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The Readiness of the Norwegian Maritime Industry for Implementation of Marketing Automation:

A multiple case study of four international maritime equipment suppliers in Møre and Romsdal

Masteroppgave i AI521616 - Innovation and Entrepreneurship discipline oriented
Veileder: Mark Pasquine, Ahmad Amine Loutfi

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Abstract

New technology has driven marketing into becoming entirely digital, and companies must therefore implement new digital marketing tools to stay in the game. One new digital marketing tool that has received a lot of attention by marketers is marketing automation (MA). This is because it can create and deliver personalised content and generate new leads, without much human interaction. This is extremely useful for B2B companies, as one of the main challenges experienced in this business model is to generate leads.

Prior research has focused mostly on understanding the concept of MA, and how it works. Only one model exists that explains how to implement MA and what resources and competencies are required for this process. Moreover, there is currently no research on MA in Norway. This marks the purpose of this study, which is to examine the readiness of the Norwegian maritime industry for implementation of MA.

To fulfil this purpose, a qualitative case study approach was chosen for this thesis. This involved running a multiple case study on four international Norwegian maritime equipment suppliers located in Møre & Romsdal. Data was collected through running six semi-structured interviews from the case companies. Questions were formulated to best capture their marketing strategies, goals, activities, resources, and competencies.

This study contributes to the literature by identifying the level of readiness for implementation of MA in the Norwegian maritime industry. The results showed that the Norwegian maritime industry found it challenging to exploit the potential in digital marketing, and that few of the required resources and competencies for implementing MA were identified. This study therefore concludes that the Norwegian maritime industry displays a low level of readiness for implementation of MA.

Key Words: Digital Marketing, Marketing Automation, Content Marketing, Technology Adoption, Norway, Maritime Industry, Business-to-Business, International Business

“Marketing is not the art of finding clever ways to dispose of what you make.

It is the art of creating genuine customer value.”

- Philip Kotler

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Abbreviations	Explanation
IoT	Internet of Things
AI	Artificial Intelligence
ML	Machine Learning
CRM	Customer Relationship Management
SEO	Search Engine Optimization
MA	Marketing Automation
ROI	Return on Investment
ROMI	Return on Marketing Investment
B2C	Business-to-Consumer
B2B	Business-to-Business
IS	Information Systems literature
M&R	Møre & Romsdal (Region in Norway)
GNP	Gross National Product
GCE	Global Centre of Expertise
WSN	Wireless Sensor Network
ESP	Email Service Providers
UGC	User Generated Content
SERP	Search Engine Result Page
WOM	Word-of-Mouth marketing
TAM	Technology Acceptance Model
UTAUT	Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology
TPB	Theory of Planned Behaviour
TOE	Technology-Organization-Environment Model
DOI	Diffusion of Innovation
CMO	Chief Marketing Officer
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CSO	Chief Sales Officer
COO	Chief Operational Officer
ERP	Enterprise Resource Planning system

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter presents the motivation and background for this study, as well as an outline of the research question and structure.

1.1. Motivation and Background

The rise of new age technologies such as the internet of things (IoT), artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), and blockchain, is transforming marketing by enabling more analytics of big data (Kumar, Ramachandran and Kumar, 2021). This has given rise to automation of digital marketing strategies such as, email marketing, social media marketing, content marketing, customer relationship marketing (CRM), and search engine optimization (SEO) (Rautela and Agrawal, 2020; Bala and Verma, 2018; Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). These tools have made it significantly easier to maintain close communication with customers, and provide content that is more tailored to their needs.

The wave of new technology is requiring companies to re-structure their business model, and rethink their marketing strategy by investing in new digital tools (Kumar, Ramachandran and Kumar, 2021). The implementation of new technology is a process all companies will go through at some point. However, for companies who are new to implementing new technology, this can be an overwhelming process. In fact, approximately 70% of all digital marketing projects fail due to lack of staff engagement, support from top management, collaboration, and accountability (Bucky, 2016).

One new digital marketing tool which has received significant attention in recent years is *marketing automation (MA).* MA is a software that can provide tailor made content automatically, based on a specific set of rules (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016). Some of the main benefits with MA are, more personalised content, increased efficiencies, sales and marketing alignment, and greater return on investment (ROI) (Wood, 2015; Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016; Heimbach, Kostyra and Hinz, 2015; Semeradova, 2020).

Companies that are planning to enter new international markets should be prepared to collect, and analyse more customer data. In addition, content must be adapted towards different cultures and norms. This can be both time consuming and challenging to do manually. However, MA has the advantage of freeing up capacity in companies, as it can perform tasks more efficiently than humans (Doyle, 2000; Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016; Murphy, 2018). Hence, a company that operates with MA can therefore reallocate employees towards tasks that require their input (Jena and Panda, 2017; Murphy, 2018), such as building personal relations with new customers in new cultures. This creates a competitive edge for companies using MA, as they are able to build relations with customers in new markets faster than their rivals who do not use MA.

MA is very well suited for business-to-business (B2B) companies, as this business model is characterised by few customers with complex profiles, long purchase processes, and close personal relations (Lilien, 2016; Salesforce, 2021). As the main functionalities of MA is to nurture leads, and build strong customer relations through delivering personalized content, this makes MA highly appropriate in a B2B context (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016).

The potential of MA in B2B is significant, however, this potential remains unexplored as many B2B companies hesitate towards implementing new digital marketing solutions. This is due to factors such as, high cost, high risk, intimidation, lack of competencies, lack of knowledge, and a small marketing team (Semeradova, 2020; ActiveCampaign, 2017). Moreover, B2B companies prefer to communicate with their customers face-to-face, as they consider this more suited for enhancing relationships in complex and long-lasting purchase processes (Järvinen *et al.*, 2012).

Sometimes the decision to not implement MA may be a wise decision, that is, if the company lacks the resources and competencies required by the system. Indeed, if a company becomes over-eager and implements the system without establishing their current marketing and business processes, then this may result in unexpected challenges, forcing the company to abandon the new system, and thereby gaining no ROI (Murphy, 2018). In an effort to understand the technology adoption process, several models have been developed in the information systems (IS) literature. However, there has not yet been a model developed which considers all aspects of the MA implementation process.

This has long been a gap in the MA and IS literature. Nevertheless, a model developed by Murphy (2018) called the “seven antecedents of marketing automation success”, filled this gap through addressing seven key antecedents that should be present when implementing MA in B2B. This model has only been tested once, which was through a single case study in a Finnish context (Hämäläinen, 2020). There is currently no research on MA in a Norwegian context, which is a major gap identified in the literature. Therefore, we will apply the "seven antecedents of marketing automation success" in the context of the Norwegian maritime industry, and assess this industry's readiness towards MA. The reason for this choice of context will be elaborated in the next section.

1.2. Research Context

The research context of our study is the maritime industry in the Møre & Romsdal (M&R) region of Norway. The maritime industry is the second largest export industry in Norway (Forum, 2021), and generated NOK 151 billion towards the Norwegian Gross National Product (GNP) in 2019 (Industri, 2019). The maritime industry in M&R is world renowned for its focus on innovation and technology, and in 2014 it was granted status as Global Centre of Expertise (GCE). The maritime industry consists of a wide range of companies that "*own, operate, design, build, and supplies equipment or specialized services to ships and other floating vessels*" (Jakobsen, 2018, p. 6).

The industry can be divided into four main segments, that is, shipping companies/ship owners, specialised services (ship designers), equipment, and shipyards (Jakobsen, 2018). Among these segments, ship equipment segment has the strongest international focus, whereby 70% of the equipment produced is exported. This illustrates that the foreign demand for Norwegian ship equipment is high, making this segment highly competitive in international markets. In 2018, this segment generated a revenue of NOK 66 billion, and consisted of approximately 18 500 employees, whereas 3800 of are located in the M&R region (Industri, 2019).

The maritime industry is going through a transformation where fossil fuels are to be replaced or complemented with renewable options (Loonela, 2021). This transformation will be further enhanced through the autonomous vessels, where operations are optimized using sensors and IoT on equipment (Mäkitie *et al.*, 2020). While the maritime industry has a long history of adapting and specializing to new global trends, the industry is still experiencing the aftermath of the offshore crisis in 2014/2015. The industry shifted their focus towards the cruise segment, and unfortunately this segment came to a standstill during Covid-19 (Jakobsen, 2020).

Even though the industry has shown an ability to adapt to changes, this is not represented in their digital marketing efforts. The industry still relies heavily on traditional marketing and sales strategies which is dependent on the network of the salespeople, travel, exhibitions, and print magazines. While 85% of B2B marketers consider lead generation as the main marketing goal (Pulizzi, 2016), measuring the effects from expensive traditional marketing remains a challenge. This is about to change through the societally impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Most companies have reconsidered current approaches and there has been a noticeable increase in the use of digital marketing tools among B2B companies (Hu and Olivieri, 2021). While slowly moving away from traditional marketing strategies, the challenge for the maritime industry will be to understand how this new world of digital marketing can benefit them in a competitive and volatile marketplace.

1.3. Research Objectives and Research Question

The primary objective in this study is to identify the level of readiness for implementation of MA in the Norwegian maritime industry. This will be achieved through applying the "seven antecedents for marketing automation success" model towards our multiple case study of four international maritime equipment suppliers located in the M&R region of Norway (Murphy, 2018). With regards to the stated objectives, the following research question has been developed:

> *What level of readiness does the Norwegian maritime industry have for implementation of marketing automation?*

1.4. Thesis Structure

This thesis consists of five chapters, and will be organized as illustrated in figure 1.

Figure 1: Thesis Structure

Chapter 1 presents the motivation and background of this study, and an outline of the research question and structure.

Chapter 2 presents a literature review on new age technologies, digital marketing strategies, and marketing automation. The chapter ends with a presentation of the chosen study framework.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology for this study. The chapter begins by presenting the choice of research approach, followed by the choice of research design and method, as well as the data collection methods. Finally, the approach for analysing the data, and checking for validity and reliability is presented.

Chapter 4 presents the results from the interviews. The chapter is divided into four main sub-chapters, where each sub-chapter is devoted to a case company. Within these sub-chapters, the results are presented in terms of the "seven antecedents of marketing automation success" model by (Murphy, 2018).

Chapter 5 is the final chapter in this study, and contains a discussion of the findings and an answer to the research question. In addition, the implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research are also presented.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter contains a literature review on digital marketing, and begins with a presentation of four new age technologies. This is followed by a review of five digital marketing strategies, and how they are being affected by the new age technologies. Subsequently, a review of the concept and process of marketing automation will be given. Finally, the main technology adoption models will be reviewed, whereby the chosen study framework is presented.

2.1. New Age Technologies

There are four new age technologies which have largely affected the conduct of business, and particularly the conduct of marketing. These are, the *Internet of Things (IoT), Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning (ML),* and *Blockchain*. Blockchain is a database, which allows data to be transferred in a highly secured manner. Blockchain can be split into two bulks, "block" which refers to a set of transactions, and "chain" which refers to cryptographically connected blocks (Kumar, Ramachandran and Kumar, 2021). For the purpose of this study, only IoT, AI, and ML will be discussed.

2.1.1. Internet of Things (IoT)

Internet of Things (IoT) is a data-oriented technology that creates connectivity between devices through the use of sensors, generating a wireless sensor network (WSN) (Kumar, Ramachandran and Kumar, 2021). IoT has developed significantly in recent years, and has successfully integrated the physical world with computer-based systems (De Cremer, Nguyen and Simkin, 2017). Google Home is a classic example of an IoT platform, where it allows users to control their home through their mobile phones, and through voice recognition (Meng *et al.*, 2018). In addition to smart homes, the IoT technology is also found in wearables, smart cities, industrial automation, and so on (Chuah *et al.*, 2016). Baiyere *et al.* (2020, p. 3) defined IoT as:

> "*A system of interconnections between digital technologies and physical objects that enable such (traditionally mundane) objects to exhibit computing properties and interact with one another with or without human intervention".*

This definition neatly sums up the core elements of IoT, and will therefore be applied in this study. IoT provides many benefits for the marketing department. For instance, the marketer can use IoT to identify the customer's product usage, behavioural patterns, and their preferences. This greater insight makes it easier for the marketer to provide personalised customer service, offers, products, and services. In addition, the marketing costs will be reduced, and the efficiency and productivity will be enhanced (Kumar, Ramachandran and Kumar, 2021). IoT allows the company to increase its competitiveness through studying the behaviour, preferences, consumption, and decisions, of the customer (Sestino *et al.*, 2020).

2.1.2. Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is an analytics-oriented technology, which can be found in anything from face and voice recognition to robotic vacuums. At its core, AI allows machines to complete tasks in a human-like way, by processing data and recognizing patterns. Moreover, AI allows machines to learn from experience, and communicate with other machines, as well as with humans (Kumar, Ramachandran and Kumar, 2021).

According to Vlačić *et al.* (2021), there has been a sharp rise in academic studies on AI and its impact on marketing since 2017. Although many AI definitions have been formulated over the years, no consensual definition has yet been reached. This is partly because AI is a technology that is in constant development, hence the way AI was defined five years ago, may not be representative today (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2019). Nevertheless, the existing definitions all share a common understanding of AI, which is "machines learning from experience, adapting to new inputs, and carrying out tasks in a human-like way" (Duan, Edwards and Dwivedi, 2019).

Although no consensual definition has yet been reached, Haenlein and Kaplan (2019, p. 17) provided a definition which neatly sums up the concept: *"a system's ability to interpret external data correctly to learn from such data, and to use those learnings to achieve specific goals and tasks through flexible adaptation"*. This definition will therefore be applied to this study.

AI has received significant attention in the business world, and a survey conducted in 2020 revealed that AI was a top priority to implement in sales and marketing (Vlačić *et al.*, 2021). The marketing department can benefit immensely from AI, as the marketer can apply AI to gain deeper insights into the behavioural patterns of its customers, which then allows the marketer to predict future customer behaviour more accurately. From this, the customer will enjoy more personalised products, services, and communication, and the company will develop closer relations with its customers (Kumar, Ramachandran and Kumar, 2021). This can then translate into greater customer satisfaction and loyalty (Prentice, Dominique Lopes and Wang, 2020).

Another benefit from AI, is that it can free up capacity within the company using it. This is achieved by allowing AI to take over time-consuming tasks previously performed by employees, and reallocating employees to perform more complex tasks that require human input (Kumar, Ramachandran and Kumar, 2021; Paschen, Wilson and Ferreira, 2020). Overall, AI is a cutting edge technology that allows companies to complete tasks in a faster, cheaper, and more efficient way (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2019).

2.1.3. Machine Learning (ML)

Machine Learning (ML) is also an analytics-oriented technology, and is an important part of AI (Kumar, Ramachandran and Kumar, 2021; Paschen, Kietzmann and Kietzmann, 2019). ML comes in different shapes and forms, where the most prominent technique is known as *neural networks.* Neural networks are used to detect possible outcomes through searching for factors of relevance, and refining them. The factors of relevance are based upon algorithms, which require regular adjustment in order to achieve the desired outcome. The algorithms will eventually learn how to adjust these factors without help from humans (Kumar, Ramachandran and Kumar, 2021). In other words, ML applies datasets to train a system to learn without human intervention.

AI and ML are regarded as two sides of the same coin, and therefore share similar benefits. ML can recognize patterns and conduct tasks without human intervention, and combined with AI, a machine or system can be taught to predict future customer behaviour and preferences on its own (Kumar, Ramachandran and Kumar, 2021). ML can be defined as *"techniques that enable computers to learn from experience, i.e. progressively improve their* *performance, without an explicit, pre-defined set of rules that are stored in memory."* (Paschen, Kietzmann and Kietzmann, 2019, p. 1414). This definition is based on the relationship between AI and ML (Paschen, Kietzmann and Kietzmann, 2019), and will be applied to this study.

In the next section, the main digital marketing strategies will be reviewed, and how they are being affected by the new age technologies.

2.2. Digital Marketing Strategies

Philip Kotler, the father of modern marketing, defined marketing as *"the process by which companies create value for customers and build strong customer relationships in order to capture value from customers in return"* (Kotler and Armstrong, 2010, p. 29). In other words, marketing is about building a brand that becomes the preferred choice by target customers (Kotler and Armstrong, 2010).

For decades, marketers have relied on *traditional marketing strategies*, such as television, radio, magazines and newspapers, and billboards (Kumar, 2019). This provides one-way communication from the company to the customers. The problem with this approach is that much of the marketing efforts are wasted, as content lacks personalisation and relevancy towards the target segment (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). However, these strategies can still be useful when combined with more modern strategies.

With the rise of new age technologies and digitalization, a range of *digital* marketing strategies have received major attention by modern marketers. The main strategies are *email marketing, social media marketing, content marketing, customer relationship management (CRM), search engine optimization (SEO),* and *marketing automation (MA)* (Rautela and Agrawal, 2020; Bala and Verma, 2018; Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). In the following sub-chapters, a review of these digital marketing strategies will be given, and their impact of the new age technologies.

2.2.1. Email Marketing

Email is one of the oldest forms of digital communication channels, and was developed by Ray Tomlinson in 1972 (Mullen and Daniels, 2011). The first commercial email was sent by Gary Thuerk in 1978, and today it is one of the most widely used communication channels, with over half of the world's population registered as users (Lorente-Páramo, Hernández-García and Chaparro-Peláez, 2020; Hedley, 2006). Email marketing was defined by Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019, pp. 26-27) as:

> *"Typically applied to outbound communications from a company to prospects or customers to encourage purchase or branding goals. Email marketing is most commonly used for mailing to existing customers on a house list, but can also be used for mailing prospects on a rented or co-branded list. Emails may be sent as part of a one-off campaign or can be automated, event-based, triggered emails, such as a welcome strategy that can be broadcast based on rules about intervals and customer characteristics".*

Email marketing is regarded as one of the most important digital marketing tools in B2B (Järvinen *et al.*, 2012), and can be divided into two categories, *inbound* and *outbound* email marketing. Inbound email marketing refers to incoming emails from customers which require administration. Outbound email marketing refers to campaigns that are sent out to customers, where they are encouraged to sign up to a newsletter, or make a purchase (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). However, a notorious issue with outbound email marketing is the number of spam emails. Emails are regarded as spam when a commercial email is sent to a lead without consent, or when the email is irrelevant for the lead (Grimes, Hough and Signorella, 2007). This can drive leads away, as they become overwhelmed with irrelevant emails that lacks personalization (Bawm and Nath, 2014).

In the research field, significant attention has been directed towards optimizing the effectiveness of outbound emails. For instance, Mogos and Acatrinei (2015) found that the subject of the email should be relevant to the content of the email, and it should capture the eye of the reader and tempt him/her to open it. Moreover, the email should begin with a personalized welcoming, such as "Dear First Name". Sahni, Wheeler and Chintagunta (2018) found that adding the name of the recipient in the subject line, increases the likelihood of the recipient opening the email by 20%, which increases the sales leads by approximately 31%. Moreover, Mogos and Acatrinei (2015) found that the first paragraph should consist of the most important information, as this keeps the reader interested. The body of the email should contain a picture of the company logo and a link to the website. The email should not contain more than 100 words, and it should end with a personalized salutation, as well as the name and position of the contact person for the company.

AI and ML Impact on Email Marketing: Email marketing has become more efficient through the use of *email service providers (ESPs).* ESPs are online automation services which can host email subscription forms, send out emails, track customers, and store customer information (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). Some of the main ESPs are ActiveCampaign, AWeber, Campaign Monitor, Click Funnels, Constant Contact, and MailChimp (Gunelius, 2018; Bawm and Nath, 2014).

2.2.2. Social Media Marketing

Social media has gained widespread use by society today, and it is estimated that over 40% of the world's population will have a user by 2022 (Appel *et al.*, 2020). Social media is a two-way digital communication platform, which can be split into four main groups: social networks, online communities, blogs, and microblogs (Weinberg and Pehlivan, 2011; Lashgari *et al.*, 2018). The term social media is often used interchangeably with *Web 2.0.*, which refers to technologies that allow individuals to communicate, create, and share content through social networks and online communities (Jussila, Kärkkäinen and Aramo-Immonen, 2014). Social media builds upon Web 2.0., and provides internet-based applications that allow users to create content themselves, that is, *user generated content (UGC)* (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

Social media is being increasingly adopted by marketers, as it is a very efficient strategy for reaching out to a wider audience, and building relationships with both new and existing customers (Felix, Rauschnabel and Hinsch, 2017). This way of using social media is referred to as *social media marketing*. Social media marketing was defined by Tuten (2020, p. 19) as:

> *"The utilization of social media technologies, channels, and software to create, communicate, deliver, and exchange offerings that have value for an organization's stakeholders".*

According to Järvinen *et al.* (2012), B2B companies operate primarily with email marketing. However, this same study found that more B2B companies are beginning to use social media tools to drive more traffic to their website, build brand awareness, generate leads, and increase engagement (Järvinen *et al.*, 2012). The main benefits with social media marketing, is that it is low-cost, it provides faster and closer interactions with customers, it enhances the relationship building process, and it increases brand loyalty (Andersson and Wikström, 2017; Lacka and Chong, 2016).

However, it was showcased that B2B companies hesitate towards social media usage, as they prefer to communicate with their customers face-to-face (Lacka and Chong, 2016; Järvinen *et al.*, 2012; Murphy and Sashi, 2018). Indeed, B2B companies consider face-to-face communication more suited for enhancing relationships in complex and long-lasting purchase processes (Järvinen *et al.*, 2012). Other reasons for hesitation towards social media adoption are fear of bad publicity for the company, due to lack of control over communication channels (Andersson and Wikström, 2017; Mangold and Faulds, 2009) lack of "know-how" towards operating with social media (Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011; Järvinen *et al.*, 2012); and not seeing the relevance of it towards their current business model (Järvinen *et al.*, 2012; Lacka and Chong, 2016; Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011).

One possible explanation for the hesitation towards social media, is the lack of understanding of the usefulness of the tool. In fact, Lacka and Chong (2016) and Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides (2011) found that the willingness to implement social media is determined by how a B2B company perceives social media from the outset. If it is perceived as useful for the company, then it is more likely to become implemented. Hesitation towards social media can be overcome through educating staff of the usefulness and benefits of social media marketing. As more B2B companies realise the benefits, then it is expected that more B2B companies will apply social media to their digital marketing strategy. Moreover, it is expected that social media marketing will eventually become an important determinant for survival in the competitive landscape (Siamagka *et al.*, 2015).

AI and ML Impact on Social Media Marketing: AI and ML have also affected social media marketing where they can, for instance, analyse UGC on social media to help identify customer preferences, behaviours, and attitudes (Paschen, Kietzmann and Kietzmann, 2019). Furthermore, AI and ML have also led to the development of *chatbots* on different social media platforms, websites, as well as through emails. A chatbot is simply a chat function that sends out automatic predetermined replies to inquiries (Kumar, Ramachandran and Kumar, 2021; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2019). This helps reduce any unnecessary time spent on replying to each customer manually.

2.2.3. Content Marketing

One of the most important inbound marketing strategies today is *content marketing* (Baltes, 2015). This is closely related to social media marketing, where the purpose of content marketing is to keep the end user engaged with the company (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016; Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). Content can be delivered in many formats, such as videos, pictures, podcasts, webinars, online newsletters, and so on (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2019; Baltes, 2015). Furthermore, content can be delivered to the end user through anything from YouTube to Instagram (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2019; Baltes, 2015).

Content marketing in a B2B context has not received much attention by scholars. The most prominent papers that directly investigate B2B content marketing, are by (Holliman and Rowley, 2014; Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016). As a result of the limited research on B2B content marketing, no consensual definition has yet been established in this context. However, Holliman and Rowley (2014, p. 285) developed a definition which presents a decent overview of B2B content marketing:

> *"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 process, such that it encourages them to convert to a business building outcome."*.

This definition highlights the importance of engaging with the target customers at the right stage in their purchase process. This requires an understanding of the target customers' purchase cycle, which is achieved through interacting and building a relationship with the target customer (Holliman and Rowley, 2014). This definition will be applied to this study, as it provides a decent overview of the concept in a B2B context.

According to Holliman and Rowley (2014) and Järvinen and Taiminen (2016), the main goals and objectives of content marketing in B2B is to generate leads, build brand awareness, engage customers, and increase sales. These goals and objectives can be achieved as long as the content is personalized and relevant for the target segment. AI and ML are very useful in this regard, as they can analyse customer data and provide the marketer with deeper insights into customer preferences and future behaviour (Kumar, Ramachandran and Kumar, 2021).

Overall, content marketing is a very important part of the B2B digital marketing strategy. This was illustrated in the Corporate Executive Board study that took place in 2012, and included more than 1 400 B2B companies. The study found that B2B customers complete almost 60% of a purchase-decision before speaking with the supplier (Adamson, Dixon and Toman, 2012; Holliman and Rowley, 2014). This illustrates how powerful content marketing is for the purchase decision.

2.2.4. Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

Building a strong relationship with customers is one of the most important ingredients for a profitable and sustainable business. This is because the quality of the relationship will have a direct impact on customer loyalty, which will then affect the profitability of a company (Rauyruen and Miller, 2007). A tool that can help build a profitable customer relationship is the *customer relationship management (CRM)* system. This tool has gained widespread use, as it provides much more efficient management of customer relationships. CRM was defined by Kotler and Armstrong (2010, p. 37) as *"the overall process of building and maintaining profitable customer relationships by delivering superior customer value and satisfaction."*. In other words, the CRM system can systematically store customer data, which is then used to build long-term personal relationships (Soltani and Navimipour, 2016).

Some of the main benefits of the CRM system are: improved customer service, understanding of customer's needs, content marketing, and a more efficient sales process

(Rodriguez and Honeycutt Jr, 2011). In order to achieve the desired effect of a CRM system, it should be integrated with the entire company, rather than just the marketing department (Sen and Sinha, 2011). Some of the main challenges with the CRM system are: quality of customer data, customer knowledge, online trust, organizational learning, and infrastructure capability (Soltani and Navimipour, 2016).

Impact of IoT on CRM: CRM is largely affected by IoT, due to its ability to collect large amounts of customer data from several platforms, which provides a richer overview over the customers (Kumar, Ramachandran and Kumar, 2021).

Impact of AI and ML on CRM: Applying AI and ML to the CRM system can yield several advantages. According to Kumar, Ramachandran, and Kumar (2021), AI and ML can automate different CRM tasks, thereby allowing employees within the company to focus more on building relationships and engaging with the customers. Furthermore, AI and ML can help the CRM system with establishing behavioural patterns, and thereby provide automated personalized replies to customers, automated data collection, and so on. This will help speed up the processes such as customer segmentation, and customization of content for customers and leads (Kumar, Ramachandran and Kumar, 2021). Chatterjee et al. (2019) seemed to support this view, and found that AI strengthens the CRM system through offering automation of mundane tasks; lead customization and segmentation; improved customer service; guidance of the sales team; and virtual assistance. Finally, Vlačić et al. (2021) found that by incorporating AI and ML into the CRM system, this will facilitate for greater customer-focus, co-creation, and co-production. Applying AI and ML to the CRM system will therefore be highly beneficial for the company, as it allows employees to focus more on their customers.

2.2.5. Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

When users search for online content, they often resort to a search engine. The main search engines used today are Google, Yahoo, and Bing, all of which provide a list with relevant results related to the search keyword. This list of results is referred to as the *Search Engine Result Page (SERP)* (Swapna and Anuradha, 2018).

The SERP ranks the search results based on several factors, and it is in the interest of the website owner to be among the top three search results (Swapna and Anuradha, 2018). In fact, research shows that the first search result on Google receives about 50% of the clicks, the second receives about 20% of the clicks, and the third receives about 10% of the clicks (Huang, White and Dumais, 2011). It is therefore the aim and goal of most marketers to be in the top three, or at least on the first page on the SERP. This can result in more customers and higher revenues (Sharma *et al.*, 2019).

The way to achieve a higher ranking on the SERP is to utilize a digital marketing strategy called *Search Engine Optimization (SEO).* The SEO strategy can be divided into five main steps: 1.) identification of key words, 2.) setting goals and developing content, 3.) on-page SEO, 4.) off-page SEO, and 5.) monitoring ranking and updating content (Swapna and Anuradha, 2018).

The first step entails identifying relevant keywords for the search page (Swapna and Anuradha, 2018). In this regard, it is essential to select the right keywords for the website, as approximately 94% of users who do not find what they are looking for on the first page of the SERP, will enter a new keyword in the search engine (Sharma *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, competition is reduced by selecting longer keywords, referred to as *long-tail keywords* (Swapna and Anuradha, 2018; Kritzinger and Weideman, 2013). For instance, a search for "boats" is unspecific and it can provide results on almost anything on the SERP. However, a search for a long-tail keyword such as "yachts for sale in Norway 2021" is much more specific, and reduces the search-word competition.

The second step entails studying the content on the competitor's website, and then setting goals and developing content based on this (Swapna and Anuradha, 2018).

The third and fourth step consists of two SEO techniques which help generate a higher website ranking, that is, *on-page SEO* and *off-page SEO*. On-Page SEO refers to factors the marketer can directly influence through the company website (Gupta, Agrawal and Gupta, 2016; Sharma *et al.*, 2019). This entails making the website attractive for visitors, and optimizing the overall user experience (Gunjan *et al.*, 2012). A well-designed website has a large impact on the engagement received from visitors, as well as their purchase behaviour (Flavián, Guinalíu and Gurrea, 2006; Lee and Kozar, 2012).

Off-Page Optimization refers to factors controlled outside of the website. One important factor in this regard, is to create enough *backlinks*. A backlink is simply the website address that is posted on other platforms. To increase the SERP ranking, it is therefore recommended to post as many backlinks as possible (Sharma *et al.*, 2019). For instance, if a company creates a Facebook page in addition to their website, then it can post links on Facebook that redirects their audience to their website.

The fifth and final step entails monitoring the ranking on the SERP, and updating content on the website. These are two important processes for securing a high visibility of the web page. The consequence of not doing this, is that the SERP will register the website as "inactive" or unreliable (Swapna and Anuradha, 2018; Gandour and Regolini, 2011).

Impact of AI and ML on SEO: SEO can be improved through the application of AI and ML. For instance, AI and ML can be used to create a model that illustrates what the search engine will find when searching for a specific topic, rather than a specific keyword. This is extremely useful for marketers, as it saves time and resources, and topics are investigated more in-depth (Paschen, Kietzmann and Kietzmann, 2019). The algorithms generated through ML can be used to analyse the user's response to a search entered into the search engine. If the user remains on the first page of the SERP, then the search may be regarded as successful; if the user turns to the second page of the SERP, then the search may be regarded as unsuccessful (Kumar, Ramachandran and Kumar, 2021).

In addition to the five digital marketing strategies mentioned, the new age technologies are also greatly rooted in *marketing automation (MA)*, which will be introduced in the following section.

2.3. Marketing Automation (MA)

Marketing Automation (MA) was first introduced in 2001 by Professor John D.C. Little. Little argued that there was a need for an automated system that could improve the online user experience, as well as customer loyalty and satisfaction. His solution was therefore MA (Semeradova, 2020; Heimbach, Kostyra and Hinz, 2015). Although MA was introduced by Little, it can be traced back to the late 90s, where a group of marketers cooperated with database developers to automatically segment customer databases into smaller groups using available data. This first developed into CRM, and later into MA (Semeradova, 2020; Wood, 2015). MA is closely related to CRM, email marketing, social media marketing, content marketing, and SEO (Heimbach, Kostyra and Hinz, 2015; Semeradova, 2020; Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016). Moreover, some of the main MA providers are HubSpot, ClickDimensions, and Marketo (Mero, Tarkiainen and Tobon, 2020).

The research field of MA contains only a few academic studies. Most of these studies discuss the concept of MA, such as (Heimbach, Kostyra and Hinz, 2015; Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016; Bagshaw, 2015), and only a few studies discuss how MA should be implemented and utilized by B2B companies, such as (Murphy, 2018; Mero, Tarkiainen and Tobon, 2020). Furthermore, the research field contains only a few definitions of MA. For instance, Mero, Tarkiainen and Tobon (2020, p. 213) defined MA as *«a technology leveraged to improve the effectiveness and efficacy of marketing operations via automated, personalized and analytics-driven activities"*. This definition, however, does not capture the important role played by customers, which is a central part of the MA system. However, the following definition by Järvinen and Taiminen (2016, p. 165) does include the role of customers, as well as the main objectives of MA, and will therefore be applied to this study:

> *"Marketing automation involves a software platform that can be used to deliver content based on specific rules set by users, where the objective is to attract, build and maintain trust with current and prospective customers by automatically personalizing relevant and useful content to meet their specific needs."*.

An essential part of MA is the *personalisation* of outputs in the marketing mix (Heimbach, Kostyra and Hinz, 2015). Personalisation refers to the "*adaptation of the marketing mix to an individual customer based upon the marketer's information about the customer"* (Montgomery and Smith, 2009, p. 131). The marketing mix consists of the 7P's: Product, Price, Place, Promotion, People, Process, and Physical evidence (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). Hence, personalisation refers to collecting and analysing customer data, and delivering tailor made content based on the 7P's. Kumar and Pansari (2016) found that by delivering more personalised content to customers, would increase customer engagement through, for instance, greater word-of-mouth marketing (WOM). However, it can be challenging to personalise content manually if there is a lot of data to analyse. This is why MA is regarded as a useful tool.

The MA system can provide a range of benefits such as, improved decision-making, enhanced productivity, greater customer satisfaction and loyalty, increased conversion rates, and greater return on marketing investments (ROMI) (Semeradova, 2020; Heimbach, Kostyra and Hinz, 2015). Furthermore, Wood (2015) found that MA can provide benefits such as greater efficiency and timeliness that is not possible through human intervention; greater personalized experience for the customer; greater insight into potential customer's experience; and faster responses to shifting demands or external threats. Jena and Panda (2017) found that MA helps convert prospects into customers, increases revenues, increases customer satisfaction, and it saves money and time. Finally, Murphy (2018) and Järvinen and Taiminen (2016) found that MA facilitates for more accurate measurement of marketing strategies, and improves the collaboration between the marketing- and sales department.

2.3.1. MA Process

In 2001, Little (2001) developed a framework that consisted of five levels of system operation. These are as follows, *(1) Data Inputs; (2) Real Time Decision Rules; (3) Updates of the Decision Rules; (4) Feedback to Site Management; and (5) Strategy Choice* (Little, 2001). The first level refers to all data input gathered from online user activity. The second level refers to the real-time decision rules. These rules are designed based on historical data, and are updated through the fine-tuning of parameters, and through adaptive experimentation. At the third level, the marketers will adjust or develop new automation rules if required. At the fourth level, feedback is provided to the site management on elements such as changes in market trends or user trends. Finally, strategic decisions are made based on the feedback (Heimbach, Kostyra and Hinz, 2015; Little, 2001; Semeradova, 2020). Heimbach, Kostyra and Hinz (2015) developed a framework based on these five levels, which described the MA process. This model is illustrated in **figure 2.**

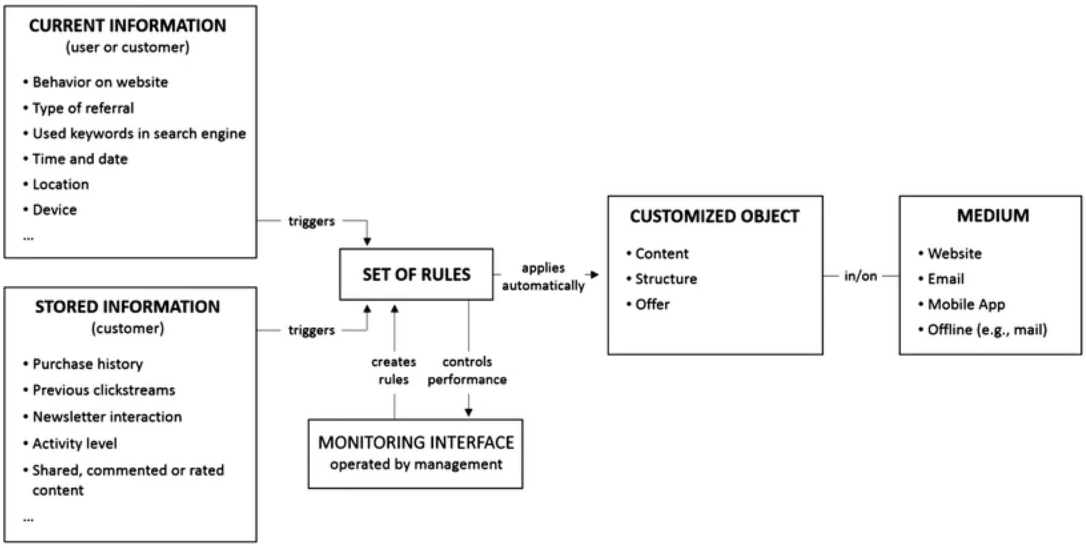

Figure 2: General Framework of Marketing Automation
Source: (Heimbach, Kostyra and Hinz, 2015).

The first two processes, "current information" and "stored information", are linked to the first level in the framework by (Little, 2001). "Current information" refers to the customer information left behind on a website, keywords typed in search engines, the time and date, the location, the type of device, and so on. "Stored information" refers to customer information that is found in purchase history, previous clickstreams, newsletter interaction, and so on (Heimbach, Kostyra and Hinz, 2015). One important prerequisite for the MA system to work is sufficient input data. The more input data the company has on its target segment, the more personalized content the company can provide (Semeradova, 2020).

The information from the two first processes trigger how the rules are designed. This represents the third process, the "set of rules". These rules are developed based on marketing and sales goals, and will trigger when certain actions are performed. For instance, if a potential client signs up for a newsletter, then a rule might be to send him/her a welcome email. More complex rules may be for the system to send out follow up emails to a smaller segment that clicked on a welcome email (Heimbach, Kostyra and Hinz, 2015).

The rules will need to be monitored and fine-tuned as more data is gathered. This will involve an analysis of the current rules, and how they perform. This represents the fourth process, the "monitoring interface". For instance, if one segment generates more sales, the marketing manager can adjust the rule to only trigger for this specific segment. The benefit of this is that the MA system can provide the sales team with more relevant sales leads, and they do not have to waste their time on low quality leads. The optimal approach to monitoring of rules, is for the system to learn how to optimize on its own accord (Heimbach, Kostyra and Hinz, 2015).

Marketing and Sales Funnel: The period before a customer is acquired is a critical period for the company. This period begins with a line of *suspects*, which then turn into *prospect*, which then turn into *leads*, and then finally, they turn into *customers*. Suspects are regarded as all potential customers. Prospects are regarded as customers that fall within the target segment of the company. Leads are regarded as potential customers who are contacted by the company. Customers are those who actually make a purchase with the company. These four stages are part of the traditional sales funnel model (D'Haen and Van den Poel, 2013; Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016).

Järvinen and Taiminen (2016) developed a marketing and sales funnel model (**see figure 3**), which is more extensive than the traditional sales funnel model, as it also includes a marketing aspect. The model consists of five stages which illustrates the process of generating leads through collaboration between the marketing- and sales department.

In the first stage, suspects are identified. They can be identified through contact information left behind on the company's website, such as an email address (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016). The second stage entails *nurturing* and *scoring* the marketing leads. These are two basic components of MA. During the lead nurturing program, a lot of information is gathered from the marketing leads' profile information and online behaviours, which allows the marketer to deliver more personalised content. The marketing lead will continue to be nurtured until it becomes a *warm lead*, that is, a lead who

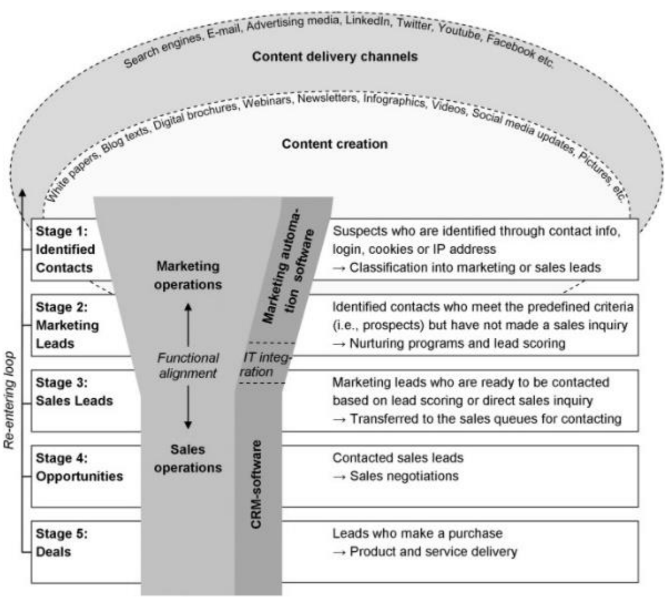

Figure 3: Marketing and Sales Funnel.
Source: (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016)

is ready to be moved to the sales department. The warm lead is then asked whether he/she would like to receive a quote from the sales department. If the marketing lead says yes, then it becomes a sales lead.

Sometimes, the marketing lead may show some interest but hesitate to make inquiries. If this is the case, then the marketing lead will be a candidate for lead scoring. The lead will then be scored based on profile information and online behaviour, in other words, the same criteria's as for the lead nurturing program. If the lead scores high, then it becomes a sales lead and is moved to the CRM system, and becomes the sales department's responsibility. If the lead scores low, then it will not be transferred to the CRM system, as they are regarded as low-quality leads (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016).

In the third stage, the sales leads in the CRM system are placed into "lead queues". Each sales team in a company has responsibility for at least one lead queue. Those leads that are contacted by the sales team, will be regarded as "opportunities" (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016). Stage four and five are regarded as connected. In stage four, the "opportunity" sales leads are contacted, and negotiations begin. Regardless of whether a deal is reached or not, the information received from negotiations is stored in the CRM system. Stage five is reached when a lead makes a purchase. Leads can move up and down the sales funnel at any time, and deals may be broken at any point. However, MA can record all of the customer information, including lost customers, and will carry on nurturing customers into making future purchases (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016).

Overall, the marketing and sales funnel model depicts the lead generation process, where it is assumed that the marketing and sales department collaborate. This is because the two departments are responsible for different areas that are important for the lead generation process. Marketing is responsible for content delivery, whereas sales is responsible for following up the leads. Moreover, the two departments usually operate with different systems, hence, for the marketing- and sales funnel to work, the two systems must become integrated (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016). Without integrating the two systems, then the company risks missing out on valuable leads, and thereby fails to meet the company's revenue goals (Patterson, 2007). This misalignment can result in conflicts between the marketing and sales department, where sales may blame marketing for generating low-quality leads, and marketing may blame sales for lack of lead follow-up (Järvinen and

Taiminen, 2016). By aligning the two departments, this may improve sales efficiency and increase revenues (Patterson, 2007).

2.3.2. Review of Adoption Models

There are several factors that may affect a company's decision to implement a new system such as MA. In that regard, the information systems (IS) literature provides several theories and models on technology adoption, which can be split into two main categories, *1. technology adoption based on preceding factors, and 2. technology adoption as an ongoing process.*

1. Technology adoption based on preceding factors leading towards a choice

This category includes models which review antecedents and factors that drives an employees or an organisation, to adopt a new technology or system.

Technology adoption models that review adoption among employees in the organisation include, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), (TAM2), (TAM3), Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), and Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Mero, Tarkiainen and Tobon, 2020; Tajvidi and Karami, 2021). These models include factors such as age, intention of use, voluntariness of use, perceived ease of use, experience, job relevance, and so on (Venkatesh and Bala, 2008; Venkatesh *et al.*, 2003). Some of these models overlap, however, they all try to identify how and if an individual will use new technology.

Technology-Organization-Environment model (TOE) considers technology adoption among organisations, and reviews factors such as, technology readiness, competency, organisation size, communication processes, and expected benefits (Tornatzky, Fleischer and Chakrabarti, 1990).

The only MA related adoption model within this category is one developed by Biegel (2009). Biegel (2009) proposed ten pre-implementations steps towards adoption success, and include, 1). senior-level steering team for control and project scoping, 2). project team 3). assess current state of marketing operations 4). determine base metrics 5). identify software vendor that facilitate with the needs 6). map a "future state" and assess feasibility 7). select vendor that facilitate towards “future state” 8). outline a detailed implementation process and schedule with short term, results-oriented objectives 9). implementation team headed my marketing 10). communicate the plan and gain commitment throughout all levels of the organisation. Although these steps are comprehensive, they do not capture the success factors related to the post-implementation of MA.

2. Technology adoption as an ongoing process

This category includes models which review both preceding antecedents and factors, as well as factors after the implementation process. Furthermore, these models are divided into stages and phases.

Rogers (1983) identified five stages in the adoption process: agenda-setting, matching, redefining/restructuring, clarifying, and routinizing. Damanpour (1991) summarized these findings and suggested that these stages could be divided into an *initiation phase,* and an *implementation phase*. In the initiation phase, the preceding factors are considered and evaluated before an adoption decision is made. In the implementation phase, the use of the system is evaluated, and adjustments are made if needed.

Different phases in the adoption process are also identified by (Premkumar and Roberts, 1999)**,** who listed the five following phases 1. awareness; 2. persuasion; 3. decision; 4. implementation; and 5. confirmation. While Cooper and Zmud (1990) and Del Aguila-Obra and Padilla-Meléndez (2006) divided the process into six different stages, 1. initiation; 2. adoption; 3. adaptation; 4. acceptance; 5. routinization, and 6. infusion.

There is no clear consensus in the literature in terms of the number of stages or phases for implementation. Nevertheless, the commonalities among the second group of models are that they distinguish between the stages leading up to the choice of adoption (initiation), and the stages post implementation (implementation). This distinction is often not made in the first group of models, as they mainly focus on the initiation phase (Mero, Tarkiainen and Tobon, 2020).

Based on the two stages of initiation and implementation, Mero, Tarkiainen and Tobon (2020) created a MA maturity model where they identified three stages in the adoption of

MA: 1. sensemaking; 2. structuring; and 3. reforming. While this model considers success factors for MA implementation, the focus was directed towards the post-implementation phase only (Mero, Tarkiainen and Tobon, 2020).

Another two-staged framework is the “seven antecedents of marketing automation success” by Daniel Murphy (Murphy, 2018). Murphy (2018) established factors that were present in companies who succeed in MA implementation, and factors that were lacking in those who fail. Murphy identified seven key antecedents for successful implement of MA (**see figure 4**). These antecedents can be split into two main phases, “pre-implementation” and “post implementation” (Murphy, 2018).

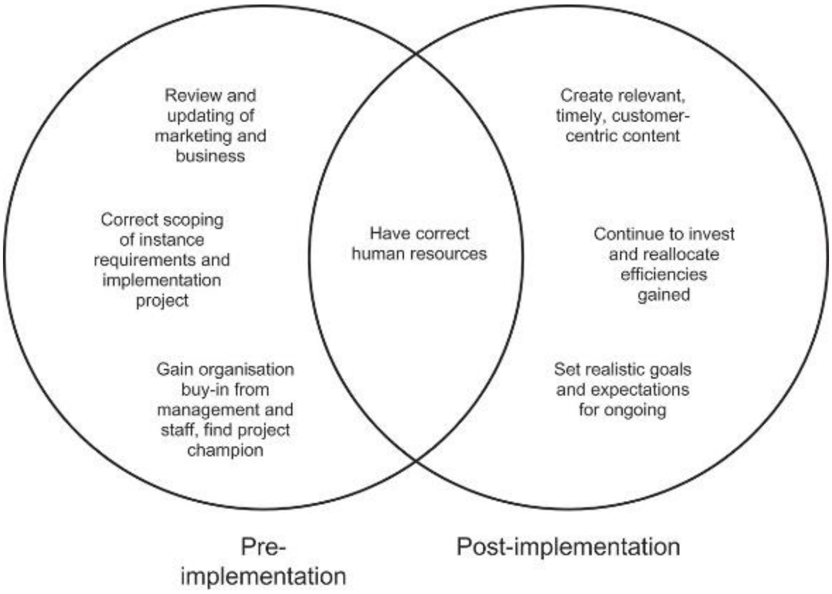

Figure 4: The Seven Antecedents of Marketing Automation Success.
Source: (Murphy, 2018)

The pre-implementation phase includes, *1. review of current marketing and business processes 2. scoping requirements of the implementation project* and *3. organizational buy-in and project champion.* These antecedents can be regarded as part of the initiation phase.

The post-implementation phase includes, *4. create relevant, timely, customer-centric content, 5. continue to invest and reallocate efficiencies gained,* and *6. set realistic goals and expectations for ongoing success.* These antecedents can be regarded as part of the implementation phase described in chapter 2.3.2. Finally, the seventh antecedent, *7. correct human resources*, plays an important role in each of the six antecedents mentioned.

The “seven antecedents of MA success” model is the only identified model that covers both the initiation, and the implementation phase of technology adoption in a MA context. Moreover, it is the only model identified which directly considers antecedents for implementation of MA, and that considers the importance of content creation. This model will therefore serve as the framework for this thesis. In the following chapter, a more detailed description of the model will be given.

2.3.3. Seven Antecedents of Marketing Automation Success

This section presents the seven antecedents of MA success. The pre-implementation phase will first be presented, followed by the post-implementation phase.

Pre implementation Phase

1. Review and Development of Internal Marketing and Business Processes

Any company considering to implement MA should realise that it will not automatically fix their current problems (Wood, 2015; Murphy, 2018). The first step towards a successful MA implementation is therefore to conduct an internal marketing and business audit (Hall, 2017; Murphy, 2018). The audit should map out the current marketing processes and activities, and current marketing strengths and weaknesses. This includes a review of analogue and digital activities, and any metrics that measure how the activities perform towards the current marketing goals. Key metrics are conversion rates, traffic to key content pages, email opening ratios, and any other data that can identify or result in a sales lead. The latter should be combined with an analysis of current, and future customer profiles (Biegel, 2009; Doyle, 2000; Wood, 2015).

The audit should also identify the current marketing and IT skills and capabilities present among the staff. MA implementation can often result in unforeseen organizational and managerial consequences, and the full extent of this will be unclear in the pre-implementation phase (Biegel, 2009). The ability to take managerial and organizational implications into account has shown to be an important success factor when implementing technology (Keens and Barker, 2009; Murphy, 2018; Luftman, Lewis and Oldach, 1993).

The review should end with a consolidation and analysis of the findings, where marketing goals and objectives should be clearly established. This is also the foundation of the scoping phase where the company will identify software functionalities and requirements of the MA implementation (Biegel, 2009; Murphy, 2018).

2. Correct Scoping of Instance Requirements and Implementation Project

In the review phase the goals of the marketing activities are identified. The scoping phase builds upon these findings, and reviews *software functionalities, choice and cost of software*, and *implementation goals and timeline* (Murphy, 2018; Biegel, 2009).

Software Functionalities: Whether the marketing goal is to increase brand awareness, lead conversion, or align the sales and marketing department, it is essential to identify which functionalities can enhance current marketing activities, and contribute towards the marketing goals. (Biegel, 2009; Nasir and Sahibuddin, 2011; Murphy, 2018). For instance, a functionality of the MA system may be to integrate email with a CRM system.

Choice and cost of software: The next step is to identify which MA solutions can provide the desired functionalities. Some of the high-end MA solutions offered in the marketplace can potentially connect every single business process in a company (Jena and Panda, 2017). A challenge is to not go for a to complex solution with many “nice to have” functionalities, as this can add to the layers of complexity and make it harder to realise the project (Biegel, 2009).

Implementation goals and timeline: It is also important to set small subgoals and objectives, as this will allow the implementation team to track their progress, and it will hold them accountable to a time schedule. Study shows, that projects with clearly defined goals on a realistic time schedule can increase the chance of success with new software projects (Nasir and Sahibuddin, 2011; Biegel, 2009).

3. Gain Organisational Buy-In and Find a Project Champion

This antecedent considers the importance of gaining organizational buy-in, finding a project champion, and training the employees.

Organizational Buy-In: Support from the whole company is essential for succeeding with implementation of new technology. This includes support from top management, and employees who will be affected by the implementation (Whittaker, 1999; Murphy, 2018). Approval and support from top management is essential for securing enough funding for the project (Lin *et al.*, 2018; Murphy, 2018). A lack of involvement and support can cause the project to become unsuccessful (Whittaker, 1999; Murphy, 2018).

Murphy (2018) recommended developing a realistic plan for the project in the scoping phase in order to achieve the buy-in of the company. Furthermore, it was also recommended that departments across the company are aligned in order to succeed with the project, and particularly the marketing and sales department.

Project Champion: The success of a project is highly dependent upon identifying a charismatic, competent, and influential project leader (Lin *et al.*, 2018; Shao, Feng and Wang, 2017; Murphy, 2018). Moreover, research shows that project leaders have a positive effect on performance, social influence, effort, and facilitating conditions (Shao, Feng and Wang, 2017; Neufeld, Dong and Higgins, 2007; Murphy, 2018). As the project champion is responsible for the success of a project, it is therefore essential that the company invests in developing leadership skills for the project leader(s) (Rezvani, Dong and Khosravi, 2017; Murphy, 2018).

Training: MA will usually require new competencies and skills among staff in the company. Project leaders will need to receive training on leadership, the marketing and sales department will need education in system usage, and the IT staff will need additional skills within technology. The level of implementation success is therefore highly dependent upon the company's ability to provide training for their staff (Murphy, 2018).

Moreover, study shows that the attitude of employees towards a new system affects their willingness to work with it (Jones, Sundaram and Chin, 2002; Murphy, 2018). This was also highlighted in chapter 2.2.2., in terms of perceived usefulness of social media marketing (Lacka and Chong, 2016; Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011). As the level of perceived usefulness is highly influenced by the level of knowledge, it is therefore important that employees receive training on the benefits and use of a MA system (Siamagka *et al.*, 2015; Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011; Murphy, 2018).

Post Implementation Phase

4. Create and Deliver Relevant and Timely Content

This step establishes the importance of delivering relevant and timely content. With everything digital, most customers expect to receive content that is tailored to their needs (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016; Wood, 2015). Delivering personalized content can provide several benefits, for instance, high quality sales leads (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016). Thus, it is important that companies devote enough time to this. However, many companies struggle to define how to deliver more personalized content, and end up delivering content that is either too generalised or too product-focused (Murphy, 2018; Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016). This can result in the loss of customers, as they find the content irrelevant. However, MA can simplify the content development process through aligning the marketing and sales systems, and through lead nurturing and lead scoring (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016; Murphy, 2018).

Overall, Murphy (2018) considered the following as best-practice approaches for content marketing: prioritize solving customer problems before promoting products and/or services; acquiring feedback from customers; and applying analytics to comprehend what content is considered relevant by customers and leads. By following these best practice approaches, the company can experience an increase in lead generation (Murphy, 2018).

5. Set Realistic Expectations and be Patient

This antecedent underlines the importance of setting realistic expectations towards MA, and not falling into the trap of believing it will magically resolve all marketing problems. Any problems should be resolved *before* implementing MA (Wood, 2015; Murphy, 2018). Moreover, the chief marketing officer (CMO), who is usually the one in charge of implementing new marketing tools, tends to be under a lot of pressure during implementation. Hence, the CMO will naturally want to show good results from the investment as soon as possible. In fact, research shows that CMOs tend to expect revolutionary results to appear as early as six months. However, in most cases it takes at least twelve months for results to appear from a MA implementation (Murphy, 2018; Wood, 2015).

The best practice approach in this antecedent is therefore to set small goals, rather than one large goal. These goals should be aligned with their implementation timeline, described in antecedent two (Biegel, 2009; Murphy, 2018). Moreover, it is recommended that the company experiments to gain additional results (Murphy, 2018).

6. Continue to Invest and Reallocate Efficiencies Gained

Organizational efficiency is one of the key advantages of MA, as the system can perform tasks more efficiently than humans (Doyle, 2000; Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016; Murphy, 2018). Instead of letting the employees go, Murphy (2018) suggested to relocate the employees towards tasks that require their input, such as content marketing, which can further enhance the performance of the MA system (Jena and Panda, 2017; Murphy, 2018). As companies begin to operate with more resource intensive features in the MA system, they should further invest where there is a suitable cost-benefit (Jena and Panda, 2017). This can be more functionalities, technology, or human resources (Murphy, 2018).

7. Human Resources

Benz and Tanner (2017) found that automated systems cannot and will not replace human resources. The implementation of an MA system requires human oversight, developers, content creators, analysts, and MA specialists. Moreover, it is vital that the employees have the right competencies for handling this new system. Human resources is a prerequisite for MA success, and it has a central role in both the pre- and post-implementation stage of MA (Murphy, 2018).

Murphy (2018) also explained that as the implementation of MA will often require new resources and competencies, it is therefore important that management offers the right training for their employees (Murphy, 2018; Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016). If management believes they need more employees, then those new employees must have existing knowledge on MA and digital marketing to complement the knowledge of current employees (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016; Murphy, 2018). Moreover, a company is encouraged to consider outsourcing if it lacks the required inhouse competencies, and it is logistically or financially challenging to train existing employees, or hire new employees (Jena and Panda, 2017; Murphy, 2018).

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter presents the methodology of the study. The chapter begins by presenting the choice of research approach, followed by the choice of research design and method, as well as the data collection methods. Finally, the approach for analysing the data, and checking for validity and reliability is presented. The structure of this chapter is based on the research process developed by Sreejesh, Mohapatra and Anusree (2014), as illustrated in figure 6.

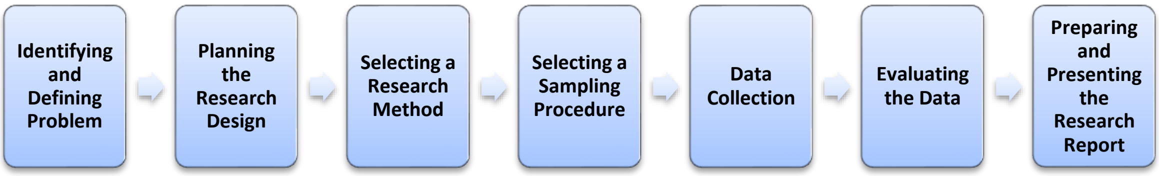

Figure 6: Steps in the Research Process – based on Sreejesh, Mohapatra and Anusree (2014).

3.1. Research Approach

The next thing to consider is the research approach, which consists of *induction* and *deduction*. Induction is applied when the aim is to develop a new theory, whereas deduction is applied when the aim is to test an existing theory. Deduction is the most common approach to take in natural sciences, as existing laws and theories set the foundations for the research (Saunders, 2007). As this study is using an existing model to assess the readiness of the Norwegian maritime industry for international MA implementation, the study therefore operates with a deductive approach.

3.2. Research Design

Research design refers to the frame of the study and how the research will be carried out. The choice of research design should be made based on the research question and objective.

There are three main types of research design, *exploratory, descriptive,* and *causal*. Exploratory research is used when an issue or a problem requires understanding first. This method does not provide conclusive results, however, they can serve as a foundation for future research where a conclusive result can be reached (Sreejesh, Mohapatra and Anusree, 2014). Descriptive research is conducted when the aim is to describe the characteristics of people, situations, or events (Sreejesh, Mohapatra and Anusree, 2014; Saunders, 2007). Causal research, also called explanatory studies, entails studying a situation to establish a "cause-and-effect" relationship between variables (Saunders, 2007; Sreejesh, Mohapatra and Anusree, 2014). The research design used in this study is descriptive. The reason for this is because we want to describe the characteristics of the marketing operations in the Norwegian maritime industry. Moreover, descriptive research questions tend to begin with "who", "what", "where", "how", and "when" (Tripodi and Bender, 2010). As our research question begins with "what", then this also supports the decision of using descriptive research.

3.3. Research Method

The research method refers to the different approaches used for collecting and analysing data. The first thing to determine in this regard, is whether the study will take a *quantitative*, *qualitative*, or *mixed methods* approach (Saunders, 2007). Quantitative research is expressed in a numerical form, and is used for large samples where the aim is to test a specific set of hypotheses (Saunders, 2007; Sreejesh, Mohapatra and Anusree, 2014). Qualitative research is expressed in a non-numerical form, and is used for understanding people's thoughts, opinions, and feelings towards a concept (Saunders, 2007; Walle, 2015). Mixed method refers to the combined use of both quantitative and qualitative research (Saunders, 2007).

With the research design of this study being descriptive, then any of the above-mentioned techniques are appropriate. We regard a qualitative approach as the best option for answering our research question and meeting our objectives. This is because the nature of our research question and objectives requires us to understand the people and processes of Norwegian maritime companies, before running statistical analyses. Furthermore, the qualitative method allows us to probe the respondents, and thereby reach further insights on a topic. This degree of freedom is not present in quantitative research, as one must stick with pre-determined questions and accept the answer received (Sreejesh, Mohapatra and Anusree, 2014).

3.3.1. Choice of Method: Case Study

There are many types of research strategies to choose from within qualitative research. The choice of research strategy should be made based on the research question and objectives of the study. In this regard, we selected *case study* as our research method, and is defined as *«an empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon (e.g. a "case"), set within its real-world context – especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident."* Yin (2011, p. 4). In other words, a case study is appropriate when there is no boundary between the context the respondents are placed within, and the phenomenon being studied. With no boundaries present, then the researcher can gain a better understanding of the phenomenon. We regard this as very important when attempting to understanding the current digital marketing processes in Norwegian maritime companies. Moreover, the case study approach can also provide answers to research questions that begin with "why", "what", and "how", making this approach well-suited for answering our research question (Saunders, 2007).

The case study approach can be divided into two dimensions: *single case vs. multiple case*. A single case study is used when the desire is to study a unique case, or a phenomenon which has never been studied before. A multiple case study is used when the desire is to compare results, or to generalise (Saunders, 2007). As the aim is to provide a generalised conclusion for the Norwegian maritime industry, then a multiple case study is the most suitable approach. When we were selecting our case companies, it was important that they differed from one another, as this would allow us to compare and establish trends. In that regard, we selected four international B2B maritime equipment suppliers located in the M&R region of Norway. These four case companies differed in terms of size, organization structure, products, and services.

3.4. Data Collection Methods

The next step is to select methods for collecting data for the study. The main types of data collection methods for case studies are: interviews, observation, documentary analysis, and questionnaires (Saunders, 2007). In this regard, we chose interviews as the main source for our data, to understand the current marketing processes from the viewpoint of the staff. We also collected data from secondary sources to support the data from the interviews.

3.4.1. Semi-Structured Interviews

Under the umbrella of interviews, there are three types: *unstructured, structured,* and *semi-structured.* Unstructured interviews are informal and highly flexible, where the interviewer will raise questions that have not yet been pre-determined. Apart from having an idea of the topics that need covering, the interviewer will not have planned any particular set of questions in advance. As a result, is the interviewee who will be in charge of the direction of the interview. Structured interviews, on the other hand, are highly standardised. In this regard, the interviewer will follow a list of pre-determined questions, and the interviewee will have less freedom of response. Structured interviews are more commonly found in quantitative research. Finally, in semi-structured interviews, the interviewer will have developed a list of pre-determined questions and themes, however, these do not have to be followed as strictly as in a structured interview. Indeed, the interviewer may find that certain questions are less relevant for one interviewee than another, and may therefore be skipped. Conversely, the interviewer may add a follow-up question which was not pre-determined. This type of interview is regarded as non-standardised (Walle, 2015; Saunders, 2007).

When selecting one of the above, it is important to consider which of them will provide the best data for answering the research question and objective. We consider semi-structured interviews to be the most appropriate, because it gives us the freedom to alter the questions raised, and it allows us to probe the interviewees for more details on a specific subject (Sreejesh, Mohapatra and Anusree, 2014).

We only ran one round of interviews, as our agenda was not to compare results over time, as is the case with a *longitudinal study*, rather, we wanted to study the current situation of each case company, making this a *cross-sectional study* (Saunders, 2007). The interviews were conducted on a “one-to-one” basis, meaning we interviewed one respondent at a time. This was performed through a video communication platform called Zoom. Ideally, we would have preferred to have performed the interviews in-person, as this facilitates for more personal contact with the interviewees (Saunders, 2007). However, this was not possible due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, we did require all interviewees to have their cameras switched on. Due to GDPR regulations, only the audio was recorded.

Each of the representatives have been anonymized, as well as their company name. To disguise the respondents, we have referred to them as “respondent A1”, “respondent B1”, and so on. Their job titles have also been disguised, where we applied generalised job titles such as Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Marketing Officer (CMO), Chief Sales Officer (CSO), and Chief Operational Officer (COO). To disguise the companies, we have referred to them as “company A”, “company B”, and so on. An overview of the interviews can be found in **table 1** below.

Company	Respondent	Job Title	Time and Date
A	A1	CMO	18. March 2021, 10.00 – 12.00
	A2	COO	19. March 2021, 08.30 – 10.00
B	B1	CEO	19. March 2021, 13.00 – 14.30
C	C1	CMO	25. March 2021, 11.00 – 12.30
D	D1	CMO	24. March 2021, 12.30 – 14.00
	D2	CSO	29. March 2021, 09.30 – 11.00

Table 1: Overview of the Case Interviews.

Interview Questions: When formulating our interview questions, it is recommended to do this based on themes (Saunders, 2007). In our case, we based our themes on the seven antecedents from Murphy (2018) model. For instance, antecedent two was the “scoping” theme, thus, we developed interview questions that would determine whether the case companies had done sufficient scoping. In total, we developed 21 interview questions, and we also asked 10 probing questions. We estimated the duration of the interviews to last between 60 to 90 minutes.

When formulating interview questions, there are certain criteria’s to be met: no assumptions, open to both positive and negative experiences, allow for deep and complex answers, and focus on the interview theme (Roberts, 2020). We formulated the questions based on these criteria’s, and ensured that none of the questions would influence the interviewee, or limit his/her chance to answer freely.

3.4.1.1. Interview Guide

In preparation for the interviews, we developed an interview guide which we sent to the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD), and to the respondents before the interview (**see appendix 1**). The interview guide serves as a manual for the interviewer and interviewees, and it should contain a list of themes to be covered in the interview, as well as the interview questions. The use of themes helps clarify the direction and purpose of the study, and helps the interviewees with gaining an overview of the agenda for the interview. Moreover, it is important that the interview questions are listed in an order that makes sense to the respondent, and that the language is clear (Saunders, 2007). Our interview guide began with a presentation of the themes to be covered in the interview, followed by practical information for the respondents. Before beginning the interview, we asked each interviewee for permission to take voice recordings.

3.4.2. Secondary Data

Secondary data refers to existing data that has been collected by another individual or company. This type of data can be collected from a wide range of sources such as, books, journals, newspapers, articles, reports, government publications, surveys, documentaries, and so on (Saunders, 2007). To best support the data collected from the semi-structured interviews, and thereby avoid misinterpreting the information received, we gathered data from the case companies' website, social media platforms, and annual results. This data was also used for gaining further insights into the maritime industry both in Norway, and internationally.

3.5. Data Analysis

The data analysis process is split into three parts, the first is *data reduction*, the second is *data display*, and the third is *drawing and verifying conclusions* (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Saunders, 2007). Data reduction entails summarising and simplifying the data so that conclusions can be drawn (Saunders, 2007). Some of the suggested methods for data reduction are, creating summaries, memos, coding, and categorising data. The reduced data can then be displayed through networks and/or matrices. This makes it much easier to analyse and identify relationships, patters, trends, or themes, and draw conclusions (Saunders, 2007; Miles and Huberman, 1994).

After the audio was transcribed, we ended up with a lot of text that required sorting. Thus, we developed codes for which relevant parts of the text was placed under. For instance, some of the codes developed were “content marketing experience”, “marketing automation understanding”, “human resources”, “current resources”, and so on. By placing parts of the transcription into these categories, we gained a much clearer overview of the data. Next, we categorised the codes based on the “seven antecedents of marketing automations success” model (Murphy, 2018). For instance, “current resources” was placed under antecedent one, “review and development of internal marketing and business processes”.

3.6. Validity and Reliability

Before commencing with the actual data analysis, it is important to check the data for *validity* and *reliability*.

Validity refers to the accuracy and representability of the data, and can be split into two main types: *internal validity* and *external validity* (Sreejesh, Mohapatra and Anusree, 2014). Internal validity refers to whether the findings of the study are credible (Miles and Huberman, 1994). External validity refers to the extent to which the results are generalisable (Saunders, 2007). Although qualitative research offers many advantages in terms of flexibility, it cannot generalise for a whole population if only a few cases have been used (Yin, 2011; Saunders, 2007). However, we selected four case companies, consisting of six respondents, which makes it possible to generalise.

In terms of internal validity, six respondents with roles as CEO, CMO, CSO, and COO were interviewed. With these roles, they were able to provide information on the company’s current digital marketing strategy. Moreover, all the respondents had previously been involved in digital implementation projects, and were therefore able to share their experience. This thereby enhances the credibility of this project.

In terms of external validity, this is regarded to be on a medium to low level. The sample for this study was selected using *convenience sampling*, which entails selecting cases based on those that are easily obtainable. Convenience sampling is a *non-probability sampling technique*, which entails selecting cases from a population randomly. In other words, the sample selected may not be representative of the entire population. Therefore, one cannot use this technique to answer research questions in a statistical manner. This technique is therefore mostly used in case studies, as it still allows the researcher to reach generalised conclusions about a population (Saunders, 2007). Although the case companies were selected based on convenience, we did also consider their size. Moreover, we selected the respondents based on the job roles/departments that were our focus for the study.

Reliability refers to whether the data collection methods would provide the same results if the study were to be conducted again (Saunders, 2007). In this regard, it is important to consider whether the data collection methods are the without errors, and can produce consistent results. To achieve consistency in our data, we tried to run each interview in the same fashion. The use of an interview guide helped with this. Moreover, we had agreed in advance that one of us would raise the interview questions, whilst the other would take care of the introductory statement. All the interviews were conducted through Zoom, and everyone had their camera on. In addition, secondary data was used to support the findings. When designing the interview questions, we avoided any questions that would affect the replies of the respondents, and cause bias.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter presents the results and discussion from the interviews. This chapter is divided into four main sub-chapters, where each sub-chapter is devoted to each case company. Within these sub-chapters, the results are presented according to the "seven antecedents of marketing automation success" model by Murphy (2018).

For the purpose of simplicity, there will not be a separate category for the seventh antecedent "human resources". Rather it will be discussed within each of the six antecedents in the pre- and post-implementation phase.

4.1. Company A

Company A has around 20-30 employees and an annual turnover of approximately NOK 70 million. Moreover, the company currently operates in Nordic countries only. They supply maintenance related products to vessels and constellations that operate in harsh conditions. One of their selling points is to provide efficient logistic solutions and close customer relations. They are currently implementing a new CRM system with some MA features.

1. Review and Development of Internal Marketing and Business Processes

Respondent A1 explained that their marketing strategy is aligned with their business idea, which is to deliver solutions and quality maintenance products. Moreover, the respondents explained that they want their experience, competencies, and expertise to be their customer's safety. Respondent A2 explained that they do not have any formal marketing strategy, however, they aim to deliver their stories to their customers. All of this is communicated through their website, Facebook, and LinkedIn. Company A operates with SEO, and have experimented with email newsletters via Mailchimp. In addition, they still use printed advertisements, however respondent A2 believed they do not always reach out to their target customers through this medium.

"It is first to highlight more of the good stories we experience and achieve each day…This is what we work actively with. It is not exactly a marketing strategy, we have nothing written down saying "this is how it is", but it is something we are working on." – Respondent A2

Their marketing team consists of respondent A1, who is responsible for marketing in three companies. With three companies, and an ever-evolving demand for new skills in digital marketing, the respondent experienced the role as challenging. Respondent A2 also considered this a challenge.

"Considering my role of working alone, and the technological developments that are going on, it is challenging." – Respondent A1

"When you have one person who is in charge of marketing operations for multiple companies… then it will be challenging to direct 100% dedication towards company A." – Respondent A2

It was registered from both respondents that they do not log any metrics from their digital marketing activities systematically. Respondent A2 explained that they only measure the number of new customers.

"We do not have any specific metrics today. In that regard, I believe we are operating at a very narrowed level in terms of the number of opportunities out there." – Respondent A2

Respondent A1 regarded their established role in the market and their brand building efforts, as their main marketing strengths. Respondent A2 regarded their small size to be a strength, as this makes it easy for them to adapt to shifts in market trends. Moreover, respondent A2 also regarded their large budget to be a strength, as it enables them to try out new and more efficient solutions.

Company A has several ongoing implementation projects, many of which respondent A1 felt were challenging to work with. In particular, the respondent found it was challenging to get the new IT-infrastructure to communicate with the old IT-infrastructure. Respondent A1 also mentioned that company A lacks an IT manager, which makes it challenging to keep up with technological changes and new digital solutions. Respondent A1 mentioned the need to outsource to overcome some of the challenges of new implementations, and to compensate for their competency gap within IT and digital marketing. However, due to bad prior experience, the respondent was hesitant to this option.

"We have no IT manager…It is challenging to keep up with technology…It is very time consuming to start learning a new system, which is when an external agency can be useful for relieving the workload, and get things done fast." – Respondent A1

According to the respondents, the main goal of their marketing activities is to increase sales, as well as building brand awareness.

2. Correct Scoping of Instance Requirements and Implementation Project

Respondent A2 explained that the company is currently implementing a CRM system called "Lime", and plan to launch it in May 2021. The respondent placed emphasis on the importance of post-implementation control, and how the time should be used for fine tuning and uncovering any problems or misunderstandings.

"We have set up a time schedule with clear project milestones, sub-goals, and a "go live" date. So, we have set up a project plan in regard to this... Spending time on controlling is extremely important because you can adjust and remove any misunderstandings that might have occurred. In think this is one of the most important things you should do when implementing something new." – Respondent A2

Both respondents from company A hoped the CRM system would help them store and systemise customer data, thereby allowing them to provide more relevant and timely content to their target customers. Moreover, respondents A2 expected the following functionalities: full tracking of emails, phone-calls, meeting points, customer visits, exhibitions, and so on.

Company A is also planning to implement a system called "Ludico", that utilizes AI and ML for analysing large amounts of data. Respondent A2 explained that it can analyse purchase behaviour, identify purchase patterns and customer needs, and identify shifts in trends. The main purpose of the platform would be to improve logistics activities, with functions that can benefit the marketing and sales department. Both respondents believed the CRM system and "Ludico" would help the company achieve their goals.

"*We are considering something called "Ludico". This is a platform that can replace co-workers and perform designated task and analyse data. Gather metadata regarding who is using the products, how often they purchase, and so on… We have a huge amount of* *purchase data going back in time, which might be able to help us identify who we should target with new products."* – Respondent A2

3. Gain Organizational Buy-In and Find a Project Champion

Both respondents believed the communication between top management and employees could improve. However, respondent A1 mentioned that their newly established leader group had improved the communication.

"We have a leader group that meets every 14th day…The leader group was established six months ago. We feel we have gotten a lot out of it. We have developed an activity plan for the year." – Respondent A1

Respondent A2 considered it important to include all staff members when undergoing a change, but added that not everyone is as positive for change. Respondent A1 spoke from experience (a former CRM project), and explained that it is challenging to get people to change. Moreover, both respondents mentioned "age" to affect the degree of openness to change.

"It is when you start working with people and culture that it becomes challenging. Getting people to realise the importance of working with these things is challenging… It requires a lot from management to get all employees on board." – Respondent A1

"There is a lot of change management in this. You may have done something for 10 years, but is this the right way? Can we do this in a smarter, better, and simpler way, that gives you time to do other things? We have a lot of work to do with this." – Respondent A2

Respondent A2 was hired by company A to speed up the process of implementing new technology. The respondent has skills within technology and change orientation, and part of the role is to overlook and accelerate the process of implementing new technology. The respondent believed it was important to not rush into new implementations, as abrupt changes in the employees everyday life can result in resistance.

"One of the reasons why they hired me was that they lacked competency for speeding up the process of implementing new technology. This is one of my areas of expertise... You need to be smart in the way you approach new ideas." – Respondent A2

In terms of the collaboration between the marketing and sales department, respondent A1 explained that it had been challenging. For instance, the respondent had to remind the sales department to include the respondent in the sales meetings. However, after the leader group was established then the collaboration improved.

"The challenge is to develop stronger ties with the sales department…, and getting them to understand the value of marketing… After we established the leader group, then the company structure improved…We have our own Teams for the sales department, where I can join. This becomes a channel for exchanging information." – Respondent A1

Respondent A2 believed the collaboration between marketing and sales work well because they are able to capture the right stories.

"There is a good collaboration, because we are good at capturing good stories, and developing both small and large cases from them…However, no matter how good we are at something, there is always room for improvement." – Respondent A2

Company A spends very little time and resources on training their employees, especially in terms of marketing. Respondent A1 believed this would show when implementing the new CRM system, however, the respondent believed things are getting better. Respondent A2 had the same view, and explained how they are spending more time on training now.

"It has been far too little, without a doubt. We will see this when we implement the new CRM system, as we have to include the whole organization. However, after we started up with the leader group, we began working more structured…The sales department receives sales-related training. It has gotten better." – Respondent A1

"I would say it is increasing. Keep in mind, we started from nothing, and now we are working towards handling more. We do spend time on it." – Respondent A2

4. Create and Deliver Relevant and Timely Content

Both respondents from company A showed a clear understanding of content marketing.

"*I think, it is to create and share content which the receiver experience as valuable.*" – Respondent A1

"*It is about reaching the correct people in the companies you want to target… People notice it, without realizing.*" – Respondent A2

Both respondents agreed that the current content creation efforts in company A was lacking. In this regard, respondent A1 felt a lack of product knowledge for developing relevant content for the B2B customers due to poor marketing and sales alignment. The respondent hoped this could improve through closer collaboration between marketing and sales. Respondent A2 believed "Ludico", and the new CRM system could improve their ability to target correct customers, and deliver relevant content.

"*One of the main challenges for me is to get sales to contribute, which is something they need to do, as they have the competency required to create the content. There is no doubt that we need to move in that direction."* – Respondent A1

"We want to get the CRM up and running so that we can become better at targeting the correct people… Reach out to technical inspectors (their customers), with content that they consider interesting." – Respondent A2

5. Set Realistic Expectations and Be Patient

Neither of the two respondents have any experience with MA, hence, they knew little about the concept. However, they both understood that it is a marketing tool, which can perform tasks automatically and more efficiently.

"*My immediate thought is that I know very little about this. However, I do know that it is about technology and software that can help streamline processes.*" – Respondent A1

"Well, it is in the name, automation of marketing processes. You can send out information regularly, without having to plan in advance." – Respondent A2

Respondent A1 did not have any expectations due to lack of knowledge, but believed it would provide an immediate ROI, and a competitive advantage. Respondent A2 hoped that it would be easy to set up, administrate, and adjust, without having to hire an expensive consultant.

"It has to be user friendly for the one who is setting it up, and managing it. There are too many places where you have a good system, and then you have to hire a consultant who charges NOK 1300 per hour to help make small adjustments that takes them five minutes." – Respondent A2

In terms of expected challenges with MA, respondent A2 believed it would be challenging to set up the system, and ensure that relevant content is delivered to the correct customer.

"Through an automation process, there is a danger of targeting the wrong customer… People will not find your content interesting, and then you will lose credibility." – Respondent A2

Respondent A2 expected results to show after six months, and explained that it is better to launch the system at 80%, and then spend time fine-tuning the last 20%.

"*I think a project phase of 3 months, then you need to test it, evaluate the solution, and fine tune. After 6 months, you should start noticing results. However, too many underestimate the 'go live' phase, and the events that follow, because you cannot see everything in the beginning… The fact is that it is better to launch an 80% solution, and then fine tune the last 20% afterwards. Compared to working for 12 months to complete it, and then it is not 100% ready after all, due to unpredictable factors.* "– Respondent A2

Respondent A1 did not think the company was ready to implement MA yet, as their current digital projects require completion first.

"Our challenge is to work long-term whilst maintaining the operative. Right now, it feels demanding enough to complete the current processes we are working on. However, we feel we are on the right path, and I believe this is the way to go, strategically." – Respondent A1

6. Continue to Invest and Reallocate Efficiencies Gained

Respondent A1 believed company A could carry out their current tasks and processes more efficiently with less staff, allowing the company to operate more profitably. However, respondent A2 explained that no system can replace people, and that face-to-face communication is an important factor towards identifying and discussing customer needs.

"I believe we need less employees, and that we could do things in a smarter way. Without doubt." – Respondent A1

"Regardless of how good a system is, in our branch, people still interact with people." – Respondent A2

In that regard, respondent A2 stated they would reallocate efficiencies gained towards building stronger relations with their customers, and being easily accessible to their customers in case they have any questions.

"*To build good relations matters, because if they have a question then they will call us... Then we are in the right place, and enter at the correct level in the organisation. That is what I want to spend time on."* – Respondent A2

4.2. Company B

Company B has between 20-30 employees and an annual turnover between NOK 50-80 million. They provide water processing equipment installed on vessels. In new projects, they need to enter the purchase process at the planning stage. Their target market is all over the globe, and they are currently not implementing MA.

1. Review and Development of Internal Marketing and Business Processes

Company B has no formal marketing strategy, however, for the last three years they have been focusing on re-branding, and re-stablishing their position in the market, with help from external partners. So far, they have developed a new name, logo, values, and more. With all this change, respondent B1 stressed the importance of communicating to their customers that they are still the same company.

"*We are the same company, people, and product, but in a different wrapping.*" – Respondent B1

Company B has no inhouse marketing personnel, and most of the marketing activities are outsourced to either a marketing agency or communication agency. This includes their activities on Facebook, LinkedIn, email newsletters, press releases, and their website. Company B is the only case company that offers email newsletter sign-up via their website. They also have a CRM solution from Avento, which they are considering shifting out for Microsoft Dynamics. The reason why they outsource is that their digital marketing competencies are non-existing, according to respondent B1.

"*I do not have time to mess around with Facebook, LinkedIn when professionals can do it for us. If I want to visibility, I will buy it.* "– Respondent B1

Company B also operate with metrics such as: clicks, likes and the number of people who view their articles. These metrics are summarized in quarterly reports.

Respondent B1 stated that they have made a conscious choice to not spend any money on traditional marketing, with the exception of exhibitions, and supporting charities and the local environment (CSR).

"*We have limited resources, we will attend exhibitions, and be visible local. But adds? We do not spend a penny on newspaper ads.*" – Respondent B1

Company B focuses on nurturing both new and existing leads. Respondent B1 considered it essential to enter the shipbuilding-process as early as possible, which requires starting the marketing process much earlier, thereby making the sales process much longer than what is found in a normal B2B situation. The customers of company B consist of a trinity of shipyards, ship owners and ship designers, who are regarded as the decisionmakers and influencers. The respondent explained that they sign contracts and receive payment from the shipyards, but regarded the ship owner and ship designers as the "real customers". This is because they are the ones who must approve of the components used for building the boat. The respondent found it hard to define who the real customer is.

"*You must win with the shipowners, and they must want you to be part of the project. At the same time, it is the shipyard you write a contract with, and they pay you. It is a triangular game that is repeated in our industry all the time. 'Who is the customer?' Well then I need to ask what the definition is, the one who chose us, or the one who paid us?"* – Respondent B1.

Respondent B1 believed that visible with a good story was very important. Company B share their stories through press releases and newsletters. They aim to release two press releases each month, and a quarterly newsletter. Moreover, respondent B1 stated that if they can manage to release three press releases each month, then they will do so. They are often timed around important company events, and respondent B1 was confident that this was a successful strategy that made them more visible in the marketplace.

"*You have to be visible in our industry, otherwise someone else will come, who is more visible…The article I am about to release is about the largest delivery we have ever had... This is something I will be milking for a while because it has an impact on our existing customers"* – Respondent B1.

"…I believe that through the choices we have made, we are noticed. I receive feedback regarding this through our network. I believe that the strategy of using contracts, news, product development, sharing stories, that we have chosen wisely." – Respondent B1

However, the respondent was uncertain of whether their stories reached out to the target customers, and added that they would have to spend a lot of money in order to determine this.

"*How accurate is it in terms of the result of signed contracts?... It is the same with traditional marketing and analysis, you have to spend millions to know for sure that the customer who is supposed to contact you, has received the message.*" – Respondent B1

2. Correct Scoping of Instance Requirements and Implementation Project

Company B does not have any ongoing implementation projects; however, they have recently implemented MS business 365 (an Enterprise Resource Planning system, ERP) and

Avento Briva (CRM), which respondent B1 considered to be successful installations. The respondent spoke about witnessing several unsuccessful implementations of complex CRM solutions over the respondent's career, and considered it easier for small companies, such as company B, to succeed with complex implementation projects. The respondent explained that there is a lack of opportunity for gathering and processing more data in their current CRM system, which was considered important to help nurture leads and maintain communication.

"*I believe that small companies have a better chance to succeed with such processes. In larger corporations, the decisions are taken far away from the end user. In our company, sales participate and contribute during the whole process, in contrast to how it often is in larger corporations… During my time in company B, I have not experienced any bad implementations of new technology.*" – Respondent B1

The respondent stated that they preferred "out of the box" solutions, with as few modifications and added functions as possible. This would contribute to keep down cost and make the implementation and continuous use less complex.

"*If you choose a standard platform, it is cheaper to operate… We will adapt to the tool, rather than adapting the toll to our needs. You can spend half a million to reduce your daily workload by three minutes with a few added functions. Good enough is good enough*" – Respondent B1

Respondent B1 placed this in the context of selecting Avento CRM. The respondent would have preferred Microsoft Dynamics 365, as this offered integration options towards the ERP, but at the time they had no access to local partners. Avento was offered by a local IT firm, and it was easy and fast to get up and running. Although it lacked functionalities, such as the option to integrate with the ERP. The respondent also emphasized the importance of the CRM being used as intended.

"*Avento is not integrated towards ERP, finance nor email. But it was easy to get there, and if I had wanted, we could have gone for Dynamics 365 which is fully integrated with our CRM. But there was no external expertise nearby… We want a more integrated CRM tool…*

At the same time, the most important factor for me is that the CRM is simple, and it gets used. Not that it has every function you can imagine." – Respondent B1

Through a mixture of inhouse and outsourced resource and competencies, the respondent believed the company was adequately equipped to achieve their goals. Outsourcing provides company B with access to a wider network of journalists, which helps make company B more visible.

"I think we are prepared, but if we did not outsource then the answer would have been no." – Respondent B1

3. Gain Organizational Buy-In and Find a Project Champion

Respondent B1 described a flat power structure in company B, with a short distance from employees to top management.

"I am able to shout across the hall to all of our four sellers, so we have continuous dialogue… If I have not communicated with all of the employees in the course of two days, that would be an exception." – Respondent B1

Moreover, the respondent was open to trying out new technology, and explained that it is important to have a clear idea of how this will benefit the company.

"If new things arrive that could benefit us, without it costing the world, then we will definitely try it out. One should be open to new things. However, you should not try new things just because it is new, and because others are doing it. You should have a clear idea of the purpose, and that it covers an identified need in the company." – Respondent B1

The respondent considered the collaboration with the communication agency to work very well and described them as their "internal marketing and communication department".

"There is a tight collaboration between the communication agency and myself, and they are in a way our internal marketing and communication department…Over time, they learn to know our company and our products. You can tell by how they require less input from us to develop good articles and press releases." – Respondent B1

The respondent stated that very little time and resources has been allocated towards training their employees, but explained that the Covid-19 pandemic brought about more courses and webinars in the company.

"There is not much training in the company. We could be better at pushing, encouracing, and even demanding (more training)…That said, the pandemic has provided us with a lot of new things, such as Teams courses, webinars…We have had more courses as a consequence of the situaiton (pandemic), compared to what we would have had under normal circumstances…There have been very few marketing courses…Our sales manager participated in a small digital marketing course before the summer of 2020." – Respondent B1

4. Create and Deliver Relevant and Timely Content

Respondent B1 showed a clear understanding of content marketing.

"We explain who we are, what we have done, and what we are going to do…Taking a photo of a product and placing it in an ad is not content marketing. You should deliver a message." – Respondent B1

Company B operates with a story-calendar with a time schedule for when press-releases and stories are to be released. This is something respondent B1 works on alongside a communication agency, where content is written by the agency based on bullet points provided by company B. They also involve the customer for approval of the press-release.

"Up until the summer, we know exactly when press-releases and stories will be released… In advance of the fishery-fair (Nor-Fishing), we release contracts that we have signed with fishing boats…This allows us to be in control of the communication strategy." – Respondent B1

Respondent B1 believed they could improve at delivering more technical content. However, the respondent explained that this is not prioritized due to capacity constraints.

"We are supposed to improve our customers business through our products. So, we could become much better at providing innovative or technical updates on technical solutions, through articles and marketing. However, this is not prioritized, as we are a small company, with a small technical department, and we have a lot of work to do." – Respondent B1

5. Set Realistic Expectations and Be Patient

In terms of MA understanding, respondent B1 associated it with tracking online, and believed MA analyses data to provide a tailored message. The respondent regarded MA as a B2C tool, and was not aware of MA being used in the maritime industry.

"*It is what everyone experiences today when visiting a website, and then a few minutes later, it is on your Facebook profile, the same company… Software that analyses you and follow up by deliver a tailored campaign or offer. I cannot say that I know of any good examples of MA in our industry."* – Respondent B1

The respondent explained that as their products are engineering-to-order, it is important to acquire leads as early as possible to have enough time for discussing product specifications. The respondent therefore hoped that MA would reduce the number of unqualified leads, and increase the number of qualified leads within an acceptable time frame. However, the respondent thought it would be challenging to define the right rules for acquiring relevant leads.

"*It would save us a lot of time, and we could sharpen our efforts…if we had a tool that was so specific that the CRM could tell us that shipping company X in country Y is about to build a boat…To have a tool that increases the likelihood of targeting real leads…and spend time on those who intend to build a boat, that would be extremely helpful…I would expect the system to increase the number of qualified leads within an acceptable time frame."* – Respondent B1

The respondent realised that one cannot expect immediate results, and highlighted the importance of setting a realistic timeframe for testing out new projects. The respondent suggested a time frame of six months for a MA implementation.

“*Six months should be in reach if the platform is ready. But if the software has to be developed, rolled out, and so on, then it will take longer…It is hard to say, as it is not my area of expertise. But to join a pilot project, and expect immediate results is unrealistic. You must give it a reasonable time frame to test it out.*” – Respondent B1

6. Continue to Invest and Reallocate Efficiencies Gained

Although the company outsource most of their marketing activities, the respondent stated they would reallocate efficiencies towards selling more. Moreover, the respondent was interested in how MA could help them save time by not pursuing bad leads.

“*Obviously, if you could increase the hit rate from 10% to 20%, that would be phenomenal. You have a large sales funnel all the time, and there are several 100 million in your project list. But the hit rate is limited, and if you can remove some of the noise and target more, then that would be the success factor.*” – Respondent B1

4.3. Company C

Company C has over 500 employees and their revenue is around NOK 1 billion. They deliver equipment mainly to the fish industry, with a large focus on fishing vessels. In new projects, they need to enter the purchase process at the planning stage. They have equipment that operates all over the world, and they currently plan to implement MA in 2021.

1. Review and Development of Internal Marketing and Business Processes

Company C is working towards becoming the most recognized brand within their market (globally), and increasing sales. This will require involvement across the whole company. Together, they work on communicating their long history into their brand, and through highlighting important “customer cases”.

“*We have a long history in company C, and we are the result of a merger of three firms, and now our job is to build ‘one company C’, and we communicate this, at the same time as we take our story into our branding.*” – Respondent C1

Customer cases are promoted by publishing the cases on a blog landing page on their website, which are shared to Facebook and LinkedIn. As company C is a global company, the respondent mentioned the cultural challenges that comes with their digital campaigns.

"*When moving over to digital platforms, it is important to be aware of this (the differences in cultures). You cannot create a campaign for Chile, and then run the same campaign on Iceland. That could be a total clash.*" – Respondent C1

Company C operate with Microsoft Dynamics 365 as CRM, with the functionality of sending email newsletters. However, at the time of interviewing the respondent, the CRM and email were not fully operational. They still use printed advertisement in relation to congratulating ship builders for the completion of a ship. Although this is optional, respondent C1 considered it necessary in order to preserve their brand image.

"It is a bit challenging when an article is written about a boat, and then you are the only supplier who has not congratulated them. So, you are forced into the jungle of magazines." – Respondent C1

Respondent C considered their face-to-face presence at exhibitions and customer meetings as one of their main strengths. However, as the Covid-19 pandemic limited the amount of face-to-face interaction, company C had to change their approach.

"*Due to the situation in the world now, we have been forced into a more digital world. We can manage to promote ourselves, and share our story on digital platforms, but we lack the personal relationship building. It is a step for us, and the whole industry to manage.*" – Respondent C1

Company C also offers a digital system called "company C IoT". This is a system of sensors that sends customer data to company C. The main purpose of the system is to be able to gather and monitor data, and provide the customer with feedback on how to optimize operations. In the future, the company hopes to use the data in product development.

In terms of metrics, respondent C1 stated that they do not measure much. They keep track of the number of followers on their social media channels, and they test what type of content generates the most engagement: content from customer cases or technical content. They also track website traffic through Google Analytics.

The respondent explained that they will often sell to a ship owner, however, they have noticed an increasing trend of professional investment companies investing in the branch.

"*There is a lot of private ownership in the market, however, we have noticed a rise in professional investment companies investing in the industry. It is an attractive industry. As soon as there is a new constellation of ownership, then the sales process will change*." – Respondent C1

The respondent also spoke about the importance of entering a project as early as possible, as this would enable them to create content throughout the whole process.

"*The dream scenario is for the customer to contact us for a product, and then build a boat around that, but that will not happen. We often get contacted by ship designers with a boat project, and then we will join the bidding process…We have to be early and talk about this in the contract and planning phase. That way, we can develop content during the project process, and not once the boat is finished and delivered."* – Respondent C1

The marketing department consists of respondent C1, and a graphic designer on a short-term contract. They also recently hired a CRM manager, who will help solve their current CRM issues. Respondent C1 explained how they currently outsource some of their marketing activities, such as their social media campaigns. The respondent regarded outsourcing to be a critical success factor when implementing new technology, and believed that further outsourcing was required for them to achieve their goals. However, the respondent explained the risk of missing out on potential leads, as data sometimes stops with the outsourcing partner, and thereby never reaches sales.

"*We use an external partner to help us with digital marketing, campaigns and remarketing, but then you do not receive the leads directly into your own system, and you do not have as good control on what happens to the different recipients."* – Respondent C1

2. Correct Scoping of Instance Requirements and Implementation Project

Company C implemented a new CRM system early 2020, however, the respondent explained that it is not operating as intended. One of the challenges is to ensure that customer data is sorted correctly, and they were experiencing duplicates and missing data on geographical segments.

"*We implemented the CRM without a clear idea on how to use it. We decided to use Microsoft Dynamics and loaded all the data over from the old system. Now after a year, we have many customer cards with incomplete data, we have many John Doe's, and several duplicates… Therefore, we could not use the CRM to extract address lists and send information to our customers."* – Respondent C1

The company is also planning to implement a MA module into the CRM system, however, the respondent stated that the CRM problems need to be sorted before they can implement the module.

"When using marketing automation…it is dependent upon having sorted the customers according into the correct groups. That you have sorted them according to the correct country, segment, whether they are existing or potential customers, whether they have had a bad experience. There are so many things to sort. So, this is our greatest bottleneck at the moment." – Respondent C1

When the CRM system is fully operational, and with a working MA module in place, the respondent hopes this will increase their visibility, number of leads, make it easier to manage campaigns, and identify which campaigns deliver the best results.

3. Gain Organizational Buy-In and Find a Project Champion

Respondent C1 explained that the communication between the top management and employees has previously been very informal. However, after launching an internal network in 2020, the communication improved, and the company became more transparent.

"A lot of the communication used to take place in the hallways, where it would be random who knew what…Last year, we launched an internal network to better control the communication internally, and to educate…By having this internal network, we see that

communication has improved a lot through using Microsoft Teams. We are able to involve more people in the information flow…We arrange global meetings on Teams, with over 400 participants. The organization is more transparent this way." – Respondent C1

The respondent considered the collaboration between marketing and sales to work very well, however, the respondent believed the sales departments' understanding of the value and purpose of marketing should be improved.

"We also have to consider the awareness of the sales department, and how they can use marketing to enhance sales... If the customer can access more product information on our website at an early stage, this can help the sales process. I think this will improve the collaboration between marketing and sales, as sales will regard marketing as a good resource in the sales process." – Respondent C1

The respondent mentioned how employees have had to adapt to a lot over the past year.

"Our company has been through a lot of change over the last year, and there have been a lot of projects and messages for the employees to take in." – Respondent C1

However, the company spends a lot of resources on educating their employees, which, to our understanding, is provided through their internal network. One of the courses they were about to initiate was a branding course.

"We are working on launching a branding course, which all employees are to participate in…It is about getting every individual to understand how their actions affect our brand… It is about educating the company to think more commercially." – Respondent C1

Respondent C1 explained that when they hire staff, they focus more on the level of ambition and attitude rather than competency. Any competency gap will be filled through training initiated by company C.

«*We have a large budget set aside for training employees. There has not been much of this in marketing."* – Respondent C1

4. Create and Deliver Relevant and Timely Content

Respondent C1 showed a clear understanding of content marketing, and explained about their use of customer cases, which was regarded as more favourable for increasing customer engagement, than purely promoting their products.

"You should tell the stories…By developing the right content to the right person, you build trust in the market…We have experience sharing cases on Norwegian customers, where we get a journalist to interview our company and our customers, and then (we) develop content from this… We also see that «tagging» the customer on social media gives a great effect, and increases organic reach." – Respondent C1

The use of customer cases has been a success in Norway, however, the respondent explained that it is challenging to apply the same approach in other cultures.

"Norwegian customers are positive and willing to share good stories, mistakes and jokes. Other cultures, however, may consider this approach to be unusual. We may receive a few sentences from the CEO." – Respondent C1

The respondent believed they could improve their content marketing efforts by entering projects at an earlier phase, as this allows them to develop content during the boat construction process.

"We need to be early and talk about this already in the contract and project planning phase…We can always improve. It is about frequency, volume, and relevance. We need to find a mid-point where we do not share everything, but manage to maintain a certain level of content." – Respondent C1

5. Set Realistic Expectations and Be Patient

Respondent C understood MA to be a system that simplifies the process of delivering relevant content to the right customers.

"You cannot just push start, and then things happen on their own…Through using a good system, you will simplify the process. You will be able to follow the customer journey in a

much better way than before, and you will reach the right customer with the right content." – Respondent C1

The respondent explained that the marketing department tends to send cold leads to the sales department, and hoped the MA system could solve this by systemizing their targeting efforts, and running re-marketing campaigns towards the most relevant leads. The respondent also hoped the system could be used in regard to different arrangements. The company has set up a tight schedule for implementing the MA system**,** and hope to see results during the autumn of 2021.

"That we can generate warm leads for the sales department. Today, we often generate cold leads, as we do not nurture them long enough before transferring them to sales…It looks like they will open up for exhibitions in the autumn. Perhaps we can use it for the exhibitions to help drive potential customers and business partners to participate in our arrangements, and for recruitment…I hope we will see results at the end of this year." – Respondent C1

6. Continue to Invest and Reallocate Efficiencies Gained

Respondent C1 was doubtful about MA freeing up efficiencies in the short run. The respondent expected the system would require a lot of work to implement, and more staff in the marketing department.

"To be honest, I think it will be a while until we will notice any efficiencies gained, because it is quite an extensive process to get the system up and running, and it is demanding to develop good content. I think we will need more staff and capacity in the marketing department…This is entirely new, and what we have done earlier has been about exhibitions, printed adds, and so on. For us, this would be a whole new area requiring more resources." – Respondent C1

4.4. Company D

Company D has over 500 employees and an annual revenue of NOK 1,5 billion. Their marketing department consists of six employees, whereby half of them are marketers, and the other half is a mix of sales and business development. In new projects, they need to enter the purchase process at the planning stage. They deliver propulsion related equipment to the global market, and they plan to implement MA soon.

1. Review and Development of Internal Marketing and Business Processes

Company D has long relied on offline channels such as, printed magazines and exhibitions for marketing their brand. However, with everything becoming digital, respondent D1 explained that they had to re-consider the value of their current marketing efforts, which resulted in a new marketing plan with a stronger focus on analytics and digital tools.

"In recent years, things have become more digitalized. We had to ask ourselves 'how valuable is the advertisement we have done in traditional paper-publications?'…We started mapping out the market two years ago, where we asked ourselves 'Who is the target group? What matters to them? Where do we find them? What channels are they at? How do we reach them?'…We completed our marketing plan in the spring of 2020, and then corona came." – Respondent D1

The new strategy entailed a shift towards more digital communication strategies, where they launched a new website, and became present on Facebook and LinkedIn. They are also considering opening an Instagram account. The company posts content on their social media platforms between 5-10 times each month on average. Some of the posts are in Norwegian, and some are in English. Through these channels, the company hopes to gain a greater understanding of customer's needs by collecting and analysing more data. Respondent D2 mentioned that they use email, however, respondent D1 stated that they do not run email marketing campaigns systematically.

Respondent D2 considered their website to be an essential part of the customer journey, where one of their goals is to draw more traffic to the website. Moreover, both respondents agreed that a marketing goal is to generate more leads.

"*We now have a website as a landing page, and how well we manage it will be a success factor which we must take with us onward. We want as many customers as possible to visit the website, and we must develop a lot of content to be able to track and observe the activity in the market.*" – Respondent D2

The respondent mentioned that it is challenging to keep track of the activity and data received through their website.

"*That might be the largest challenge, to keep track of all the activity and data that we receive, and structure it.*" – Respondent D2

Respondent D1 considered the level of their marketing competencies to be low. However, respondent D2 believed they had a high level of competencies, in terms of their new website and other tools, but added that they lacked the required inhouse competency for operating with their upcoming CRM system.

"Our competencies… We struggle with finding the correct form. It is a learning process, and we must learn how to write, formulate, and present ourselves to the digital world." – Respondent D1

"We have resources, we have absolutely got market intelligence…I feel that over the last six months, while developing our website and other tools, that we have increased our competencies in that area…We do not have any inhouse competency to operate the Dynamics system, so we must hire consultants to help us." – Respondent D2

Both respondents stated that they measure website traffic through Google Analytics, and clicks and engagement from social media. In addition, respondent D2 stated that they measure customer satisfaction through email, and they measure incoming request from different customers segments and geographical areas. Some of this data is stored and later applied to forecast new opportunities. Both respondents believed that more metrics would be beneficial for the company.

"In light of marketing automation, we would like to have a more detailed view of the activity on our website, and the relevant hits we receive from social media." – Respondent D1

"There is a lot of market data out there. To be able to collect it all, and at the same time use it to be better able to improve our targeting towards segments, that must be the dream." – Respondent D2

The company's paying customers are the shipyards, and the ship owners and technical personnel are the end users. In addition, the ship designers are regarded as the influencers, as they influence the choice of components for the boats. In line with their brand building strategy, respondent D1 stated that the goal is to become the first choice by their customers.

"We need to be in the subconsciousness of the customer. The day the shipbuilder starts to design a boat, and considers type of equipment, then we should be the first choice. It is important for us to be present and included early in the design process." – Respondent D1.

Company D is also exploring the use of IoT in their products. Data gathered through IoT is something respondent D2 considered useful for product development, as it provides further insights into which products and solutions are best suited for their customers.

"We have programmed something which can tell us how a fleet operates… This allows us to determine which product and system the customer will benefit the most from, if they are considering re-construction or a new vessel to reduce their footprint and save both fuel and the environment in the future." – Respondent D2

Respondent D2 considered their product knowledge to be their greatest strength, and had a goal of becoming a "competence hub" both internally and externally, towards their customers. A part of company D's strategy towards achieving their goals is to align their 20 sales agents, who are spread around the world, with their digital marketing platforms. By doing this, they hope to increase their brand awareness. Moreover, respondent D2 believed that greater visibility would translate into more leads and opportunities, and a greater turnover in the long run.

"Greater visibility, increased presence on digital platforms, more leads, and opportunities. These are our main goals." – Respondent D2

2. Correct Scoping of Instance Requirements and Implementation Project

Company D currently operates with Microsoft Dynamics 365 CRM in one of their three divisions, where respondent D1 is working. However, they are working on implementing it in the rest of the company. Respondent D2 explained the CRM solution would be able to run campaigns with various accessible content, and monitor and receive feedback on their targeting efforts. They are also planning to implement a MA module as an extension of the CRM system, which is expected to be launched 2021.

Respondent D2 mentioned that the MA module would enhance the company's ability to develop and deliver more relevant customer content, review campaign statistics, and establish more metrics. However, respondent D1 had more faith in their current CRM system than MA.

"MA will be an important part of the CRM. It provide a better picture of the customer relative to the content delivered. We can track and log activities, and see how far they read into our emails, where they click, and what they find interesting and not." – Respondent D2

Respondent D2 believed the CRM system and MA module would be very helpful for achieving their marketing goals. However, the respondent believed they must first define their marketing process more clearly to achieve these goals, and considered time to be a constraint for them.

"We have a new web page, and we are going to implement CRM (and MA) in the corporation. We have a defined sales process, but we must also define our marketing process and set our goals…It requires time and resources to implement this, which is challenging as we already have to spend time on content and so on. Once the system is implemented, then I think we will be better able to forecast the market." – Respondent D2

Respondent D2 also mentioned that they are planning to establish some key metrics, but had not yet determined anything specific yet.

With many ongoing projects in the company, respondent D2 believed that it is important to take the time to always plan ahead, and be prepared for unexpected market events.

"We have so many ongoing projects, in sales, marketing, our homepage, and new systems…In between, you have to sit down and consider the next step, and develop the company to become more prepared for the next pandemic, or the next oil crisis, or whatever else that might hit us." – Respondent D2

3. Gain Organizational Buy-In and Find a Project Champion

Both respondents believed communication in the company was good, however, they felt that the top management could become more involved and invested in their digital projects. The respondents also experienced a lack of digital understanding from most of the top management, which was problematic as their current transformation processes requires involvement from top management.

"We are very dependent upon having the top management on board…It is essential that they understand the importance of marketing, and that the whole company is marketing oriented… Much is new, and the top management perhaps do not have the same focus on the details that matter in a digital process, and we must teach them." – Respondent D1

"It is important to communicate with the top management, so they can understand where we stand today, and what resources we need going forth." – Respondent D2

Respondent D2 also mentioned how the top management consists of a mix of generations, and have different views on digitalization.

"*The younger realise that the need for digitalization will grow going forward, whereas the older do not want to see the challenges.*" – Respondent D2

Respondent D1 explained how the sales department considers the CRM system to be additional work, and prefer to use their own programmes. Respondent D2 considered it important to get the whole company to understand the value and usefulness of a new system. For their current CRM project, they therefore selected a few software ambassadors who understand the value of a CRM system, and who will be used to actively promote the CRM through the company.

"*We need to have a few "super-users" who have worked with the system more than others, that way we achieve a great selling-point. I think this is important.*" – Respondent D2

The collaboration among sales and marketing in company D was described as well-functioning by both respondents. However, respondent D2 believed the marketing and sales department should become more aligned. Moreover, they both mentioned how more clearly defined roles in marketing would enhance sales, where marketing activities should directly or indirectly contribute to leads, opportunities and more sales.

"*The activities we do in marketing is based on sales benefiting from it."* – Respondent D1

"*Not everyone shares the same understanding of what happens within marketing, and why we need to do this and that."* – Respondent D2

Both respondents believed the involvement of sales in marketing is necessary to succeed with their current strategy. Respondent D1 explained that the marketing department collaborates with the sales department where they define customers and segments, and establish the content to be delivered. Respondent D2 also explained the importance of a close collaboration to establish this content.

"We are working on ensuring that everyone understands that we need a clear focus, we need a message, and we need content. Then sales should also contribute." – Respondent D2

Both respondents agreed that company D should focus on increasing the employee's digital marketing competencies through offering more courses. A part of company D's strategy is to spend time and resources on training and developing their employees. In that regard, respondent D1 mentioned they had recently established an e-learning platform, for which the employees are encouraged to use. Respondent D2 did not consider this to be part of their competence development.

"This is something we are focusing on in company D right now (training). We have actually established an e-learning platform…We are supposed to use it if we feel the need for more competencies." – Respondent D1

"I think we have improved considerably in this area. Although we receive a lot on the way, we do not always regard it as competence development." – Respondent D2

Respondent D2 thought their inhouse competency would be a challenge in terms of the MA system, as they already have to outsource consultants for their CRM system.

“The technical aspect. We do not have inhouse competencies for the Dynamics system, so we have to hire consultants… Not everyone in the company will be part of the implementation, and only a few will be part of the MA module.” – Respondent D2

Respondent D2 explained how an increase in digital marketing competencies can reduce the need to outsource.

“I definitely see the need to spend more time and resources on this. To build inhouse competencies, and not rely on (outsourcing)…not that there is nothing wrong with that. However, if we can have inhouse resources, then that would be the best for us.” – Respondent D2

The company also encourages employees to take courses externally as well. However, respondent D1 claimed there was no marketing training, and that any training was on the respondents’ own initiative. Meanwhile, both respondents, along with some other employees, participated in a digital marketing project during March 2021, where one of the topics was MA.

“It is also anticipated that we take courses externally as well…The courses I have taken have been out of working hours. I have also had to take time off work. I had to pay myself, despite it being highly relevant for my job. So that is how we solve it here. But this might end soon, perhaps we will receive more attention by the company.” – Respondent D1

4. Create and Deliver Relevant and Timely Content

Both respondents showed a good understanding of what content marketing is.

“Our marketing should have content that is useful and attractive for our target group.” – Respondent D1

“I think it is marketing with content aimed at different customers, segments, or targeted areas.” – Respondent D2

The company runs market analyses, and then develops relevant content for the target segment. Respondent D1 explained how storytelling has been a part of their content marketing strategy for a long time. The respondent further explained that their content should not only explain what they do, rather, it should be explained through different contexts that the customer finds relevant.

"We have been working with content marketing for as long as I have been employed here. We try to tell our story, but it has to be content that is relevant for the product group. It is not just to push out what we can offer, this should be highlighted through specific contexts. We have always done this." – Respondent D1

In terms of their website, respondent D1 explained that most of the content is developed inhouse, however, they also receive help from a small communication agency. They have helped with the layout of the website, and they produce some articles. However, the respondent seemed sceptical towards the use of agencies for content creation.

"*It is sometimes amusing to see how they deliver this, because personally, I have worked a lot with marketing/advertising over the years, and my impression is that when you develop content, you need to do it yourself. It is hard for agencies to understand the market, and what type of content works. Unless they have worked for you for a very long time.*" – Respondent D1

Both respondents believed their content marketing efforts could be improved by understanding their customers better, and improving their targeting efforts. This would require more involvement across the departments. Respondent D2 regarded market analysis, identifying trends, and making forecasts, as important factors for improving their content marketing efforts. As employees in the different departments already have other time-consuming task and responsibilities, there is often not enough time to set aside to contribute to the marketing efforts.

"We have to take a more analytical approach in order to target our customers better... We are revising the market plans for each segment, and we must consider what the trends are, what is new, what is out, and develop a message to our customers. Of course, technical, product development, sales and marketing must collaborate to develop relevant content for our customers." – Respondent D2

5. Set Realistic Expectations and Be Patient

Respondent D1 was not entirely sure of the functionalities of MA but explained that it can collect data which is incorporated into marketing activities. However, the respondent questioned the degree of automation in the system. Respondent D2 understood MA to be a system that monitors and measures elements in the market and provides feedback on this.

«I think it is automation of customer data that is collected from visits to a website, downloads, contacts…and placed into a CRM system where it is stored. Then you can incorporate the data into marketing activities…But I am unsure about how much of it is automation, and how much of it is manual, although it is called marketing automation." – Respondent D1

"It can store, monitor, and save all of our inhouse marketing activities. It can also monitor and measure settings and other things that we want monitored in the market, and then give us input." – Respondent D2

Both respondents stated that the company has no experience with MA.

"Well, it is an Excel sheet and emails. We do not have any marketing automation today, but we are working on it, as we can see the need for it." – Respondent D2

Respondent D1 was very sceptical to MA, and could not understand how content marketing and targeting could be automated. The respondent hoped that MA would help identify leads, but believed they managed fine with their current CRM system.

"It is just to systemise the information we have in the CRM system, and then we must shape it and develop content. You cannot just push a button, and then content is made based on a few rules. You have to make the content, select the target group, and push the button that sends this out to different channels…. I think the greatest challenge will be for the tool to provide the desired effect and be a 'miracle tool…I am very unsure about whether we need marketing automation." – Respondent D1

Respondent D2 expressed high expectations towards the MA system, and hoped it would provide them with more specific information on the type of content that can increase customer engagement. Meanwhile, the respondent also realised that they must establish some rules and procedures in the company in order to determine what they want out of the MA system.

"I have major expectations…I expect it to provide us with more specific information on activities we bring to the market, and receive some measurable feedback to see what type of message and content increases activity, and what areas, customers, shipowners, and designers delve deeper into the content." – Respondent D2

Respondent D1 guessed that three to six months would pass before results from the MA implementation would appear. Respondent D2 thought it would take six months, as things need time to mature. Moreover, the respondent believed the system would require regular adjustments.

«Results in terms of increased activity and requests for instance, might show up in the short run. However, I believe we must work for a good half year before we can begin measuring results…Things have to mature externally and internally…Random results may appear immediately, but more specific results will not show up until half a year has passed…I think one will always have to adjust the system." – Respondent D2

6. Continue to Invest and Reallocate Efficiencies Gained

Both respondents believed MA would free up time and resources in their company, and explained they would allocate more resources to areas such as, market analysis, content production, customer follow-up, and forecasting. Moreover, respondent D2 spoke about spending time on building more competencies across the departments, which would prepare the company for future digital competency needs.

"*We must build more competencies across departments, and at the same time free up some time in the marketing department so they can work more with content production and planning. Hopefully they can also take the time to build competencies within marketing and digitalization. I think that would benefit us.*" – Respondent D2

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter consists of a discussion of the results, an answer to our research question, implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

5.1. Discussion of the results

This section discusses the results from chapter 4. At the end of this chapter, the main findings from each of the case companies are summarized in a table (**see table 2**).

Although none of the case companies had a written marketing strategy, they did however, share similar marketing strategies and goals. That is, to build brand awareness, become more visible, acquire more leads, and earn a higher revenue.

Company B, C and D expressed a desire to enter new boat projects as early as possible, as this would allow them to create content during the project. To achieve this, they had to start their marketing efforts early, and target all three customers the trio (ship designers, ship owners, and shipyards). However, the respondents from the case companies felt it was not always easy to know which customers to target in the trio, and considered it a top priority to identify how to best reach out to the customers.

The findings revealed that all the case companies were using traditional communication strategies such as face-to-face, printed magazines, and exhibitions. These were being combined with digital marketing strategies such as social media marketing, email marketing, content marketing, CRM, and SEO. Moreover, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, all the case companies were more or less forced into using digital tools. Nevertheless, all the respondents seemed to be satisfied with the outcome of this transition. Moreover, the newfound use of digital marketing tools opened new opportunities for the companies to achieve their marketing goals. One of the recurring tactics was to drive traffic towards their website via content shared on social media, email, and articles, and thereby generate new leads. The shift from traditional marketing to digital marketing, with the purpose of building brand awareness, has proven to be successful strategy among B2B companies in general (Järvinen *et al.*, 2012; Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011).

Moreover, the findings showed that all the case companies considered metrics, analytics, and collection of customer data, to play an important role towards achieving their marketing goals. However, none of the companies were able to show exactly how they would achieve this. The findings showed that all the case companies measured some metrics from their marketing activities, however, none of these metrics were systematically analysed in terms of sales leads. Instead, the success of certain marketing activities was explained through an increase in sales, without any proof of a correlation besides "observation". The best example of this was through company B, where the marketing strategy of being visible in the marketplace was considered successful. However, the respondent did not know for certain whether their marketing efforts reached out to the correct customers, and whether it contributed to a ROMI.

The results also revealed that all the case companies lacked internal marketing staff and digital marketing competency. In this regard, Jena and Panda (2017) and Murphy (2018) recommend companies to outsource if there is a lack of inhouse competencies, it is logistically or financially impossible to train existing employees and hire new employees. In terms of the case companies, the identified trend was to outsource whenever there was a lack of inhouse competencies. This was particularly visible in company B, where all their marketing operations were outsourced. Respondent B1 considered this to play a major role in their level of success. Although the case companies realised the need to outsource, not all of them experienced the same level of success as company B. This was evident in company A, which had tried outsourcing their SEO activities without any results to show for it.

In company A, C, and D, hesitance was registered towards using external agencies for content creation, as it was believed that agencies do not share the same level of understanding of the market and customers as the inhouse staff does. Moreover, it was believed that outsourcing can result in loss of data, fewer leads, and lower sales.

The findings suggest that all the companies understood how software systems such as CRM and MA, would provide functionalities that contribute towards achieving marketing goals. Some of these desired functionalities included more structured customer info, integrations with other software, access to more data analytics, and an improved ability to identify and deliver more relevant customer content. This aligns well with the importance of identifying how new software such as MA should be chosen based on the functionalities it provides (Murphy, 2018).

The results showed that the respondents had several ideas on how new technology could solve current problems, however, few knew exactly how this would occur. Moreover, the study identified several unsuccessful implementations in company A, C, and D. Company B stood out from the crowd, through having successfully implementing their new Avento Briva CRM system. One of the reasons for this success, was that they selected the less complex Avento solution over the more complex Dynamics CRM. While Dynamics offered more desired functionalities, Avento was both cheaper and more realistic to implement due to its simplicity. Many companies tend to fall for the temptation of selecting many comprehensive functionalities, which end up complicating the implementation project without adding any real value (Biegel, 2009). This was a trap which company C and D entered into through selecting the more complex Dynamics 365 system, which offered more functionalities, including a MA module. By following company B's tactic, the likelihood of a successful implementation can increase.

There was a lack of data on how the case companies handled the project phase in terms of milestones, subgoals, and timeline. Company B had no current implementation projects, whilst company C and D had the MA module planned for "sometime in the future". Company A was the only case with a current software implementation nearing completion. The software being implemented was a Lime CRM system. The findings showed that this company operated with clear milestones, subgoals, and a "go live" date. Through setting a time schedule with clearly defined goals, this keeps them in control of the project, and reduces the likelihood of failure (Nasir and Sahibuddin, 2011; Biegel, 2009). Company C and D's unknown "go live" date therefore suggests that they do not have the same level of control.

The findings indicate that the top management in company A and B were positive towards new technology. Moreover, the CMO and COO in company A realised the importance of their roles as top-management on getting everyone else in the company on board with new technology. The CEO in company B also had a positive outlook on the use of new technology, and considered it important for new technology to satisfy specific needs.

Meanwhile, company D experienced a certain misalignment between top management and the marketing department, where each of them operated with different marketing strategies.

The findings suggested that the age of the top management played an important role in terms of the openness to change. In this regard, it was mentioned several times how the younger generation was more open for new technological solutions than the older generation. This is not a surprising finding considering how age can be important factor in terms of attitude towards new technology (Venkatesh *et al.*, 2003). The findings also suggested that top management buy-in was more obtainable in the smaller case companies (company A and B), than in the medium sized case companies (company C and D). This was supported by the respondents from company A and B, who regarded their small company size to benefit them in terms of adapting to new market trends. In contrast, the respondents from company C and D found their large size to sometime be challenging in terms of receiving information from top management. As small companies face less distance from top management to the employees, they will experience better communication and greater alignment.

The findings identified project champions in company A and D only. In company A, the identified project champion was the COO (respondent A2), as this individual had a lot of experience with implementation projects and had the role of initiating projects in the company. Moreover, the COO was knowledgeable on how to approach the staff to get them on board with new technology. In addition, this respondent understood the importance of setting a realistic project plan. In company D, the project champions were identified through the software ambassadors in their current CRM project, and how they played a role in influencing and enabling other employees to adapt and use the CRM.

The findings also revealed that company A, C, and D were in need for closer collaboration between sales and marketing (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016). They considered this to be important for achieving their marketing goals, particularly in terms of content creation. Meanwhile, there were no clear findings that explained how the case companies planned to close the existing collaboration gaps.

Although all the case companies lacked internal marketing staff and digital competency, respondents from company A, C, and D considered inhouse marketing competency and training to be important success factors for achieving their marketing goals. However, there was hardly any marketing-related training identified in the case companies, apart from a MA seminar which company C and D were attending. This lack of marketing related training can be related to how the industry traditionally has not prioritized marketing competency. However, the findings registered a potential shift among the case companies, where marketing training and competency will be of higher priority going forward.

Meanwhile, the findings also suggest that there was an overall lack of IT related competency, and several challenges in current technology implementations such as CRM. For instance, company A experienced problems with software integration and staff adoption. The former could indicate bad scoping, and the latter was attributed to the "age factor". Staff adoption was also identified as a problem in company D, with some of the staff preferring to use old Excel sheets over the new CRM. The findings from company C suggest that they had no clear idea on why they wanted the CRM, which can suggest a bad scoping process. When the case companies embark upon new and more complex implementations, it is important that they identify and fix any current challenges, and not depend upon the technology to fix their problems (Wood, 2015). This was acknowledged by respondents from company A and C, as they considered fixing current problems a prerequisite before starting on any new implementation projects.

The study also indicated that all the cases understood the importance of content marketing. This was shown in terms of how all respondents wished to deliver more personalised content, improve upon their targeting efforts, add value through problem solving, and use analytics to identify what content is relevant for the customer. These are all important success factors for the post-implementation of MA (Murphy, 2018).

Several of the case companies emphasized the need to engage with the customer early in the purchase process. To achieve this, they focused on increased brand awareness through storytelling and content creation. Reaching out to customers early in purchase process through storytelling, is an efficient strategy for generating new sales (Holliman and Rowley, 2014; Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016). However, most of the case companies showed little to no effort in tailoring content towards solving customer problems, despite realizing its importance. Rather, their content was very product focused. This is a challenge that many companies struggle with in general, where they end up delivering content that is either too generalised or too product-focused (Murphy, 2018; Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016). This can backfire on companies in terms of loss of potential sales leads and customers.

As company B, C, and D, are challenged with complex customer profiles, this does not make the delivery of personalized content any easier. This complexity will be further enhanced when dealing with international customers, as they must also consider the cultural factor in terms of content creation. This was best illustrated by company C, where it was acknowledged that content must be adapted towards different cultures. A story that works in Norway, might have a different effect in Chile, and so on.

The results show that all the case companies knew how to solve the problem of personalising content, through increased use of analytics and collaboration. This is shown in the findings in terms of how all the case companies intended to collect and analyse more customer data from new digital sources such as Google Analytics, and more advanced IoT solutions. However, none of the respondents were able to explain, or provide an example on how these analytics would be applied in the development of more personalised content.

The results also showed that the cases companies found it challenging facilitate the collaboration among all the employees required to enable more personalised content. This was shown through company B, which desired to deliver more problem-solving content. This required the knowledge and involvement of their technical staff, and they had more important activities to prioritise. A similar challenge was identified in company A, where the CMO was dependent upon the collaboration and competency of sales to develop personalised content. In company D, there was a desire to involve the whole company in the entire marketing process, and not only for content creation.

The collaboration on content creation, and a data driven use of analytics are considered some of the most important success factors in the implementation and successful use of MA. Therefore, companies should prioritize to solve these problems before starting the MA implementation process (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016; Murphy, 2018; Westergaard, 2016). If the companies experience a successful implementation of MA, they will be able to further enhance their ability to deliver more personalised content (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016; Murphy, 2018).

The study identified a difference in the understanding of MA and how it could provide benefits for the case companies. This was also reflected in their differences on MA expectations. The expectations in company A were unclear and company B did not consider it applicable for the B2B context. Meanwhile, the respondent from company A thought it would improve the marketing department's ability to warm up leads, before transferring them to the sale department. While respondent D1 could not understand how MA would provide anything new and considered the potential benefits to already be present in their current CRM.

In terms of time of implementation, the findings show that it was only respondent A2 and respondent B1, who brought up the importance of a realistic timeframe for the implementation. In this part of the findings, there is also a deeper insight into how respondent A2 consider the pre- and post-implementation phases of new technology, and the importance of fine tuning and adjust after all the unpredictable factors are identified. Realistic expectations on both implementation time, and benefits from MA are considered success factors related to both the scoping process, and the post implementation phase (Murphy, 2018).

The findings showed that all the case companies had an idea on how to reallocate efficiencies gained. Some of the examples included spending more time building customer relations, sales, prospecting, market analysis, content production, and planning. The results did not identify any areas in the case companies that would make marketing staff redundant. This is not unexpected as three of the case companies operate with marketing departments consisting of zero to two employees. Meanwhile, the results identified a need for more staff for the case companies to be able to implement and use MA efficiently. This was apparent in the identified expectations in company A and C, as they considered MA to require more resource and not less, especially towards content creation. This realisation can work in the case companies' advantage, and their challenge will be to identify how they should approach the need for new competency and more human resources. Will the case companies invest in staff training and build up their internal competencies in digital marketing? Or will they continue to outsource knowing that they might be missing out on potential leads and sales?

	Company A	Company B	Company C	Company D
1. Review and Development of Internal Marketing and Business Processes				
Established strategy and marketing goals	High	High	High	High
Realistic strategy and goals	Low	High	Low	Low
Digital marketing competency	Low	Low	Medium	Low
Digital marketing experience	Low	Low	Low	Low
Intention of gathering metrics	High	Medium	High	High
Current metrics	Low	Low	Low	Low
Understanding customer profiles	High	Medium	Medium	Medium
Level of outsourcing	Low	High	Medium	Medium
2. Correct Scoping of Instance Requirements and Implementation Project				
Functionalities needed	Medium	High	High	High
Choice of software	*Not registered*	High	Low	Low
3. Gain Organizational Buy-In and Find a Project Champion				
Top management	High	High	*Not registered*	Low
Collaboration	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium
Training	Low	Low	Low	Low
Project Champion	High	*Not registered*	*Not registered*	High
4. Create and Deliver Relevant and Timely Content				
Understanding	High	High	High	High
Use of analytics to identify customers	Low	Low	Low	Low
Personalized content	Low	Low	Low	Low
5. Set Realistic Expectations and Be Patient				
MA understanding	Medium	Medium	High	Medium
Time expectation	High	High	Medium	Medium
6. Continue to Invest and Reallocate Efficiencies Gained				
Need for added capacity	High	High	High	High

Table 2: Addressing the Seven Antecedents Based on a Ranking of Low / Moderate / High

5.1.1. Addressing the Research Question

The objective of this study was to identify the level of readiness for MA implementation in the Norwegian maritime industry, through running a multiple case study. In that regard, the following research question was developed:

> *What level of readiness does the Norwegian maritime industry have for implementation of marketing automation?*

This research question was addressed through applying the "seven antecedents of marketing automation success" model as the framework of this study. Through analysing each case company in terms of the antecedents, the findings revealed that the case companies were in an early phase of their digital marketing journey. The results showed an intention to adopt more digital marketing tools, but the competency and resources required to fully exploit these tools were not present. Overall, few of the required success factors for MA were identified, and the findings indicated a low digital marketing competency, few relevant marketing metrics, low degree of personalised content, and several challenges related to collaboration and former and current technology implementations.

However, the results did identify some success factors, such as marketing goals, understanding of content marketing, and functionalities required to reach their goals. The results also showed that several of the case companies had an ambition to use analytics from digital marketing activities to deliver more personalised content. However, none of the case companies could show to how this could be done in practice.

Based on these findings, the conclusion is that the Norwegian maritime industry displays a low level of readiness for implementation of MA.

5.2. Theoretical Implications

The first contribution of the study looks at how prior research has identified important antecedents for implementing MA, as well as the importance of aligning the marketing and sales department. However, there is currently no existing research on implementation MA in a Norwegian context, nor is there any research on MA in a maritime context. By using Murphy's model to identify present success factors, this is the first study that assess MA implementation readiness in a Norwegian B2B context.

The second contribution of the study is the evaluation of relevant technology adoption models and their application towards implementing MA. While the traditional technology adoption models can be useful in their own way, they were identified as to narrow in their approach for MA implementation. Murphy's model was the only model to capture the importance of content creation and sales and marketing alignment. Both factors established as important in B2B companies' ability to create and nurture leads through the sales funnel. Abilities which are essential for companies in the maritime industry in their search for international sales leads with complex customer profiles.

The third contribution is how the study identify the benefits MA can have on maritime companies' ability to produce high quality sales leads by strengthening the success factors required for implementing MA. The study shows how the maritime industry is past the hesitation towards digital marketing often found in the B2B sector. This hesitation has been replaced by a newfound understanding in how analytics and personalized content marketing can contribute towards the marketing goal. Still, the low level of digital marketing experience and lack of "know-how" where still dominant. The challenge for the industry will be to close the gap between understanding and practice. By mastering one success factor at the time, companies in the maritime industry can slowly make themselves ready to implement complex digital marketing solutions such as MA.

5.2. Managerial Implications

Based on the findings, four managerial implications have been reached.

1. Identify the first sales generating marketing metric. B2C marketers have had over 20 years to learn how to master the opportunities of digital marketing, and today they can measure their ROMI more accurately. However, this is not the case in the maritime industry, and there appears to be a misconception that sales generating marketing metrics are almost impossible to identify. This does not come as a surprise considering how they are still relying on traditional marketing strategies, which is both expensive and hard to measure.

With the industry now increasing their digital marketing efforts, they need to understand how relevant digital metrics can be beneficial in obtaining more relevant sales leads. By gaining more digital marketing experience and competency, companies will gain access to more relevant customer analytics and metrics. With the right efforts, it will be possible to observe the exact number of sales leads that are generated from activities such as, website traffic. The challenge will still be to identify which metric this is, and this will not happen overnight by implementing new technology. It will require the right staff, competency, and a proper alignment between marketing and sales. This should therefore be a top priority for maritime companies to establish, as this is essential if they later decide to implement MA.

2. Learn to walk before your run - Do not pursue a complex and "fancy" technology before proving that you can implement and master the use of less complex technology. While MA can provide many benefits, it is one of the more comprehensive and complex marketing technologies available. The more comprehensive and complex the implementation is, the more likely it is for problems to arise, and it can even make matters worse. It is therefore important that maritime companies that are considering implementing MA, actually assess how realistic and obtainable it is. This includes asking themselves "will it really solve 'all' the problems we think it will solve?"; "how successful have our prior technology implementations been?"; "do we have inhouse competencies?"; "is it necessary to go for the top shelf solution?"; and "can the same results be achieved through other means?". It is important to consider questions such as these, as it will help the company to identify whether there is a need for more complex functionalities in a new system, or whether more simple solutions are sufficient for reaching their goals.

3. Enable personalization of content by narrowing down the segment. The maritime industry is moving towards a greener and more sustainable future, which can open up for new market opportunities in new segments and geographical areas. New and upcoming industry trends will add to the challenge of identifying the customer, and it will require even more efforts into developing personalized and relevant content towards him/her.

Since the equipment providers in the maritime industry target primarily international customers, the cultural factor thereby adds an additional layer of challenges to an already complex customer profile. Until the target segment is narrowed down, the customer can be anyone from Turkish shipyards to Swedish ship designers. Different customer profiles will have different preferences in terms of the type of content they find relevant. Few, if any companies have access to the data and resources required to tailor content towards all types of customer profiles. A solution to this problem can be to narrow down the customer segments, and thereby enhance the ability to identify and deliver personalised content to a smaller group. This can be achieved by identifying the geographical areas where new industry trends are most prominent. This can further be combined with an option to change the website language according to the nationality of the customer. Even if a company is not considering implementing MA, the ability to create relevant and personalised content will continue to be a success factor for reaching out to new potential customers.

4. Ask the sales lead who he/she is, and whether there is an intention to build a boat: Companies in the maritime industry should aim at identifying new leads using as few resources as possible. With the complexity of stakeholders, decisionmakers, and influencers in the maritime industry, it can seem like a daunting task to figure out how to best identify high quality leads. While this challenge can be solved through MA implementation, it can also be solved through less complex solutions such as a newsletters signup page. Through predefined checkboxes on the signup page, companies can ask for specific information they consider valuable. For instance, the checkboxes could ask about their role (e.g., a ship designer, ship owner, shipyard), and whether they intend to build a boat in the next one to two years. While this new insight can generate new leads by itself, it can be further utilized by marketing and sales to enable further personalisation of customer content.

Final thoughts: For maritime companies with limited competency and experience in digital marketing, new marketing technology such as MA may seem like a quick fix, but it is not. One should also be aware of that marketing tools with low barrier of entry such as, Facebook and LinkedIn, do not necessarily provide results in form of more sales. They still require a certain level of effort and resources designated towards them. For instance, you can create a Facebook account with a few pictures, build it up with 10 000 followers that consist primarily of jobseekers. These efforts are futile if they do not generate leads. If a B2B company aims for success through digital marketing, then the understanding on exactly how digital marketing tools can benefit a company’s marketing strategy is not optional, it is a requirement.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research

In this section, we will highlight the main limitations for this study, and provide suggestions for future research.

5.3.1. Limitations

The aim of this thesis was to identify the level of readiness for MA implementation in the Norwegian maritime industry, through studying the marketing operations of four international B2B maritime equipment suppliers located in the M&R region. However, some limitations have been identified.

Although we had certain criteria's for the selection of our case companies and respondents, they were, nevertheless, selected based on convenience, which may have caused bias to the data, and reduced the level of generalisability for this study. Moreover, as the case companies only represented the maritime equipment segment, this reduced the generalisability for the entire Norwegian maritime industry.

When using a case study approach, it is recommended to collect data from multiple sources to strengthen the validity of the study (Saunders, 2007). However, as our data collection methods consist of semi-structured interviews and secondary data, we acknowledge that the validity is reduced. Additional data collection methods would have increased the validity through supporting our findings.

MA requires the involvement of particularly the top management, the marketing-, sales-, and IT department, as well as customers. Ideally, we should have interviewed respondents from each of these departments in each of the case companies, as this would have increased the validity of the study. Rather, we interviewed the CMO and COO of company A, the CEO of company B, the CMO of company C, and the CMO and CSO of company D. Moreover, we two respondents had to be excluded from the study, due poor data quality.

As the case companies had either not begun, or were at an early stage of the MA implementation process, this affected their answers to some of our interview questions. This was particularly notable in terms of antecedent five (set realistic expectations and be patient) and six (continue to invest and reallocate efficiencies gained), which made it challenging to analyse the two antecedents. The credibility of the data concerning antecedent five and six is therefore low, and is a major limitation for this study.

Around the time of running our interviews, both company C and D were participating in a digital marketing project by a local innovation hub. The focus of this project was on implementation of MA. This was partly reflected in their understanding of MA, compared to company A and B, who had not participated in this project. We anticipate that this could have caused some bias to our results, and is therefore another limitation.

Some of the data in the transcripts were ambiguous, and assumptions had to be made in terms of what was meant by the respondents. This may have caused bias to the interpretation of the results, and thereby reduced the reliability of the study.

5.3.2. Future research

As MA offers several opportunities for companies who implement it, we therefore consider it important that more research is made on the implementation process so that additional best-practice approaches can be established. The main areas of future research are as follows:

1. Larger Sample: Future research should run the same study again, where the following segments should be included: shipping companies/ship owners, specialised services, equipment, and shipyards. This would increase the generalisability for the industry. Moreover, at least two companies from each segment should be studied, where the sample represents different parts of Norway. The study should also include respondents from top management, the marketing-, sales-, and IT department, as well as customers. It could be viable to combine interviews with observations, as this will provide the necessary in-depth understanding of the case companies for determining the readiness of MA implementation in the Norwegian maritime industry.

2. Longitudinal study: We could have performed a longitudinal study, however, due to the short timeframe for this project, it was not feasible. We suggest that future research could take a longitudinal case study approach, where 1-2 companies are studied over time through applying “the seven antecedents of MA success” as the study framework (Murphy, 2018). This would provide further insights into the post-implementation steps, which we were unable to analyse properly due to low credibility of the data. Moreover, this would provide further insights into more best practice approaches for MA implementation, and help improve upon Murphy’s model.

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Appendix 1: Interview Guide

1. **Information**
    - Short presentation of the theme
    - Explain the purpose of the interview.
    - Go through GDPR and the interviewee rights.
    - Ask if the interviewee has any questions.
    - Ask the interviewee for permission to record the interview.
    - Begin recording the interview.

2. **Preview questions**
    - Determine what prior knowledge the interviewee has about marketing automation.

3. **Questions**
    - 21 questions related to the key success factors in the framework model used in our research.

4. **Summary**
    - Summary of the findings
    - Resolve any ambiguities.

~~Research~~ Interview questions: The questions below are based on a theoretical framework by Daniel Murphy. This framework consists of seven antecedents of marketing automation success.

Pre-Implementation	**Interview Questions**
1. Review and Development of Internal Marketing and Business Processes	• How would you describe the current digital marketing efforts in your firm? • What is your current marketing strategy? • What are your strengths within digital marketing?

	• What do you consider to be your main digital marketing challenge? • Does your firm use any form of marketing automation solutions? • How does your firm measure the marketing performance? • Do you still use any analog forms of marketing? ○ Is the firm expenditure on digital marketing greater than on analog marketing? • *Several digital marketing tools that exist today*, what digital marketing tools do you consider to be the most important? • What CRM solutions do you use?
2. Conduct Proper Scoping	• What are your marketing goals? • Are there any digital marketing tools you would like to implement? • Have you considered implementing marketing automation, why/why not? • Do you think your firm is ready to implement marketing automation as it is now? • Do you think the firm would need to hire new employees or outsource if you were to implement a marketing automation solution? • Which of your current challenges do you believe can be solved through marketing automation?
3. Gain Organizational Buy-In and Find a Project Champion	• How would you consider the organization's overall view on the use of new digital solutions? • What is your organization's earlier experience with implementation of new digital solutions? ○ Was this implementation successful or unsuccessful? Explain. • To what extent does the sales and marketing department collaborate?

<table>
<tr><td></td><td>How do you think the involvement of the two departments will affect a potential implementation?
Do you think the greater integration between marketing and sales from a new digital marketing solution will affect upper management's attitude towards the project?
Do you think that a marketing automation solution as we have described would require outsourcing of management and staff?
How do you consider the upper management's expectations towards the marketing operations?
Who would be in charge when implementing a new digital marketing solution?</td></tr>
<tr><td>Post-Implementation</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>4. Create and Deliver Relevant and Timely Content</td><td>Does your company do content marketing?
How do you measure the performance of content marketing?
Which channels do you use for delivering content to your customers?
How do you ensure that the content delivered to your customers is relevant?
How do you adjust the content?
Is personalization of content to your customers important to you?
Is feedback from your customers important to you?
Do you think there is room for improvement in the way you conduct content marketing, and how?</td></tr>
<tr><td>5. Continue to Invest and Reallocate Found Efficiencies</td><td>A marketing automation solution is likely to provide increased efficiency in a firm, and thereby allowing staff to spend time on other tasks that require human interaction. How would you manage this added capacity?</td></tr>
<tr><td>6. Set Realistic Goals and Expectations</td><td>When implementing a new digital marketing solution, how soon would you prefer to see results?</td></tr>
</table>

	• What type of results do you want to achieve with a new digital marketing solution?
Human Resources	• How would you describe the level of digital marketing competencies in your firm? • Do employees from different departments in your firm collaborate with regards to digital marketing? • How much time and resources does the firm spend on training the marketing department? • Do you think the marketing department has the necessary skills and resources to achieve current marketing goals?

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The Readiness of the Norwegian Maritime Industry for Implementation of Marketing Automation

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