interviewee that they are possible implementing Instagram in their marketing in the future.

According to the interviews, YouTube is the most used social media channel among the interviewees, Facebook is the second most used, and LinkedIn the third most. Out of the third most used social media channels, only YouTube is primarily content based according to the categorization of Zhu and Chen (2015). Importance of Facebook and LinkedIn can be due to importance of collaborative relationships in B2B context, and especially in a supply chain, since these channels are mostly used to connect with business partners, sharing content from suppliers, as well as arranging events and sending invitations. Instagram and Pinterest usage is currently low, even though many interviewees stated that visual content is extremely important in their selling and in this industry. Visual content coming from company's own website is more important than content on image-based social medias such as Instagram and Pinterest. However, using social media to generate more traffic to company's website and increasing brand awareness fits the definition of social media marketing by Felix, Rauschnabel, and Hinsch (2017), which suggests that social media is used in combination with other channels to achieve goals and increasing shareholder-value. The importance of online visibility of company's brand and its products is recognized by multiple interviewees, and the utilization of various social media channels is likely to increase in the future.

In terms of UGC in social media and its usefulness, various opinions were given. According to one interviewee, UGC can lead to increased amount of online visibility and better brand image. Even negative comments can be useful and turned into positive, if problem situations and customer complaints are solved accordingly and fast. However, it was seen as a possible threat by several interviewees, since it is unpredictable and hard to control. The importance of fast response times to negative public content was highlighted by one interviewee, since fast reactions can minimize potential damage to the brand. Multiple

interviewees stated that a lack of resources is limiting their social media usage, since it would be beneficial to have employees who mainly handle social media to ensure fast response times and expertise in social media environment. One interviewee mentioned that if there is UGC on their posts it is usually positive, but since the amount of UGC in their post is low, it is not important part of marketing currently. Dealers of the case company have different preferences and needs regarding content on social media, and they are utilizing social media channels of the case company differently from each other. Noguti's (2016) figure (Figure 4) illustrates well how the content creator should think about who is saying what in which social media channel, and who is the target audience for that content. In addition, the effects of certain posts should be evaluated based on metrics that are relevant for the company, such as number of comments or shares. Multiple Interviewees stated that in ideal situation they would have certain people responsible for all social media activity in order to keep social media marketing professional and consistent.

According to the interviews, using instant messaging applications is relatively common. WhatsApp is used with customers by two interviewees, Telegram by one interviewee, and Skype by two interviewees. The benefits of these applications are the speed and convenience of sending photos or messages compared to emails or phone calls:

"If I call someone it might be a bad time and then it is not good. If I just send WhatsApp it is easy and they can answer whenever they have time for it. And no need to book for meetings." (Interviewee 3)

According to two interviewees, applications like WhatsApp and Telegram are used especially internally to communicate with colleagues, since it is possible to have specific channels or groups for certain people. Skype and Facetime is also used for video calls and conferences internally by two interviewees. According to Kobsa, Patil, and Meyer (2012), the usage of instant messaging with business partners and external clients is increasing, which was also supported by comments of multiple Interviewees, such as:

"Email is complicated and slow, we need to find new ways of communicating with customers. Also, telephone calls will be decrease. Applications of mobiles will have a bigger role." Interviewee 3

"I think that WhatsApp could grow business-wise, we use it with colleagues but never with our clients." Interviewee 6

Email is used in communication with customers and business partners by all interviewees, and it is vital communication channel in everyday business matters. It was mentioned as a primary communication channel by half of the interviewees, and two interviewees

mentioned that emails are used to a high degree in selling process combined with phone calls. Emails are used since they are easy and rather fast way of communicating, different kind of data can be attached to emails, and they can be sent from anywhere and anytime, even with mobile phones. The ability of delivering valuable data was also recognized by Dawe (2015), as well as the cost-efficiency of emailing. However, as it was mentioned earlier, the usage of instant messaging is increasing, and that might decrease the use of email in the coming years.

Emails can also be utilized as a marketing tool in a form of regular email newsletter. From the customers' perspective, regular emailing can be irritating, if it is uncalled for (Reimers, Chao & Gorman 2016). Currently, the case company is not sending regular email newsletters to its dealers. However, several interviewees were interested about email newsletter, and multiple opinions regarding them were given:

"We would be interested to receive a newsletter, it would be the easiest way of getting information and things moving forward." (Interviewee 2)

"That could be useful, you know updates about the products, about the novelties. They can do it yes, but not too often, like monthly. Not every week. Maybe once every quarter could be enough." (Interviewee 4)

"Yes, that would be great because I think newsletter that we receive from our suppliers, we email to our whole organization. And for instance, our sales team, whenever they have a client on meeting, they can show / send the newsletter to them. And also for our architects a reminder of the case company's products." (Interviewee 6)

The optimum frequency for email newsletters should be once a month according to multiple interviewees, or even once every quarter according to one interviewee. One interviewee mentioned that newsletter could be sent when there have been updates on regarding products or content in different digital channels, such as website or blog. Updates and novelties are easy to miss if there is no regular pattern of informing about them, and newsletter would also be a great reminder of existing products for different purposes according to half of the interviewees. According to Dawe (2015), it is rather difficult to customize and optimize email marketing to produce desired results, but as can be seen from the interview answers, regular communication from the case company's direction should have a positive effect. The case company should start to experiment with different types of email newsletters to keep their dealers better updated since regular contact and communication is vital in supply chain relationships to create value for each party of the supply chain, including the end customer.

Mobile phones in general are used by all interviewees, and phone calls in particular are in a large role in the selling approach of almost all interviewees. Mobile phones are used to approach both existing and potential customers, and often email is used to support phone calls. This approach supports the importance of personal selling in B2B context, and as salespeople usually can travel quite a lot, smart phones combined with different digital sales-support materials can be extremely effective (Karjaluoto, Mustonen & Ulkuniemi 2015). Based on the interviews, direct contacts to customers are vital:

"Phone calls, emails, direct contacts. We have nothing else." (Interviewee 4)

"Yes, our sales department does a lot of phone calls. They call different kind of companies, people, architects." (Interviewee 6)

Mobile phones are also effective since they allow using other channels, such as websites, email, and social media, anywhere. In addition, as was discussed earlier, instant messaging systems are currently used to some degree, and these systems can also be used with mobile phones. This development enables viewing and sharing different content easily from anywhere, and according to one interviewee, the utilization of different channels with mobile phones will increase:

"I think that mobile phones will take bigger role definitely. I see much more of the communications happening via mobile phones. And I think that mobile phones will grow stronger than tablets. And will soon become the key device for messages via email and social media." (Interviewee 5)

In general, different mobile applications, excluding social media, are used somewhat regularly by two interviewees, so they are not currently major part of the selling. The case company currently has a mobile application, that provides information about different products, projects, and news. However, according to the interviews, it is not widely used by their dealers at the moment:

"I mean the case company already has an app with product presentations and I don't think that it is ever been used." (Interviewee 5)

"Yes, but the case company has an app right? But it could be updated as well. It's a little bit of old-fashioned." (Interviewee 6)

Based on the answers, if the case company wants to develop an application that would be used more, a new approach is needed. Two interviewees stated that with an application that does same things that other applications, no additional value is created. According to one interviewee, visual content about how certain products and how they can be used in

different spaces and projects would be beneficial for architects. One interviewee mentioned that integrating an application to an office space in a way that different metrics could be monitored and identified, such as where people are sitting in the office and how much of the office space is utilized, would be beneficial for the dealers' use to better explain the products. One interviewee identified the same problem as Berman (2016) regarding the screen and keyboard sizes of the mobile phones, and stated that some visual content is easier to use and demonstrate on bigger screens due to size and quality.

According to Rogers and Clark (2016), context-aware mobile applications create new opportunities in B2B sales processes. It was mentioned by one interviewee, that they are currently using some context-aware applications in their selling, such as an application that can measure acoustics or echoes in office spaces, which helps to measure important metrics and adjust selling accordingly. Development of mobile technology removes physical limitations of selling process, and customers' expectations and buying behavior has changed (Pantano & Priporas 2016). However, based on the interviews, opinions about applications for selling products varied a lot:

“In the future, we are selling more of our intelligence, expertise, services, knowledge, and the product would sell itself. We could focus on providing value and support. Everything will go online, I don't have to meet people for selling. Face-to-face meetings will decrease. Whole selling process could be done online.” (Interviewee 3)

“...what we will see is web interface where existing customer can order additional product but to plan and specify a new office workspace that cannot be done via app, it requires physical meetings and a lot of communication back and forth and drawings.” (Interviewee 5)

“That (sales applications) is very important as well, because as I said earlier people are looking products more online, so instead of going to a shop they go online and purchase the chair online. So it is very important for the case company to explore the possibility of an online webshop.” (Interviewee 6)

Since there are fewer but larger customers in B2B sector than in B2C, and personal selling is in a vital role, it is possible that online buying is not going to be in as large a role as in B2C sector. As one of the interviewees mentioned, solution selling for larger spaces requires a lot of planning and it is hard to do via application, but additional products could be ordered online. However, two interviewees believe that part of the selling process, or even the whole process, could be done online in the future and that the seller could focus more on value-adding services. There might also be differences in the selling process depending on if the dealer is more focused on selling products or services.

5.4 Summary of utilization of content and channels

Many of the interviewees had rather long experience in their current position (over 15 years), and all interviewees including those with rather short experience in their position used website, email, and mobile, which are quite traditional channels, to a high degree. In addition, the experience of the interviewee with the case company had no effect on the usage of those channels. The usage of different social media channel varied a lot between interviewees regardless of the amount of experience in the current position. As social media usage in B2B business is quite new phenomenon in general, it would not have been surprising to see social media preferred more by interviewees who have not been in the industry for that long. However, the findings do not support such generalizations. Even though the findings do not generally support that the experience in a certain position or with the supplier effects the utilization of different digital content or channels, there were some mentions in the interviews, that certain content or channels, such as podcasts or social media, are not relevant due to clients or salespeople consisting of older generations. Table 7 summarizes usage of various forms of digital content and channels by dealers.

Table 7. Summary of digital content and channels used by dealers for marketing and selling

Type of content and channels	Number of dealers utilizing	Importance and details of usage
Articles & Blogs	5	Text-based content should showcase writer's expertise, discuss relevant issues, and not focus on advertising company's products or services.
Videos	7	The most utilized type of content based on the categorization used in this study. Visual content vital in marketing, and videos should be valuable to customers, by being either instructive, or inspirational.
Podcasts	0	Not relevant form of content currently.
Web services	8	The most important channel for finding information regarding the case company's offering. The image bank is essential since visual content is extremely important, and images are even more important than videos. References of earlier projects are also important and used to a high degree.
Social media	7	The three most important social medias are YouTube, Facebook and LinkedIn. Mainly used to assist customers with instructional videos, sharing content from suppliers, and connecting with business partners.
Email	8	Important channel for communication with customers and partners, and primary communication channel for half of the dealers. Benefits are convenience of use and the possibility of attaching valuable content. Most of the dealers considered email newsletter from the supplier beneficial, since it would make it easier to stay constantly updated.
Mobile	8	Vital due to importance of personal selling and regular traveling of sales people, since mobile phones allows using different channels anywhere. Email and social media, especially instant messaging applications, used with mobile to a high degree. Different sales applications not in a major role currently.

6 DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the empirical findings are used to present answers to set research questions of this study. The following subchapters provides theoretical and managerial implications. Lastly, the limitations of the study are identified and discussed, and potential direction for further research related to this topic is recognized.

What dealers think about suppliers' content?

Content coming from the supplier is vital for dealers, since suppliers can provide valuable information and expertise regarding their own offering and industry, and dealers might *lack the resources of creating content and increasing brand awareness* for a certain brand, especially if they are representing multiple different brands. Content related to the offering of the supplier should help existing and potential customers to *understand the concept and usefulness of the product or service*. However, there should also be content that does not focus on the offering, but rather *helps to solve customers' problems and adds value*, which is also suggested by multiple earlier studies (Holliman & Rowley 2014; Järvinen & Taiminen 2016; Karjaluoto, Mustonen & Ulkuniemi 2015). In addition, different background stories, such as stories related to trending issues, new projects, or sustainability, should be available since stories support selling. Without appealing content, dealers are not able to assist supplier on the brand building, which is vital especially in new market areas. In addition to creating content to different channels, *communication with dealers is essential*. Communication between supply chain members helps to keep each member updated on important issues, such as changes and trends in the industry, possible new technologies, and novelties in offering of the supplier. Frequent communication can also lead to stronger relationships between supply chain members, and enhance the ability of recognizing changes in demands of customers.

What kind of digital content is most useful for dealers?

Visual content is most useful for dealers, both videos and images. All interviewees mentioned utilizing case company's image bank, that is on their website, and almost all interviewees are using video content. Various images are important since good quality images can *create interest to the products, help to understand different sizes and dimensions, and inspire and provide possible solutions for architects and designers*. Video content is useful for *product and service instructions, as well as providing background*

information and stories for the products, and showcasing the company culture and thinking behind their offering. Digital content in written form is also widely used, even though it is not considered as useful as visual content. Articles, as any form of content, must have some value for the customer in order to be useful, and as was also suggested in earlier studies (Ho et al. 2015; Reingen & Kernan 1986), it is vital to show expertise in the topic of the article or blog text to have an effect on consumers and the possibility of generating WOM. Different industry experts and designers are good way of getting expert opinions, which is something that the case company is already doing.

What is the role of different digital channels in dealers' business?

Supplier's website is the most important channel for content for dealers, and in some cases the only one. Website and blog are good channels for creating visual and text-based content, and suppliers should share links to their content in multiple channels, especially social media, to increase website traffic. *References of earlier projects are also extremely important,* and they should cover different customer types and geographical areas, so that for each individual customer, there is a possibility to show tailor-made references to support selling. *YouTube* of the case company is the most used social media channel by dealers, as videos are easy and fast way of explaining concepts or providing product instructions. *Facebook* and *LinkedIn* are the second and third used social medias, and they are used mostly to share different content (both own and suppliers' content), connecting with business partners, and sending invitations or other information related to different events. Currently, the usage of social media channels like Pinterest and Instagram is scarce, even though visual content is vital for the dealers. In general, *social media is used to increase brand awareness and sharing different kind of content.* For dealers, creating own content on social media is limited by lack of resources and expertise. The possibilities of social media for marketing purposes are recognized by many dealers, and there is a desire to increase its usage in the future.

Email is often *primary communication channel with customers* since emails can be sent from anywhere with smartphones or other portable devices, they do not require immediate answer such as phone calls and can be therefore sent anytime, and different data, such as images or links, can be attached to them. Many dealers also expressed interest for a regular *email newsletter* from the case company, since this would help them to keep in track with any novelties from the case company. *Phone calls* are also used widely, often in combination with email. *Emails and phone calls* are vital since *personal selling is still*

important approach in B2B environment. Mobile phones, and especially new smartphones and other portable devices, enable the usage of other channels from anywhere, which makes them vital in today's markets since salespeople are often travelling to customer meetings. Instant messaging applications are used a lot by some of the dealers both internally and externally, but in general, the usage of those applications is not that common with customers due to informality of instant messaging. The benefits of instant messaging are the speed and convenience and its usage will likely increase in the future. Even though different mobile applications are not currently used to a high degree, it is possible that their importance will grow in the future, due to many possibilities provided by rapid development of technology. Some parts of current sales processes could be done online in the future, and sales applications for mobile devices might be important in the future in order to stay competitive.

Main research question: How can digital content marketing be used to support dealers' selling in B2B context?

Suppliers should create high quality visual content, which showcases different products in different settings, serves an instructional purpose, inspires, or provides other type of value to the customer. *Visual references* of various earlier projects should also be available. Since website is the main source of content for dealers, suppliers should invest a great deal of effort in *website design* in order to make it as effective as possible, since it is common for dealers to share links to the suppliers' website, and thus *website should be easy to use* for people who are not visiting it regularly. *Website or separate blog site* is the most convenient channel for publishing different content. Social media should be used to *share content*, and in general to *increase brand awareness and website traffic*. Companies should *encourage and educate employees on social media using*, as the more people are sharing content, the more visibility it gets. However, there should be a strategy on participating on online discussion to avoid negative WOM. *Email newsletter* is a viable tool for suppliers to keep dealers updated. The usage of *applications for selling and communication* is likely more important in the future as technologies develop and younger generations increasingly enter working life. Suppliers should invest in their digital content marketing efforts, and consider both the *needs of the dealers and end customers*, in order to create suitable strategy for content creation in different channels.

6.1 Theoretical contributions

The aim of this study was to contribute to the existing academic literature regarding digital content marketing in B2B context, and identify how digital content can be used to support dealers' sales, as well as how different digital channels are utilized. First definitions of content focused primarily on the website of the company (Handley & Chapman 2011; Halvorson & Rach 2012), and this study also recognized the importance of company's website. Earlier definitions of content marketing emphasized distribution of educational and compelling content in various formats (Pulizzi & Barrett 2008), and focusing on creating a valuable experience (Rose & Pulizzi 2011), which were also supported by the findings. The importance of quality and various forms of different content and their usage was also recognized, which is in line with Holliman and Rowley (2014). Furthermore, this study also supports that in B2B environment, personal selling approach and creating different content in different channels depending on the audience and purpose are essential (Karjaluo, Mustonen & Ulkuniemi 2015; Cawsey & Rowley 2016; Holliman & Rowley 2014). The importance of creating valuable content and helping customers rather than selling to them were also recognized, which is in line with multiple studies (Holliman & Rowley 2014; Järvinen & Taiminen 2016; Karjaluo, Mustonen & Ulkuniemi 2015).

As it was identified by Karjaluo, Mustonen and Ulkuniemi (2015), content is important part of digital marketing, and it can be used to communication in customer relationships, sales support, and building awareness. Based on the findings, for communication in customer relationships, email and phone calls are primary tools, for sales support visual content and web services of the supplier were emphasized, and for building awareness, visual content combined with social media usage with the goal of increasing traffic to the website of the company appears to be effective. As a result, it is essential to identify marketing objectives and customer needs when planning digital marketing. This study provided a starting point for further research about usage of digital content to satisfy the needs of the end customer of the supply chain, as there are currently no research combining digital content, B2B context, and supply chain marketing. Creating digital content that can be shared and delivered throughout the supply chain is vital in order to satisfy the needs of the end customer. Aligning marketing between supply chain partners appears to be of great value, as was recognized in prior research (Green, Whitten & Inman 2012; Jüttner, Christopher & Godsell 2010; Jüttner, Christopher & Baker 2007; Martin & Grbac 2003).

This study suggests that visual content is the most important form of content within the context of this research and the case company's industry. Text-based content can also be useful, but it is not as vital as visual content, and there is no value in audio-based content currently. Regarding digital channels, the importance of company's website as a source of content was one of the key findings. Email and mobile were recognized essential for communicating with customers and business partners. Interestingly, even though social media has generated a lot of attention in recent years, out of the interviewed dealers, there was one who never utilizes social media for business, and one who utilizes it very seldom. In addition, out of the dealers who utilized social media, most of them were actively using at most three different social media channels for business purposes. Based on these findings, social media is not in as large a role in many cases as some prior studies suggest.

Even though the importance of marketing alignment in a supply chain is discussed in multiple earlier studies, this study was first to highlight the importance of suppliers' digital content to the dealer, especially in situations where the dealer is located in a different country than the supplier. Findings of the study suggest that a high amount of content is essential in situations where the distance is large, and the brand of the supplier rather unknown in the dealers' market area, as content is needed to create awareness and attract interest towards the brand, and in many cases, dealers might lack resources of creating own content for brands of a certain supplier. This study suggests some practices for the supplier regarding how digital content marketing can be used to support dealers' sales. However, more research is required in this field to get more comprehensive idea of how marketing should be aligned in a supply chain setting.

6.2 Managerial implications

This study has generated several managerial implications for companies operating in B2B field, especially for those operating in furniture or working environment management industry. The results of this study highlighted the importance of digital content in a supply chain setting, as the content coming from the supplier is essential for dealers and their selling. There should be both content regarding suppliers' products and services, and content that has additional value for customers. Companies should regularly communicate with their dealers, and potentially with end customers as well, in order to identify what kind of content is most important in marketing. It is unlikely that the produced content is valuable for customers, if customer needs are unclear. Creation of valuable content can be challenging, and therefore investing time and resources is necessary in order to succeed.

Different content and channels can and should be used for different purposes, and identifying what works where can be defined with regular communication with supply chain partners, experimenting with different types of content and channels, setting certain objectives for marketing, and finding right metrics to measure if the objectives are achieved with certain marketing efforts or not. Based on both the theoretical and empirical part of the study, helping the customer rather than selling to the customer appears to be one of the key elements for success in B2B field nowadays. In addition, since importance of long-term relationships was also recognized, marketing strategy should focus on long-term relationship building and avoid focusing on short-term selling goals. Long-term strategies also enhance the brand building of the company, and digital content marketing is great for creating brand awareness and trusted brand status if done correctly. Furthermore, having an established strategy for digital content marketing and its objectives will increase the likelihood for success.

The findings of this study suggest certain activities for the case company regarding their digital content marketing. Dealers had differing opinions regarding the website design, as many stated that it is good or really good, and some mentioned that it could be better. One way of updating the website could be further optimizing the content based on which country is selected. However, this would require more feedback from dealers and customers, as eight dealers each from different country is not enough data to justify drastic changes. YouTube, Facebook, and LinkedIn were recognized as the three main social media channels for dealers. YouTube should be used to create content, and Facebook and LinkedIn to share different forms of content, connecting with business partners, and publishing information regarding different events the company is attending, as well as sending invitations if the event is organized by the company. The case company should be more active on social media, and try to create content more frequently and attract larger audience.

Regular email newsletter to dealers could be used to keep them updated on any vital information, as well as keeping the brand name of the supplier visible, as some of the dealers represents multiple brands, and in some cases, content of the newsletter can be further shared and discussed with customers. The frequency of the newsletter should be between once a month to once a quarter, depending on future feedback and how much content can be created regularly, as there is no value in newsletters without appealing content. Developing applications for selling or supporting selling are not essential at the moment, but it is increasingly important in B2B in general, and thus cannot be ignored. As

personal selling approach is still vital, different ways of utilizing digital content and channels to make personal selling more effective should be considered. Figure 10 shows a framework for digital content marketing in a B2B supply chain context based on the empirical findings of the study.

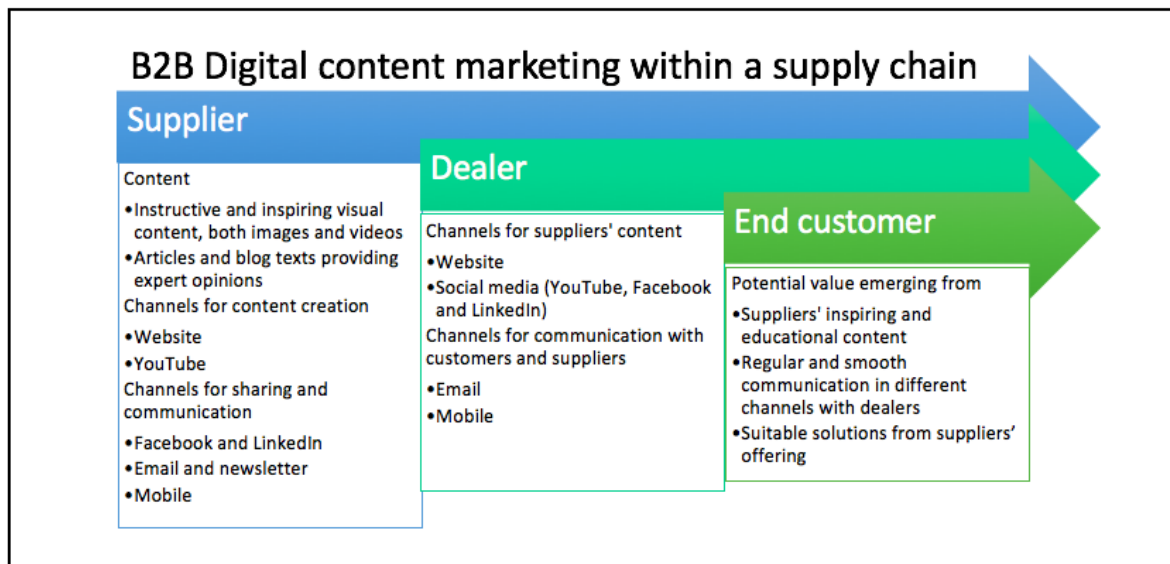


Figure 10. Framework for digital content marketing in a B2B supply chain context

6.3 Limitations and future research

For the purposes of this study, eight dealers of the case company were interviewed, and the digital content marketing efforts of the case company were identified. Dealers represented the same industry and companies of various sizes, as well as geographically different locations, even though mainly from Europe. All dealers were located outside the case company's domestic market. The respondents also had different amount of work experience in their current positions, as well as different history with the case company. Most of the organizations that the dealers represented had rather long history with the case company since only two had relationship of less than ten years, and other one of those had relationship of nine years. However, some of the interviewees were not familiar with some forms of content that the case company is creating to different channels due to limited personal experience with the case company, or due to different selling and marketing approaches that does not currently utilize certain channels. Thus, some of the cases provided much more valuable data than others.

Based on the earlier presented categorization by Stephen and Galak (2012), this study focused mainly on owned and earned media due to focusing on supporting sales of existing dealers rather than acquiring new customers, as well as the request of the case company, and thus this study did not attempt to gain comprehensive view of using content for potential new customers, even though that concept was also discussed to some extent in terms of using digital content and channels for generating website traffic and increasing brand awareness, which can be potential ways of acquiring new customers. Some further studies could focus on paid media, as it is also viable form of content marketing, and as a concept it was merely mentioned in this study.

Even though this study generated results that provide more insight on digital content marketing in B2B supply chain context, and in more detail within the given industry, wider range of respondents would be needed to produce generalizable results and draw more detailed conclusions about the utilization of different forms of content and channels. In addition, multiple opinions from people with different backgrounds from each organization could result to wider spectrum of opinions and practices. Further studies could also include quantitative approach with larger data sample to draw more conclusions about importance of each form of content and channel within certain industry. In addition, as supply chains can be rather complex, studying the dyadic relationship between buyer and seller might not be enough to gain a comprehensive understanding of the state of digital content marketing in supply chain setting. Gathering data from the end customers of the supply chain or suppliers' supplier could also provide deeper understanding for the importance of different forms of content and channels. Furthermore, since this study only focused on one specific industry, and identified the importance of visual content, further studies could include multi-industry data in order to draw generalizations or comparisons between different industries.

As both this study and earlier literature identified the importance of value of digital content that companies create, the determinants of value for customers, as well as how to recognize what customers consider valuable, should be studied in order to help B2B organizations to enhance their content creation, and to build more thorough foundation for academic literature regarding these themes. For companies, recognizing what forms of content and channels are the most important for their customers might present certain difficulties, since there can be notable differences in the usage of content and channels between supply chain partners, which makes difficult to optimize content creation for the supplier. Therefore, further research regarding the state of digital content marketing in both B2B and supply chain context is needed to completely understand the value and nature of digital content.

7 Conclusions

This study sheds light to usage of digital content and different digital channels in B2B context, and in more detail, within a supply chain. Even though digital content and different ways of its utilization are popular topics among practitioners in marketing field, academic research regarding it in B2B context is still quite scarce. Studies that combines digital marketing to supply chain setting and buyer-supplier relationships, are extremely limited. Therefore, combining these concepts for reasonable theoretical framework and literature review was rather challenging. The aim of this study was to contribute to the scarce literature and create foundation for further studies related to the topic. Furthermore, this study attempts to assist companies within B2B sector to understand how different forms of digital content and digital channels can be utilized to enhance marketing activities, as well as supply chain performance. This study was conducted as an exploratory qualitative case study. The qualitative data was acquired by interviewing eight international dealers of the case company. Semi-structured questionnaire was used to present vital concepts and topics for the interviewees without limiting their answers. Each interviewee had different working experience and history with the case company, providing various opinions regarding digital content marketing.

The results of this study emerge from a wide base of different academic research articles, as well as the empirical data acquired from the interviews. Based on these sources, digital content marketing can take various different forms, and the usage of different forms of content can differ a lot between different dealers of a certain company. Digital content can be used to provide information regarding the offering of the company, and educating customers and helping them to solve their problems, which, based on the findings, seems to be more effective than focusing on marketing and advertising. Content coming from the supplier is essential for dealers, as they might have limited resources for creating own content regarding certain brand, and content is key in brand-building. Visual content from the supplier's website is the main way of utilizing content for dealers. However, various channels can be used to share and create content, as well as to communicate with potential and existing customers, and supply chain partners. Regular communication within the supply chain is vital, since it aids to identify customer needs and gain competitive advantage.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. The interview questions

Background:

What is your position in the company?

How many years of experience you have in your current position?

How long relationship you / the company you represent have with the case company?

Digital channels:

What digital channels do you use in your own marketing and why?

What are the most useful digital channels of the case company to support your selling?

How do you see the current marketing efforts of the case company in:

- Web services
 - Website
 - Blog
 - Image Bank
- Social media
 - YouTube
 - Facebook
 - LinkedIn
 - Pinterest
 - Twitter
 - Instagram

In what ways should the case company develop their marketing in these channels?

How the case company could utilize digital channels in the future to better serve their international dealers?

Digital content:

How would you define digital content?

How important do you find digital content marketing in B2B context?

What kind of digital content is most valuable in your business and how do you utilize it in your selling process?

What do you think about user-generated content in different digital channels?

How do you see digital content marketing developing in the future?