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Digital online strategy for B2B internationalization

a multiple case-study on manufacturing SMEs

Master's Thesis
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Master's Programme in Industrial Engineering and Management ABSTRACT OF
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<p>International trade has become the normal for SMEs as borders between countries has seemingly disappeared due to the prevalence of information and communication technology. Lowering cost of digital technologies and possibility of rapid development have enabled new ways to compete. Digital technologies have been found to transform the structure of social relationships through social media and social networking in both the B2C and the B2B context. Previous research has studied digital transformations mainly as transformation initiatives needed to enhance digital capabilities and resources or as new technologies to use in order to improve business. Research has left a gap in defining tangible actions and metrics when pursuing internationalization through digital and online activities.</p> <p>This thesis studies digital online strategy for B2B internationalization of manufacturing SMEs. An extensive literature review synthesizes a conceptual framework on related constructs covering aspects, such as, Internet as path to internationalization, from IT strategy to digital transformation and business strategies, marketing in digital era, from multi-channel to omni-channel strategy, and social media influence and engagement. The empirical part of this thesis examines the digital readiness and competence of 12 manufacturing companies in the aforementioned theoretical context, and it is conducted as a multiple case-study using public materials of companies together with supportive interviews.</p> <p>The results of this thesis increases the know-how in content, actions and metrics for companies in improving their digital readiness and competence. The suggested actions and metrics provide strategic guidelines for companies to take during their pursuit for internationalization through online and use of digital technology. This thesis contributes to multitude of research fields as digital transformation and online internationalization are global phenomenons in any industry or organization.</p>		
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Abbreviations and Acronyms

B2B	Business to business
B2C	Business to consumer
C2C	Customer to customer
DTS	Digital transformation strategy
SME	Small and medium-sized enterprises
IT	Information technology
ICT	Information and communication technology
C-level executive	For example CEO, CIO, CDO
CEO	Chief executive officer
CIO	Chief information officer
CDO	Chief digital officer
IVR	Interactive voice recording
SMS	Short message service
TV	Television
3D	Three-dimensional
SEO	Search engine optimization
®	Registered trademark
R&D	Research and development
MEUR	Million Euros
BIM	Building information modeling
GLP	Good laboratory practice
CAD/CAM	Computer-aided design and manufacturing
X-ray	X-radiation, a form of electromagnetic radiation
2D	Two-dimensional
CMS	Content management system

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This thesis studies digital online strategy for B2B internationalization in special furniture manufacturing SMEs. The study is divided into a theoretical and an empirical part. The theoretical part provides an extensive literature review and synthesizes a conceptual framework on what makes up the digital online strategy for B2B internationalization by studying aspects, such as, Internet as path to internationalization, from IT strategy to digital transformation and business strategies, marketing in digital era, from multi-channel to omni-channel strategy, and social media influence and engagement. The empirical part of this thesis examines the digital readiness and competence of 12 manufacturing companies in the aforementioned theoretical context, and it is conducted as a multiple case-study using public materials of companies together with supportive interviews.

1.1 Background and motivation

The advancement of the Internet and the rapid internationalization of firms are major trends in export marketing research. International trade has become the normal for SMEs as borders between countries has seemingly disappeared due to the prevalence of information and communication technology [9] [27]. Digital technologies have been found to transform the structure of social relationships through social media and social networking in both the B2C and the B2B context [38].

The previous research on digital innovations [6] has shown that the lowering cost of digital technologies and possibility of rapid development have enabled new ways to compete [66] [46], and that the possibility of digital disruption of industries [20] have created a sense of urgency overarching all industries [29]. These digital disruptions of industries, even by small en-

trants, have been seen to flip or even destroy competitive positions of large traditional corporations [16].

In order to benefit from the emerging opportunities in the use of digital technologies and simultaneously to manage the threat of others disrupting the industry, companies have been studied to improve their digital readiness and competence [53]. Resulting integration of IT into corporate strategy has led to various concepts of IT strategies that mostly govern the management of IT infrastructure and offer system-centric roadmaps to future use of technologies [57]. The alignment of business strategies with IT strategies has been coined as the concept of digital transformation strategies that provide a more business-centric perspective to account the product-centric and customer-centric opportunities in adoption of new digital technologies including the necessary transformation of products, processes and organizational structures [10].

However, the previous research has studied digital transformations mainly as transformation initiatives needed to enhance digital capabilities and resources [34], or similarly, as new potential technologies to use in order to improve business [53]. Research has left a gap in defining concrete measurable strategic actions and metrics for companies to take in order to improve the digital readiness and competence of their digital services in the context of B2B internationalization. Furthermore, to emphasize the timing of this thesis, the late adoption of digital technologies, or no adoption at all, has been hindering international growth of special furniture manufacturing SMEs industry-wide.

This thesis explores the elements of digital online internationalization and strategic aspects of digital online strategy to provide actions and metrics that SMEs should take in their internationalization efforts to improve their digital readiness and competence. Previous research has revealed that global incumbents have been investing heavily on digital transformation [53]. However, SMEs in special furniture manufacturing are lacking concrete strategic guidance in use of these new digital online technologies and business strategies as part of their growth and internationalization activities. For example, what concrete actions should a company take in order to benefit from the use of social media in B2B context? How profound and significant changes this would require on the digital content of the company product range, company information, customer references, and other marketing and sales material?

We plan to rectify this situation by providing a conceptual framework with a holistic approach to digital online strategy for B2B internationalization. The increased know-how in content, actions and metrics on improving digital readiness and competence contributes to multitude of research fields as digital transformation and internationalization are global organization-wide

phenomenons overarching all industries. The in-depth analysis of the current digital readiness and competence of SMEs in special furniture manufacturing context allows companies, managers, consultants, and researchers to use, observe and measure these findings according to the derived actionable contexts given in the conceptual framework, and thus develop the knowledge on the digital online strategy for B2B internationalization further.

1.2 Research problem and research questions

The aforementioned background and motivation sets the research context for the research problem. The identified research gap in defining concrete measurable strategic actions and metrics for companies to take in order to improve the digital readiness and competence of their digital services in the context of B2B internationalization will be studied with to the following research problem:

How manufacturing SMEs can implement a digital online strategy for B2B internationalization?

Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to provide a better understanding on how manufacturing SMEs can implement a digital online strategy for B2B internationalization. The aforementioned research problem together with the research questions listed below are used to study the identified research gap:

RQ1: What are the minimum requirements for companies?

RQ2: What are the critical aspects in building a solid foundation?

RQ3: What actions should manufacturing SMEs take?

The aforementioned research problem is studied extensively from both the context of learning and scoping, and from the context of adaptation and cherry-picking. First, the thesis provides information on learning and scoping: RQ1 what are the minimum requirements for companies, and RQ2 what are the critical aspects in building a solid foundation. Second, the thesis provides guidelines on adaptation and cherry-picking: RQ3 what actions should manufacturing SMEs take when implementing a digital online strategy for B2B internationalization.

The RQ1 aims to discover the premise in company's use of digital technologies, and in the minimum requirements in terms of company's digital readiness and competence. Thus, provide basis for the RQ2 that highlights

the critical aspects in building a solid foundation for implementing the digital online strategy for B2B internationalization. Finally, the minimum requirements of RQ1 together with the critical aspects of RQ2 reveal the actions that manufacturing SMEs should take analyzed in RQ3.

1.3 Objective and scope of the study

The objective of this study is to provide a holistic understanding on how digital online strategy for B2B internationalization can be implemented in manufacturing SMEs. The elements of digital online internationalization and the strategic aspects in digital online strategy will be conceptualized, case companies' digital readiness and competence will be analyzed, and concrete actions and metrics will be given for SMEs to implement in their digital online strategy for B2B internationalization.

The theoretical objective of this thesis is to synthesize a body of knowledge on elements of digital online internationalization and strategic aspects in digital online strategy. This thesis undertakes a comprehensive literature review covering topics, such as, Internet as path to internationalization, from IT strategy to digital transformation and business strategies, marketing in digital era, from multi-channel to omni-channel marketing strategy, and social media influence and engagement. The theoretical importance of this thesis comes from providing an in-depth analysis on underlying concrete actions and metrics the manufacturing SMEs can take, observe, and measure when implementing their digital online strategy for B2B internationalization. For academic research, this thesis provides a deeper understanding on evaluating and analyzing digital readiness and competence of companies and conceptualizes a theoretical framework that can facilitate future research overarching industry boundaries and company sizes.

The practical objective of this thesis is to understand and provide guidance on how companies can evaluate, analyze, and improve their digital readiness and competence industry-wide. The goal is to define concrete measurable strategic actions and metrics for companies to take in order to improve their digital readiness in use of digital technologies and services in the context of digital online strategy for B2B internationalization. By analyzing the current situation of 12 companies, this thesis reveals valuable insights into current state of digital transformation and internationalization of SMEs in special furniture manufacturing industry. Based on the industry analysis and with the provided concretization on actions and metrics, the companies and practitioners can take, observe and measure their current situation and future potential in advance, even before acting on potential improvements or

adapting best practices from other industries.

This thesis is implemented as a qualitative case-study and the data is collected mainly using public materials of companies with few supportive interviews. The approach to study elements of online internationalization and strategic actions in digital strategies is pragmatic: concepts of digital innovations, digital disruptions, technical barriers, drivers for digital transformation, and leadership practices together with leadership structures are excluded both from the theoretical and empirical part of the study. This allows the thesis to focus on concrete elements of digital online internationalization and strategic actions in digital online strategies for SMEs in manufacturing industry.

The supportive interviews were conducted mainly to gain preliminary insight and confirmation into the industry-wide slow adaptation, or lack of adaptation, in use of digital technologies to support the internationalization and sales and marketing activities of companies. One C-level executive and one marketing manager were interviewed. In addition, the interviews assisted in scoping a comprehensive and intriguing set of companies for the multiple case-study to ensure the depth of the analysis.

1.4 Structure of the study

This thesis is divided into five parts: (1) introduction, (2) theoretical background, (3) research methodology, (4) findings, and (5) discussion. The second chapter of the thesis outlines the theoretical background in strategic use of digital technologies in the current digital era as a path to B2B internationalization. The focus of the chapter is to synthesize a body of knowledge into a conceptual framework on elements of digital online internationalization and strategic aspects in digital online strategy. The third chapter presents a comprehensive overview of the research methodology, research setting, data collection and data analysis used in this thesis. The fourth chapter presents the findings from the empirical part of the study and follows the actionable contexts synthesized in the conceptual framework. The fifth and final chapter of this thesis concludes the answers to the research questions and provides a more holistic approach to digital online strategy for B2B internationalization in terms of different aspects, actions and metrics that manufacturing SMEs should consider in their pursuit for international growth through digital online channels. The most important theoretical and practical implications are covered, and study limitations are discussed critically before, finally, providing conclusion to summarize the thesis.

Chapter 2

Theoretical background

This chapter presents the theoretical background for companies' digital online strategy for B2B internationalization. The aim of the chapter is to provide a sufficient knowledge to link the empirical part of the thesis into the current academic literature. The literature review is divided into five main sections that cover the elements of digital online internationalization and the strategic aspects in digital online strategy. This examination is required in order to understand how manufacturing SMEs can implement a digital online strategy for B2B internationalization. The literature review discloses topics, such as, the use of Internet as path to internationalization, transition from IT strategies to digital transformation and business strategies, use of marketing in digital era, shift from multi-channel to omni-channel marketing strategy, and use of social media influence and engagement. Finally, in the last section, the literature review is synthesized into a conceptual framework of digital online strategy for B2B internationalization. However, first, in order to provide a reasoning on why companies are using digital technologies and online channels in internationalization, we need to take a look at the viability and benefits of the digital online internationalization.

2.1 Internet as path to internationalization

Bell et al. [8] refer to “internationalization” as the deliberate use of information and communication technology (ICT) in foreign market entry. This has also been coined as “active online internationalization” by Yamin and Sinkovics [63] in which market presence is virtual rather than physical. Research has shown a growing competitive pressure increasing the use of the internet as a strategic tool [17] [47].

The advancement of internet has allowed SME exporters with limited

resources to access markets in new ways and to improve efficiency in receiving inquiries and orders globally [9] [27]. The internet has been argued to provide a viable and cost-effective path to early internationalization in a largely SME-based economical context [55]. Furthermore, Sinkovics et al. [54] examined the viability and effectiveness of the internet as path to internationalization and found that entrepreneurial SMEs that use internet as a sales channel can improve overall and export performance especially with online channel support, and that the internet should be used to complement relationship building on-site and not to substitute physical market presence.

Aforementioned have contributed to the better understanding of the Internet as path to internationalization by revealing the key benefits that SMEs can achieve through online internationalization. These benefits include the ability of SMEs with limited resources to access markets in new ways and to improve efficiency in receiving inquiries and orders globally, and to improve overall and export performance especially with added online channel support. In addition, Internet should be used to complement relationship building on-site and not to substitute physical market presence.

2.2 From IT strategy to digital transformation and business strategies

As discussed above, the internationalization through the use of digital technologies and online channels has opened a set of new opportunities for companies to gain competitive advantage and boost growth. In order to provide guidance in exploiting this potential, we need to take an in-depth examination at the underlying strategic aspects in what makes up the digital online strategy.

The potential benefits from use of digital technology, for example, improved sales or productivity, novel forms of customer interaction, and innovations in value creation has been found to allow entire business models to be reshaped or replaced [20]. Resulting integration of ICT into corporate strategy has led to various concepts of IT strategies [57] that mostly govern the management of IT infrastructure and offer system-centric roadmaps to future use of technologies. This has denoted the use of IT strategy as a subordinate functional strategy aligned with the chosen operational business strategy. This alignment of the operational business strategies with the functional IT strategies constitute as the concept of digital transformation strategy (DTS) as presented in Figure 2.1.

These digital transformation strategies provide a more business-centric

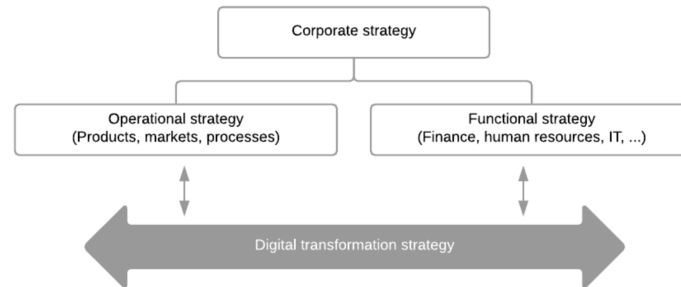


Figure 2.1: Relation between digital transformation strategy and other corporate strategies [42]

perspective that accounts the product-centric and customer-centric opportunities in new technologies including the necessary coordination, prioritization, and implementation in transformation of products, processes and organizational structures. Bharadwaj et al. [10] has suggested the use of “digital business strategy” to denote the close fit between digital transformation strategies, IT strategies, and all other operational and functional corporate strategies. Bharadwaj et al. [10] denote that a digital business strategy goes beyond the traditional role of IT systems and technologies and recognizes the pervasiveness of digital technologies to all functional and operational areas within firm operations. However, similar to IT strategies that describe future roadmaps, digital business strategies often describe desired future business opportunities arising from the use of digital technologies, whereas digital transformation strategies provides the actionable blueprints to govern the transformation. Matt et al. [42] has devised a digital transformation framework (Figure 2.2) that integrates the four organizational dimensions and their dependencies within the digital transformation strategy. These dimensions include the use of technologies, changes in value creation, structural changes, and financial aspects.

However, the exploitation and integration of new digital technologies has been one of the biggest challenges of the current era and no sector or industry has been immune to the effects [20]. The digital transformation has become a high priority for business leaders and has been expected to make an increasing strategic contribution to the overall business [12]. However, the rapid advancement of internet and digital technologies have provided a myriad of important elements in digital transformation that managers have to consider and they are often left with a lack of clarity about the different options.

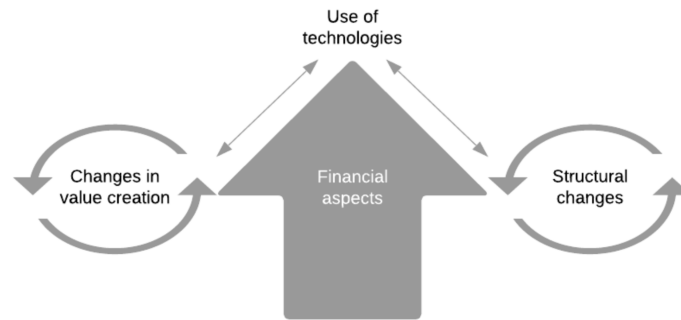


Figure 2.2: Digital transformation framework: balancing four transformational dimensions [42]

Hess et al. [29] has derived a set of strategic questions aligned with the four dimensions of the aforementioned digital transformation framework. The following questions and decisions in Table 2.1 are to be considered when assessing the adoption of a particular option in digital transformation strategy concerning either the use of technologies, changes in value creation, structural changes, or financial aspects.

Use of technologies					
1. Strategic role of IT?	Enabler			Supporter	
2. Technological ambition?	Innovator	Early adopter		Follower	
Changes in value creation					
3. Degree of digital diversification?	Electronic sales channels	Cross-media	Enriched-media	Content platforms	Extended business
4. Revenue creation?	Paid content		Freemium	Advertising	Complementary products
5. Future main business scope?	Content creation	Content aggregation	Content distribution	Management of content platforms	Other
Structural changes					
6. Responsibility for digital transformation strategy	Group CEO	CEO of business unit	Group CDO		Group CIO
7. Organizational positioning of new activities	Integrated			Seperated	
8. Focus of operational changes?	Products and services		Business processes		Skills
9. Building of competencies?	Internally	Partnership	Company takeovers	External sourcing	
Financial aspects					
10. Financial pressure on current core business?	Low		Medium		High
11. Financing of new activities?	Internal			External	

Table 2.1: Key decisions for a digital transformation strategy [29]

Managers are to consider the significance of the firm’s IT in achieving strategic goals. Whether the firm regard IT as an enabler of new business

opportunities or as a means of supporting business change. Similarly, the firm's ambition towards new digital technologies is to be considered. Aggressive approach is to act as an innovator that creates and introduces new technological solutions into markets, which are then subsequently deployed by early adopters during early stages of their development. Whereas, a more conservative firms are considered as followers that only adopt widely used and established digital solutions.

Similarly, managers are to consider the extent to which their firm should diversify the use of digital technologies in their business. SMEs are seen to emphasize the stability of their core business in digital transformation, whereas, larger firms are seen to actively diversify and transform their traditional businesses into digital and simultaneously leverage the new possibilities offered by digital technologies [29]. Furthermore, the managers need to address whether the digital transformation changes the revenue creation, for example, media companies have adopted new approaches in revenue creation such as paid content, a freemium model (a basic free version and a paid version with additional value), advertisement, and complementary products. Similarly, managers are to consider the future business scope. For example, media companies have been studied to maintain their focus on traditional activities such as content creation, aggregation and distribution, however, simultaneously attempting to exploit opportunities of digital transformation through management of content platforms.

Execution of a digital transformation strategy requires a person in charge who is fully responsible for the transformation. Ideally, the CEO or CIO if the focus is more on the business processes. In recent years, the trend in customer interfacing businesses has been to appoint a chief digital officer (CDO) working alongside the CIO together managing the transformation. In addition, it is to be considered whether the digital transformation strategy is to integrate digital into current operations or to organize them as separate business units, for example, as subsidiaries. Subsequently, the execution of a digital transformation strategy can result in operational changes internally through business processes or through products and services at the customer interface. Similarly, the adoption of new digital opportunities might need new skill sets, thus operational changes might be required. As a resulting action, a firm can either build on their current capabilities and acquire the required competencies themselves through training or hiring, or to partner with or takeover a firm with the necessary skill set, or to use outsourcing firms.

Furthermore, Hess et al. [29] remark that the willingness of top management towards digital transformation often depends on the financial pressure and competitive situation of the current core business. Firm has to have

the means to finance the digital transformation, either through internal or external financing options. However, firms struggling with financial pressure have their financing options severely limited.

Above findings have contributed to the better understanding of the change from IT strategy to digital transformation and business strategies through the provided reasoning on the scope of digital transformation, and on the key decisions for companies to consider when implementing a digital transformation strategy. To conclude, the digital transformation strategy overarches the corporate strategy encompassing the operational (products, markets, processes) and functional (finance, human resources, IT, ...) strategies. It goes beyond the traditional role of IT systems and technologies and recognizes the pervasiveness of digital technologies to all functional and operational areas within firm operations. Digital transformation strategy provides actionable blueprints to govern the transformation and requires balancing the four transformational dimensions that include changes in value creation, financial aspects, structural changes, and use of technologies. Through a careful assessment of the key considerations and decisions, any company can potentially navigate their way through digital transformation, even if they are lacking the needed skill set to begin with. The potential antecedents from digital transformation includes improved sales or productivity, novel forms of customer interaction, and innovations in value creation that have allowed entire business models to be reshaped or replaced. Whereas, potential barriers include a myriad of important elements in digital transformation with a lack of clarity about the different options, as well as, firms struggling with financial pressure have their financing options for digital transformation severely limited.

2.3 Marketing in digital era

Digital has become increasingly important source of competitive advantage in both B2C and B2B marketing as internet usage has continued to spread worldwide. Main research focus has been on the future opportunities that the digital marketing presents with less attention to the actual challenges that firms will face in practice when transforming to digital. Literature overview by Leeflang et al. [38] highlighted the three main challenges in digital marketing. These include the rise of new digital media and channels, importance of analytics and big data, and effects on business and revenue models.

Furthermore, Leeflang et al. [38] evaluated the current and future use of digital channels in marketing in 2014. These digital channels included the

following: company home page, e-mail communication, social media sites, natural search, paid search words, paid banner ads, mobile and SMS communication, online stores, mobile applications, interactive voice recordings, and third-party online stores. Their findings highlighted that the traditional use of company home page and email communication are seen to prevail. Whereas, social media and mobile are seen to as the main future areas for growth. Whereas, other channels are suggested to be used selectively on case-by-case basis.

In their study, Leeftang et al. [38] found seven main trends that presented dominant changes that affect firms dramatically. The most dominant changes for manufacturing industry in B2B are the ability to interact with and/or serve customers in a new manner, the ability to reach new customer segments, and the changes related to increased access to data and customer insight. In addition, of which the ability to reach new customer segments is shown most predominant in manufacturing industry compared to other industries. Other trends included the following: greater ability to reduce costs in various business processes through technology, increasing pace of change in the marketplace, greater use of analytical tools and models in decision making, emergence of new business models and new revenue streams.

As a result, Leeftang et al. [38] suggested and evaluated 10 digital marketing tensions based on their degree of challenge in resolving a gap in plans to address the challenge. These digital marketing tensions were grouped based on the evaluation into having big challenges that require most developed plans (customer insight and social media), or having sizeable but not fully addressed challenges (talent gap, metrics and organization), or having moderate challenges with modest gap in plans (digital revolution and automated interactions), or as low hanging fruits that could easily be addressed (price transparency, online opportunity and breakthrough).

All of the above have contributed to the better understanding of marketing in digital era as digital has become increasingly important source of competitive advantage in both B2C and B2B marketing as internet usage has continued to spread worldwide. Three biggest challenges are the rise of new digital media and channels, importance of analytics and big data, effects on business and revenue models. Highlighted findings entail that the traditional use of company home page and email communication are seen to prevail. Whereas, social media and mobile are seen to as the main future areas for growth. Furthermore, other channels are suggested to be used selectively on case-by-case basis. These include channels, such as, natural search, paid search words, paid banner ads, SMS communication, online stores, interactive voice recordings and 3rd party online stores. Furthermore, seven main trends are presenting the most dominant changes affecting firms: abil-

ity to interact and / or serve customers in a new manner, ability to reach new customer segments, changes related to increased access to data and customer insight, greater ability to reduce costs in various business processes through technology, increasing pace of change in the marketplace, greater use of analytical tools and models in decision making, emergence of new business models and new revenue streams. In addition, the evaluated 10 digital marketing tensions grouped in three: customer insight and social media having big challenges and require most developed plans, digital revolution and automated interactions having sizeable but not fully addressed challenges with modest gap in plans, and price transparency, online opportunity and breakthrough as low hanging fruits that could easily be addressed. Furthermore, the above findings have contributed to the better understanding of the marketing capabilities gap in digital era [18] by revealing the three biggest improvement opportunities that companies across all sectors should address: firms ability to successfully manage the gap in supply and demand of analytically trained people in digital marketing, redesign the organization structure to better account for digitally transformed business with clear incentives and decision-making process, and making actionable digital metrics for the digital marketing.

2.4 From multi-channel to omni-channel marketing strategy

The advancement of online channel and rise of new digital channels such as social media and mobile has allowed firms to serve their customers in various digital and analog means. Multi-channel strategies addresses the decision on whether additional channels should be added to the existing marketing channel mix [23] [19] and whether the firm should be present online and offline as well [4]. Later studies have broadened the scope of multi-channel to address the issues such as management and integration of customers across channels [43], which suggests a shift from multi-channel towards omni-channel marketing [50].

Neslin et al. [43] considers and emphasizes channels as customer contact points through which the firm and the customer interact, thus excluding the one-way mass-communication channels such as TV. However, Li and Kannan [39] denote that these mass-communication and advertisement channels, such as TVs, have already become an integral part of the available digital online channel mix, as in light of the recent advancements, TV shows have started to interact with customers during TV shows through mobile applica-

tions.

Before the advancement of online and digital channels, the multi-channel strategy was considered to have a three folded approach in which the search happens in one, for example, in traditional direct marketing channel (catalogs) or in an online channel (websites), and the purchase in another offline channel (stores). Whereas, the integration of digital channels, such as the online websites, mobile devices, tablets, and social media, have made it possible for firms to evolve towards seamless customer experience where there is less or no distinction between the online and the physical, and has transformed these firms into a showrooms without walls [15].

Verhoef et al. [61] has highlighted that the customers use these channels seamlessly and interchangeably during the search and purchase process which has proven difficult or virtually impossible for firms to control. For example, consider the showrooming issue in which the customers, while visiting in a store, are doing searches online for the product information, reviews and offers for finding cheaper offer of the same product elsewhere [49].

Baxendale et al. [7] and Hennig-Thurau et al. [28] denote that the distinction between the one-way communication and the two-way interaction between customers and firms has become less obvious in the omni-channel marketing as the customer contact points have broadened to include customer-to-customer and peer-to-peer interactions, for example, in social media. In general, Verhoef et al. [61] has defined the omni-channel as the management and optimization of customer contact points, experience and performance across all available channels.

Above findings have contributed to the better understanding in digital marketing strategies as the companies can manage, optimize, and benefit from all of the potential digital channels through an effective use of omni-channel marketing strategy. Every digital customer contact points is to be considered as a digital channel, including, but not limited to, one-way communication and two-way interaction between firm and customer, and customer-to-customer and peer-to-peer interactions, for example, in social media. Customers are using these channels seamlessly and interchangeably during their search and purchase process.

2.5 Social media influence and engagement

The online based social media has made it possible for one person or business to communicate and interact with hundreds or even thousands of other people about products and businesses that provide these products. This change has increased the importance of both C2C and B2C communication.

Boone and Kurtz [13] introduced the concept of integrated marketing communications as the guiding principle for firms to follow in order to produce a unified and a customer-focused message aligned with the firm objectives across the potential medium in promotional mix, including, advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, public relations or publicity, direct marketing, sponsorship, guerrilla marketing, corporate image, and product placement. However, traditional marketing related aspects like content, timing, and frequency are outside of firms control in social media communication also referred to as user-generated content. Blackshaw and Nazzaro [11] describes the user-generated content as online information created, initiated, circulated, and used by other users with the intent on educating each other about products, brands, services, personalities, and issues. Thus, the effort should concentrate on directing and shaping the social media discussion in a manner that is inline with the mission and performance goals of the firm [41].

The interaction between buyers and sellers has changed since the emergence of social media, and the increased use of social media has been found to have positive effect on sales in B2B context [1]. Customers have incorporated social media into their daily lives and social media has encompassed the business landscape. Customers liking firms on Facebook, following firms on Twitter, or connecting to firms in LinkedIn are becoming increasingly connected to these firms, more knowledge about their products and selections, and more powerful in buyer-seller relationships through accessibility of information. Avlonitis and Panagopoulos [5] has suggest social media customer integration as a logical progression for firms to expand their customer communication. Social media has been studied to improve business exposure, increase online traffic, and provide customer insight [56].

Andzulis [3] has asserted that social media should be integrated into firms customer engagement activities. These activities build social capital in encouraging customers to interact, engage, and establish relationships with the salespeople [2]. Prahalad and Ramaswamy [48] has found social media shifting the power from seller to buyer. Similarly, Greenberg [26] has found buyers to have more equal footing with sellers because of the increased buyer-seller collaboration and co-creation of knowledge and value through social media. However, customers have founded to have higher expectations in social media channels for firm representatives to either adapt or risk losing or alienating their customer base [30]. Agnihotri et al. [1] provided a conceptual model to visualize the findings in that the use of social media in information communication increases the responsiveness of the salesperson which has been found to have a positive correlation on customer satisfaction (Figure 2.3). Furthermore, customers have been found to value this extra medium through which they can interact with the salespeople [1].

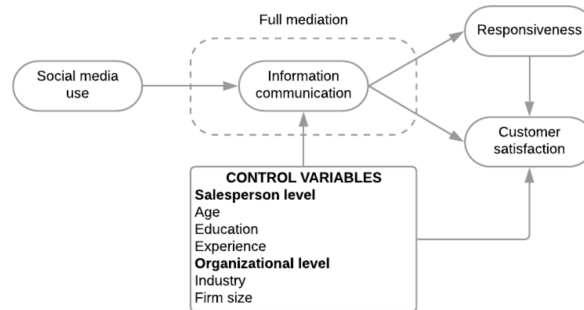


Figure 2.3: Conceptual model in use of social media [1]

The interactions in social media form the basis for social media analytics. Firms have been found to invest heavily on raising their online profile in order to connect and engage with potential customer and promoters through their actions in social media. Wilson et al. [62] has presented four different social media strategies: the practitioner strategy, the creative experimenter strategy, the social media champion strategy, and the social media transformer strategy. Similar approaches are required in marketing efforts to enable customers to recognize the marketing campaigns on social media [62].

Literature overview by Perrault and Mosconi [45] has listed the most popular concepts, definitions and dimensions for social media engagement. Hoffman and Fodor [31] describes the concept of consumer brand engagement in which the level of customer's cognitive, emotional and behavioral investment in specific brand interactions are examined through dimensions such as immersion, passion, and activation. Whereas, Leckie et al. [37] describes the concept of consumer brand engagement through dimensions as involvement, participation and self-expressiveness of the brand. Furthermore, Brodie et al. [14] describes the concept of customer engagement as a psychological state that occurs by virtue of interactive, co-creative customer experiences with a focal agent / object (e.g., a brand) in focal service relationships. Additionally, Kumar et al. [36] describes the concept of customer engagement value as active interactions of a customer with a firm, with prospects and with other customers, whether they are transactional or non-transactional, and additionally, engagement is also seen as a way to create customer interaction and participation, all of which are measured through dimensions such as customer purchasing, referral behavior, influencer behavior, knowledge behavior. Whereas, Van Doorn et al. [60] describe the concept of customer engagement behavior through engagement brand behaviors that go beyond transactions,

and may be specifically defined as a customer's behavioral manifestations that have a brand or firm focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers, and is measured through dimensions such as valence, form / modality, scope, nature of impact, and customer goals. Finally, Perrault and Mosconi [45] unified these aforementioned definitions for social media engagement as customer action of liking, commenting and sharing content published by the firm.

Furthermore, the social media engagement has been categorized as actions and metrics used to interact on social media platforms [35]. These interactions include measurable actions such as: like, dislike, share, visit, view, click, tag, hover, check-in, pin, embed, endorse, upload and download. Each of these interactions have a unique compound features that allow users to, for example, express their positive or negative feelings about content. Distribute content to their social network. Count the number of website visitors. Track the number of times content has been seen. Count the number of clicks on a hyperlink content. Assign content to a person. Track moving the cursor over social media content. Announce and share their arrival at a location. Pinning interesting content at the top of the page. Incorporate social media content into a blog or website. Approve other people, products or content, and add content to a social media platform.

Literature overview by Perrault and Mosconi [45] has listed the most popular definitions for measures of engagement as identified actions and metrics in customer interaction when measuring customer brand engagement. Rapp et al. [49] suggest measuring engagement through popularity with metrics, such as, number of likes, number of comments, number of followers, length of the wall post. Whereas, Tsai and Men [58] [59] suggest measuring engagement through affiliation, conversation, and responsiveness through metrics such as click-through rate and conversion rate. Kabadayi and Price [33] measures engagement through communicating and broadcasting with liking and commenting as metrics. Maiz et al. [40] measures engagement through social interactions through number of clicks and comments. Whereas, Howard et al. [32] measures engagement itself through metrics from actions such as posting on the page, commenting post, replying to comment. However, Oh et al. [44] suggested measuring engagement through economic performance assessed through metrics such as number of followers, number of tweet, number of Facebook likes, number of other Facebook profiles mentioning, number of views, and number of comments. Whereas, Schivinski et al. [52] suggested measuring engagement through consumption, contribution and creation measured through read posts, read fanpages, watch pictures, follow blogs, follow brand, comment of videos, comment on post, comment on pictures, share brand posts, like pictures, like posts, initiate posts, post

picture, write review, write posts, and post videos.

Perrault and Mosconi [45] unified the findings in their literature overview to provide a framework of factors of customer brand engagement on social media. Figure 2.4 shows how these individual social media characteristics are related to social media metrics and brand engagement, and illustrates that the identified types of antecedents (brand, user, technical, page / content) are interlinked with measurable actions referred to as metrics that govern the engagement. However, the quantitative data gathered from these metrics is suggested to be accompanied by qualitative data to present a more complete picture. In conclusion, managerial implications by Perrault and Mosconi [45] suggest that the focus should be on determining how to measure engagement and which content strategies actually do promote engagement.

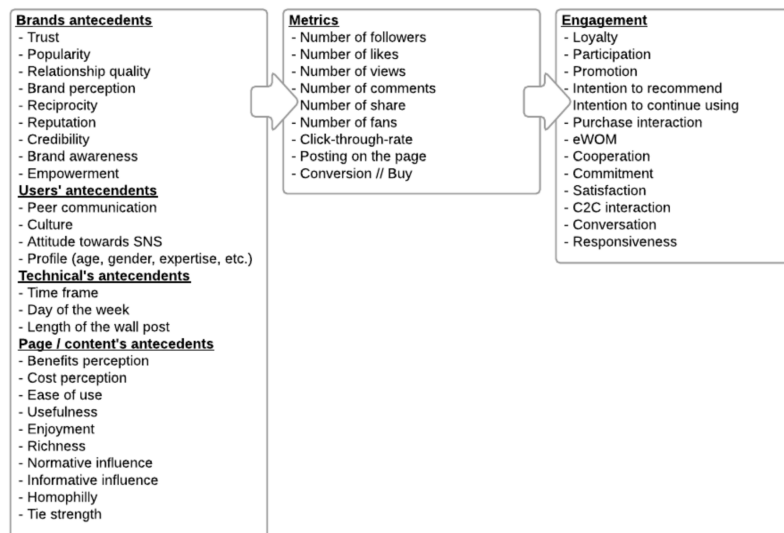


Figure 2.4: Framework of factors of customer brand engagement on social media [45]

Above findings have contributed to the better understanding in use of social media as an online based medium which has made it possible for one person or business to communicate and interact with hundreds or even thousands of other people about products and businesses that provide these products. A concept of integrated marketing communication is suggested to be used as a guiding principle to produce a unified and customer-focused message aligned with firm objectives across promotional mix including marketing and sales channels. Furthermore, as the content, timing and frequency of the user-generated content that is created, initiated, circulated and used by other

users in social media is out of the hands of the company, the company's effort should concentrate on directing and shaping the social media discussion in a manner that is inline with the mission and performance goals of the company. Moreover, the interaction between buyers and sellers has changed since the emergence of social media and has been found to have a positive effect on sales in B2B context. Furthermore, social media has been studied to improve business exposure, increase online traffic, and provide customer insight. Social media activities should build social capital in encouraging customers to interact, engage, and establish relationships with the salespeople. Furthermore, customers have been found to have higher expectations in social media channels for firm representatives to either adapt or risk losing or alienating their customer base. All of the above considerations in social media antecedents, metrics and engagement activities have increased the importance of social media in both C2C and B2C communication.

2.6 Summary of the literature review

This chapter has reviewed a large body of literature regarding elements in digital online internationalization and strategic aspects in digital online strategy, such as, Internet as path to internationalization, from IT strategy to digital transformation and business strategies, marketing in digital era, from multi-channel to omni-channel strategy, and social media influence and engagement. The focus of this chapter was to explain and incorporate the overarching nature of the digital online strategy in B2B internationalization. Figure 2.5 synthesizes the main implications of this chapter into a conceptual framework that reveals the actionable context for each of the studied topics for the digital online strategy for B2B internationalization.

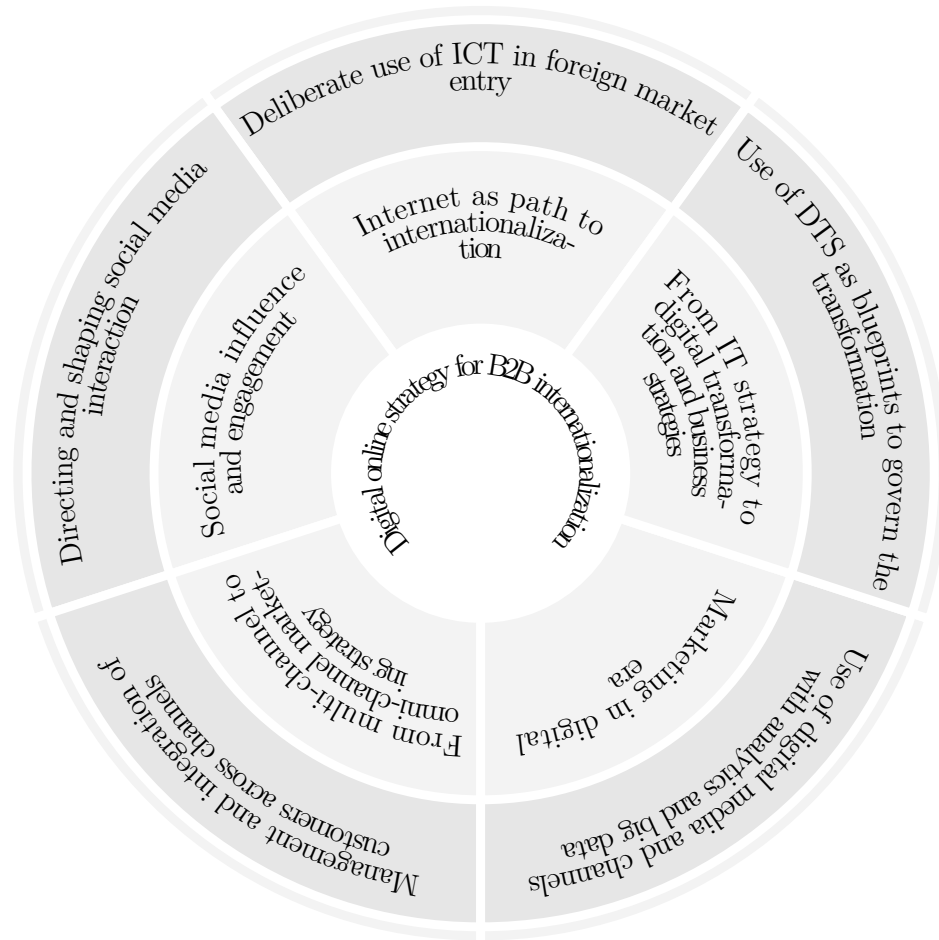


Figure 2.5: Digital online strategy for B2B internationalization

As discussed above, the elements of digital online internationalization and the strategic aspects in digital online strategy with their distinctive features present the underlying constructs that produce the digital online strategy for B2B internationalization. Therefore, the synthesizing conceptual framework is divided into these five main sections: Internet as path to internationalization, from IT strategy to digital transformation and business strategies, marketing in digital era, from multi-channel to omni-channel strategy, and social media influence and engagement. Furthermore, the context for each section was developed further to reach sufficient level of concreteness to reveal actions and metrics necessary in online internationalization activities. These derived actionable contexts for each section are as follows:

Internet as path to internationalization entails the *deliberate use of ICT in foreign market entry*.

From IT strategy to digital transformation and business strategies depicts the *use of DTS as blueprints to govern the transformation*.

Marketing in digital era incorporates the *use of digital media and channels with analytics and big data*.

From multi-channel to omni-channel marketing strategy involves the *management and integration of customers across channels*.

Social media influence and engagement entails *directing and shaping social media interaction*.

The above framework facilitates a structured approach for the empirical part of the study and can be used to provide a better understanding on the research problem on how manufacturing SMEs can implement a digital online strategy for B2B internationalization. Firstly, by studying RQ1, minimum requirements for companies, and RQ2, critical aspects in building a solid foundation, we will get a better understanding on what are the requirements for digital online strategy for B2B internationalization. In other words, we will learn how to measure and analyze the state of digital readiness and competence. Secondly, there is little literature about concrete measurable actions and metrics for companies to take which is why studying RQ3, what actions should manufacturing SMEs take, will give us better understanding in defining these concrete measurable strategic actions and metrics for companies to take in order to improve the digital readiness and competence of their digital services in the context of B2B internationalization. Next, the following chapter will discuss the research methodology and research setting followed with the presentation of the findings from the empirical part of the study.

Chapter 3

Research methodology

This chapter presents an overview of the research methodology, data collection and analysis. First, the research setting for the study is outlined. Second, the methodological approach is described. Finally, the data collection procedures and the conducted data analysis are presented.

3.1 Research setting

The conducted multiple case-study explores the current worldwide situation in use of digital technologies in SMEs in the manufacturing industry, especially in the special furniture manufacturing. The thesis was conducted by request from one of the case companies with a goal set to provide a concrete strategic guidance in current and future use of new digital technologies in pursuit of internationalization. The company in question indicated that the industry is lacking behind in the digitalization compared to other industries, and at the same time the company had started to pursue internationalization. This timing provided a unique opportunity for collaboration to gather an invaluable insight on current industry situation in the use of digital technologies worldwide.

As the previous research had studied digital transformations mainly as transformation initiatives needed to enhance digital capabilities and resources, or similarly, as new potential technologies to use in order to improve business. Research had left a gap in defining concrete measurable strategic actions and metrics for companies to take in order to improve their use of the digital services in the context of digital online strategy for B2B internationalization to tackle the originating late adoption of digital technologies, or no adoption at all, that can be considered to hinder the international growth of special furniture manufacturing SMEs industry-wide.

3.2 Methodological approach

A qualitative multiple-case study method was chosen to explore the identified research gap. The digital readiness and competence of 12 manufacturing companies in the aforementioned theoretical context was conducted using public materials of companies together with supportive interviews. The approach to study elements of online internationalization and strategic actions in digital transformation strategies was pragmatic: concepts of digital innovations, digital disruptions, technical barriers, drivers for digital transformation, and leadership practices and leadership structures are excluded both from the theoretical and empirical part of the study. This allows the thesis to focus on the concrete elements of digital online internationalization and on the strategic actions in use of digital technologies in SMEs in manufacturing industry, especially in special furniture manufacturing.

The case-study method has been criticized not to provide a sufficient result set for scientific generalization [64] [22]. However, it has been found that through analytic generalization, for example, by using a theoretical framework to analyze and support the case findings, the results from case-study can be applied to other situations [65]. Furthermore, the multiple case-study approach improves the generalization as each case may support, reject or shape a tentative proposition emerging from an individual case, and as it enables comparison of cases to reveal whether those emergent findings are idiosyncratic to single case or recur in several cases [22]. Accordingly, as this multiple case-study has been conducted using a supportive conceptual framework synthesized from the theory, the results can be generalized to provide a set of generic strategic actions for companies to undertake in their digital initiatives in any industry.

3.3 Data collection procedures

This section uncovers the data collection procedures used in this thesis. First the selection of case companies is described followed by the case company profiles and by describing the data collection approach.

The selection of case companies was based on theoretical sampling with joint decision on data collection in order to develop a theory as it emerges [51]. Eisenhardt [22] suggest that a multiple case-study ranging from four to ten cases provides a good basis for analytical generalization. Thus, the goal was set to find 10 manufacturing SMEs within the special furniture manufacturing industry, and to have two large already successfully internationalized and more digitally advanced companies from adjacent manufacturing industries

as control companies.

As previously discussed, different industries have been impacted differently by digitalization. A set of supportive interviews were conducted to gain preliminary insight and confirmation into the industry-wide slow adaptation, or lack of adaptation, in the use of digital technologies to support the internationalization, sales and marketing, and information communication activities of companies. One C-level executive and one marketing manager were interviewed. The interviews were used to scope a comprehensive and intriguing set of companies for the multiple case-study to ensure the depth of the analysis in international context. The interviews were not recorded as their input was mainly to narrow down the selection of companies.

All of the selected companies had taken systematic steps towards internationalization while efforts towards digitalization were varying in great detail. Each of the selected companies presented a varying international presence through their respective export models and also had an online presence at least in the form of a website. Total of 10 companies in special furniture manufacturing (Visu Kaluste, Wesemann Lab, Köttermann, Waldner Lab, Mott Lab, Lab Modul, Lekolar, Lab Interior, Pol Lab, and Labflex) were selected together with two large already successfully internationalized and more digitally advanced companies from adjacent manufacturing industries as control companies (Planmeca, and Halton). Short descriptions of the case companies are revealed below together with key financial indicators accompanied with indicative descriptions of international presence:

Visu Kaluste¹: Since 2014 with 15 employees having turnover of 3.226 M€ and operating profit of 0.268 M€. International online presence in 3 languages with sales in 4 countries and manufacturing in Finland.

Wesemann Lab¹: Since 1963 with 173 employees having turnover of 54.978 M€ and operating profit of 0.648 M€. International online presence in 4 languages with sales in 24 countries and manufacturing in Germany and Switzerland.

Köttermann¹: Since 1972 with 266 employees having turnover of 43.114 M€ and operating profit of -3.157 M€. International online presence in 2 languages with sales in 11 countries and manufacturing in Germany.

Waldner Lab¹: Since 1950's (1908) with 1350 employees having turnover of 216.931 M€ and undisclosed operating profit. Interna-

¹Key financial and employee data from 2016

tional online presence in 2 languages with sales in 69 countries and manufacturing in Germany.

Mott Lab²: *Since 1960's (1934) with 11-50 (>250) employees having undisclosed turnover and operating profit. International online presence in English with sales in 10 countries and manufacturing in Canada.*

Lab Modul³: *Since 2006 with 19 employees having undisclosed turnover and operating profit of 0.274 M€. International online presence in 3 languages with sales in 10 countries and manufacturing in Denmark.*

Lekolar³: *Since 2004 (1971) with 33 (281) employees having turnover of 24.405 M€ and operating profit of 0.255 M€. International presence in 5 languages with sales in 4 countries without own manufacturing.*

Lab Interior²: *Since 2014 (1990) with 110 employees having undisclosed turnover and operating profit. International online presence in 3 languages with sales and manufacturing in Slovenia and 2 other countries.*

Pol Lab³: *Since 2004 with 17 employees having turnover of 2.389 M€ and operating profit of 0.093 M€. International online presence in 2 languages with sales in 19 countries and manufacturing in Poland.*

Labflex³: *Since 1990 (1960's) with 113 employees having undisclosed turnover and operating profit of -6.382 M€. International online presence in 2 languages with sales in 2 countries and manufacturing in Denmark.*

Planmeca³: *Since 1971 with 2755 employees having turnover of 710.600 M€ and operating profit of 38.169 M€. International online presence in 11 languages with sales in 138 countries and manufacturing in Finland.*

Halton³: *Since 1969 with 1465 employees having turnover of 205.456 M€ and operating profit of 7.477 M€. International online presence in 14 languages with sales in 69 countries and manufacturing in Finland and 8 other countries.*

Information enclosed in brackets indicates the year of establishment if it differs from the year when the business entered into the special furniture

²Undisclosed financial data

³Key financial and employee data from 2017

manufacturing industry, or similarly the total number of employees if the company is involved in other business through separate subsidiaries or organized as a group overarching multiple industries. The case companies are described in more detail in Appendix A.

The selected group of case companies represents an ideal sample for theory development. It provides a variety of distinct cases and examples from the special furniture manufacturing industry with two control companies from adjacent manufacturing industries with a proven track record in building an internationally successful business. Selected companies varied in size both financially and in employee count, and in international as well as in online presence. Some companies had already internationalized widely while others were in the beginning of their internationalization efforts. Some companies were using digital technologies extensively from social media to mobile applications while others were merely providing simple website with general contact information.

3.4 Data analysis

The supportive interviews were conducted in Q2 in 2018 to gain preliminary insight and confirmation into the industry-wide slow adaptation, or lack of adaptation, in use of digital technologies. One C-level executive and one marketing manager were interviewed. The main purpose of the interviews were to scope the disclosed set of companies for the multiple case-study to ensure the depth of the analysis. Notes were taken during the interviews but the interviews were not recorded or transcribed.

The primary qualitative data was gathered during Q2 and Q3 in 2018 and were analyzed in an iterative manner following the instructions on theory building from case-study research [22]. Each of the case companies were examined in a detail and went through an extensive within-case analysis to identify each of them separately and simultaneously to find unique tentative themes. The insight derived from literature review were used to limit the analysis to specific topics linked to digital online strategy for B2B internationalization context. First, the emerging themes were studied as elements of digital online internationalization and strategic aspects in digital online strategy. In all the cases, various export approaches, as well as, digital tools were used by companies in their internationalization and digitalization efforts and in different level. Therefore, the topics were required to be developed into more detailed constructs that emerged during the literature review: the use of Internet as path to internationalization, transition from IT strategies to digital transformation and business strategies, use of marketing in digital

era, shift from multi-channel to omni-channel marketing strategy, and use of social media influence and engagement. These constructs provided the necessary basis for analysis to start identifying the prerequisites for digital online strategy for B2B internationalization.

However, these more detailed constructs were not providing sufficient level of concretion to reveal strategic metrics and actions. Thus, these constructs were further developed to study the derived actionable contexts that were revealed during the synthesis of the conceptual framework in the summary of the literature review. Finally, the original topics together with the derived actionable contexts provided sufficient level of concretion to highlight the digital and technological aspects in online internationalization. This included studying these context granular level, such as, export approaches in international trade, competitive setting, internationalization of online services, renewal of online services, use of digital analytics, quality and findability of digital contact information, quality and findability of digital product information, digital marketing, and use of social media.

The following public data was collected from all selected companies to study the derived detailed constructs on more granular level, including but not limited to annual reports 2016-2017, press releases, company websites, media articles, social media. Following details were extracted and analyzed for all companies:

Company details: *employee count, turnover, operating profit, ownership structure, age of company and business, international presence and in which countries, internationalized since when, internationalized through offshore manufacturing and in which countries, internationalized through authorized partners or sales organizations and in which countries, online services offered in which languages, years of website launch and relaunches⁴, key selling phrase.*

Digital analytics⁵: *does the company use website usage analytics, does the company use real-time analytics, does the company use advanced customer analytics, and does the company use heatmap analytics.*

Quality of digital contact information: *is general contact information readily available, is personal or detailed contact information*

⁴**Years of website (re)launches:** websites were crawled using Wayback Machine at <https://archive.org/>

⁵**Digital analytics tools:** Google Tag Manager, Google Analytics, Adobe Analytics, Hotjar, Crazy Egg, Clicky, Chartbeat, Kissmetrics, Segment, Hubspot, Mixpanel, Piwik, Gauges, Foxmetrics, Woopra, Clickdimensions.

available, is targeted contact information available based on responsibility or geographically, does the contact information include authorized partners such as distributors or resellers.

Findability of digital contact information: *is personal or detailed contact information available on a separate page, is personal or detailed contact information available or accessible from all pages, is general contact information available on all pages, is targeted contact information available on pages that are considered to initiate digital sales funnel*

Outreach potential of digital contact information: *does the website have a contact information page, does the website have a contact us form, does the contact information include both phone numbers and email addresses, does the website provide a callback service, does the website have a chat customer service*

Digital marketing potential of product information: *does the company have product pages, does the company have product category pages, does the company provide a virtual showroom service, does the company have a mobile catalog or a virtual showroom mobile application, does the company have an online photo gallery, does the company offer tips, ideas or instructions to customers, does the company have a news stream, does the company publish customer references on their website and in what quality.*

Digital sales potential of product information: *are the company's product catalogs available for download, does the company have a search feature on their website, does the company provide a partner's area or a material bank, does the company offer 3D product models for architects and designers, does the company offer a self-service online laboratory planner, does the company have a 3D sales interface for sales representatives, does the company have an online store, does the company provide public price information.*

Quality of customer references⁶: *whether the references are shareable, whether they include the name of the customer, whether they have descriptions of the customer and the deliverable, and whether they include reference photos.*

⁶**Emphasis on quality of customer references:** references are shareable and with name, photo, and description (1.00), references are with names, photos, and description (0.75), references are with names, and photos (0.50), references are with names (0.25)

Digital marketing: *does the company have a website, does the company use keyword advertising, does the company use display advertising, does the company use email marketing, does the company use mobile marketing, does the company use search engine optimization (SEO).*

Overall SEO potential: *use of SEO keywords and at what level, structural quality needed for SEO, technical implementation support for SEO, is the content linked from other external media, is the content linked from social media, is direct sharing of the content supported.*

Quality of SEO keywords⁷: *company website uses any combination of dynamic title, description, and keywords (full, extensive or limited use) or static title, description, and keywords.*

Social media potential: *use of social media platforms*⁸, *number of followers and subscribers in total and per social media platform, activity frequency in terms of posting cadence, types of content being shared and in which platforms*⁹, *cross-platform content sharing*¹⁰

Cross-case analysis was performed after the within-case analysis to analyze and compare the emerging themes and relationships. All of the cases presented observations that either supported, rejected or shaped the tentative propositions that had emerged from the individual case analysis thus improving the generalization of those constructs. The cross-case analysis quickly revealed that all of the case companies were in fact engaged in internationalization activities and were using digital technologies. However, significant differences were found in the level of use of digital technology, as well as, in internationalization activities. Some of the case companies were utilizing completely different export models in their international market entry strategies compared to most. Analysis identified three export models for

⁷**Emphasis on quality of SEO keywords:** dynamic title, description, and keywords in full use (1.000), dynamic title, description, keywords in extensive use (0.875), dynamic title, description, and keywords in limited use (0.750), dynamic title, and description (0.625), dynamic title, static description, and keywords (0.500), dynamic title (0.375), static title, description, and keywords (0.250), static description, and keywords (0.125)

⁸**Social media platforms:** LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Vimeo, Instagram, Pinterest, WhatsApp, Trello

⁹**Social media content:** trade fair news, open job positions, product releases and publishing product catalogs, company news, employer image and company culture, customer references, product presentations, commenting on industry-related publications, customer competitions, fun facts, job appointments, customer service, instructional videos.

¹⁰**Cross-platform content sharing:** Facebook content sharing on Instagram, Facebook content sharing on Twitter, Youtube content sharing on Vimeo

internationalization which were also found to present different prerequisites for company's level of digitalization and online presence.

Two of the case companies addressed internationalization and digitalization rather differently. In the Lekolar case, the company was not actually a manufacturer, and they provided their services mainly through an online store with public price information readily available. All of the other companies were manufacturers and were not providing public prices on their website and were operating through receiving inquiries and orders without providing online stores. In the Planmeca case, the company was solely a manufacturer and their sales were organized completely through local distributors and subsidiaries.

Moreover, the cross-case analysis revealed that scale and maturity of the company were found to entail higher digital readiness and competence in terms of digital technology used in activities supporting online internationalization. More mature and financially stable companies were found to engage with digital technologies through development activities in earlier stage than SMEs. Therefore, the scale and maturity were needed to be taken into account when assessing the options to take in digital online strategy for B2B internationalization.

The iterative approach in studying the emerging themes with prior findings in literature evolved towards conceptualizing the empirically valid framework supported by data. However, as a result of the iterative approach, the original framework, theory, and research questions were further shaped to cover the emerging themes from the cases. In the following section, the findings from the analysis are revealed to highlight the strategic actions and metrics that are to be considered when implementing a digital online strategy for B2B internationalization.

Chapter 4

Findings

This chapter presents the findings from the data analysis. The findings reveal insights into the level of adoption and maturity of digital technologies for the selected case companies. Similarly, the findings enlightens both the physical and the virtual aspects in internationalization by revealing the predominant export approaches in international trade, the international competitive situation and the presence of the case companies in the industry, the overall use of digital technology, and the digital readiness and competence regarding the digital online potential starting from the company website to the advanced use of analytics and social media as part of marketing and sales activities. The findings highlight the reasoning behind strategic actions and metrics that are to be considered when implementing a digital online strategy for B2B internationalization.

First, the findings cover the deliberate use of ICT in foreign market entry. Second, the use of DTS as blueprints to govern the transformation. Third, the use of digital media and channels with analytics and big data. Fourth, the management and integration of customers across channels. Fifth, directing and shaping social media interaction.

4.1 Deliberate use of ICT in foreign market entry

Deliberate use of ICT in foreign market entry defines the actionable context for the use of Internet as path to internationalization. Findings reveal the different export approaches used in international trade, as well as, the internationality of the case companies in terms of international presence and website translations.

Deliberate use of ICT has been studied to provide viable and cost-effective

path to early internationalization in a largely SME-based economical context [55] and to reveal benefits, such as, the ability of SMEs with limited resources to access markets in new ways and to improve efficiency in receiving inquiries and orders globally [9] [27]. Furthermore, an overall and export performance has been seen to improve with added online channel support especially in entrepreneurial SMEs that use internet as sales channel [54]. However, Internet has been argued to be used mostly to complement relationship building on-site and not to substitute physical market presence [54].

This section elaborates on the strategic actions and metrics in use of ICT in internationalization activities of the case companies. The findings reveal the different export approaches used in international trade, as well as, the overall internationality of the case companies in terms of physical and online presence, for example, in what countries the companies operate and in which languages the companies provide their services.

Determine regional export approaches in international trade. The industry trend and analysis highlights that 75% of the companies are doing direct export through authorized partners in destination country, whereas 58% of the companies are doing direct export to foreign customers without middleman, and only 25% of the companies are doing indirect export by domestic partners. In addition, almost all of the companies are using a combination of these strategies. Half of the case companies are using both the direct export to foreign customers without middleman approach and the direct export through authorized partners in destination country approach.

However, the findings reveal that bulk of the SMEs are seemingly making their decision on the export model on a case-by-case basis for every new market entry. Whereas, larger companies are seen to have developed their processes into more standardized and regionally applicable approaches by making strategic decisions on the use of diverging export patterns based on the target region. These diverging patterns are studied to take into account at least the customer's business language and potentially other distinctive business practices that are in use in the target country.

The decision between choosing an export approach can also be seen dependent on the motivation of the company to be a manufacturer rather than a sales organisation or vice versa. When acting solely as a manufacturer, the company can concentrate more on their product development and production as the authorized partners would concentrate on the marketing and sales towards actual end-customers. However, this approach would require access to well-established partnership network which denotes this as an evolutionary approach and more applicable for well-known larger organizations that could be considered as incumbents in particular region.

Evaluate the regional competitive setting when expanding internationally. The case companies have internationalized worldwide and are having international presence in Africa, Asia, Europe, North-America, South-America, and Oceania (Figure 4.1). Most of the companies have presence especially in Russia and Germany. Approximately half of the companies have presence either in one other large European country, Nordics, India, China, Brazil or in North-America.

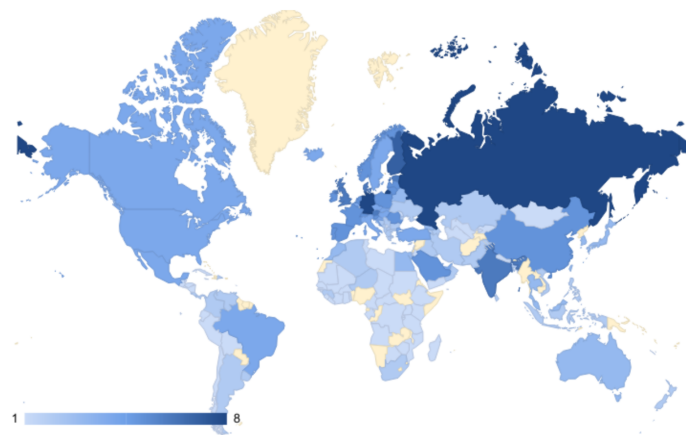


Figure 4.1: International presence of case companies

However, most of the case companies are operating only in one to three countries when excluding the two large control companies from the comparison. This depicts that the competition is not actually global, but rather regional and more concentrated to certain countries. Therefore, by evaluating the export models used by competitors in the target regions, the company entering the markets can benefit from adopting similar approaches in their online internationalization activities that are in use by others already operating in that particular region. Similarly, the competitor analysis can reveal the lack of digital adoption in certain regions, and thus reveal online internationalization as potential market entry strategy.

Determine the necessity for new translations for digital services. The case companies are studied to offer their online services in English (12), Deutsch (7), Danish (4), Finnish (4), Polish (3), Spanish (3), Swedish (3), Norwegian (2), Russian (2), French (2), Dutch (2), Chinese (2), and Czech (1), Hungarian (1), Italy (1), Korean (1), Portuguese (1), Slovenian (1). In

any situation, SMEs can benefit from offering their online services in English.

Moreover, findings reveal that the necessity for target country specific language translations can diminish when a company operates using either indirect export by domestic partners or a direct export through authorized partners in the destination country export approach. This is because in these approaches the middleman usually takes care of the communication in sales and marketing in the destination country. Whereas, when companies are doing direct export to foreign customer without middleman, they are required to provide a language specific translations if the communication in sales and marketing activities cannot be handled in English or by using any other already translated and supported language by the company.

4.2 Use of DTS as blueprints to govern the transformation

Use of digital transformation strategy as blueprints to govern the transformation provides the actionable context for the shift from IT strategy [57] to digital transformation and business strategies [10], and requires balancing the four transformational dimensions including changes in value creation, financial aspects, structural changes, and use of technologies [42]. The following analysis covers the initial online presence and the cyclic nature in renewal of online services.

A digital transformation strategy goes beyond the traditional role of IT systems and technologies and recognizes the pervasiveness of digital technologies to all functional (finance, human resources, IT, ...) and operational (products, markets, processes) areas within firm operations. Through a careful assessment of the key considerations and decisions (Table 2.1), any company can potentially navigate their way through digital transformation, even if they are lacking the needed skill set to begin with [29].

The potential antecedents from digital transformation includes improved sales or productivity, novel forms of customer interaction, and innovations in value creation that have allowed entire business models to be reshaped or replaced. Whereas, potential barriers include a myriad of important elements in digital transformation with a lack of clarity about the different options, as well as, firms struggling with financial pressure have their financing options for digital transformation severely limited.

This section provides reasoning for the use of DTS as blueprints to govern the transformation. The findings reveal the recurring nature of digital and online activities. Moreover, for the sake of clarity, this topic overlaps with

others as these blueprints can be considered to manage the online internationalization in its entirety.

Recurring renewal of the digital services to keep up with the potential. First indications of the online presence in the industry were in 1997 when one of the case companies launched their first website. Subsequently, one third of the case companies had launched their websites at the turn of the millennium. Later followed by another third launching their websites before year 2010, and last third launching their websites by the end of year 2015.

Findings highlights that all case companies have either launched or renewed their website since 2010, but only half of the companies have renewed their online services after 2015. Furthermore, only 33% has renewed their website during the past three years. Therefore, the timing and frequency of website launches or complete rewrites can be used to deduct that the company might either be satisfied in their current online presence and level of website and online services, or more so that the digital business and online services are not being prioritized in their corporate strategy. However, the modernization of online services should be implemented as a recurring endeavour needed to keep up with the changes and possibilities emerging from digitalization.

4.3 Use of digital media and channels with analytics and big data

Use of digital media and channels with improved analytics and big data provides the actionable context for marketing in digital era. The analysis studies the use of digital analytics in terms of tools used, and the digital customer contact in terms of findability, quality, and completeness of the available customer contact information, as well as, the digital product information resulting in revealing current digital marketing potential and digital sales potential of the digital product information, as well as, the overall use of digital channels and tools in sales and marketing when utilizing the digital product information.

Online has become increasingly important source of competitive advantage in both B2C and B2B marketing as internet usage has continued to spread worldwide. Three biggest identified challenges [38] have been the rise of new digital media and channels, importance of analytics and big data, and effects on business and revenue models. Highlighted findings entail that the

traditional use of company home page and email communication are seen to prevail. Whereas, social media and mobile are seen to as the main future areas for growth. Whereas, other channels are suggested to be used selectively on case-by-case basis. These include channels, such as, natural search, paid search words, paid banner ads, SMS communication, online stores, interactive voice recordings and 3rd party online stores. In addition, seven main trends [38] have been argued to present the most dominant changes affecting firms: ability to interact and / or serve customers in a new manner, ability to reach new customer segments, changes related to increased access to data and customer insight, greater ability to reduce costs in various business processes through technology, increasing pace of change in the marketplace, greater use of analytical tools and models in decision making, emergence of new business models and new revenue streams. Furthermore, companies are suggested to address the following 10 digital marketing tensions [38] that are grouped in three: customer insight and social media having big challenges and require most developed plans, digital revolution and automated interactions having sizeable but not fully addressed challenges with modest gap in plans, and price transparency, online opportunity and breakthrough as low hanging fruits that could easily be addressed.

All in all, the above findings contributes to the better understanding of the marketing capabilities gap in digital era [18] by revealing the three biggest improvement opportunities that companies across all sectors should address: firms ability to successfully manage the gap in supply and demand of analytically trained people in digital marketing, redesign the organization structure to better account for digitally transformed business with clear incentives and decision-making process, and making actionable digital metrics for the digital marketing.

Improve the use of digital analytics overall. The data reveals that the use of digital analytics is on rudimentary level across the case companies in the industry. Website usage analytics are used by 75% of the companies which are most effective at measuring key metrics such as conversion rates, bounce rates, user demographics, user behavior, and most visited web pages. Whereas, only 33% of the companies are gathering real-time analytics that focuses on live insights into website performance, for example, catching bugs that hinder website usage and might drive users away. Furthermore, only a single company has implemented more advanced customer analytics that can help them to dive deeper into website statistics on an individual customer level. These advanced customer analytics are the tools to map out and track the online marketing funnel. Finally, none of the companies are using heatmap analytics that could be used to provide insight into whether the

visitors are noticing important call-to-actions or headlines, or whether forms and navigation are working effectively.

As a result, companies are to improve their common use of website usage analytics. Companies are to implement real-time tracking of analytics on their pages, especially, on the pages from which their digital sales pipeline is considered to begin. Moreover, in order to succeed in the development of analytics, the companies should introduce real-time monitoring tools such as Segment ¹ and Mixpanel ².

Improve findability, quality and overall potential of the digital contact information. Data reveals that the use and the potential of digital customer contact information varies a great deal when assessing the completeness of digital customer contact regarding quality, findability and overall potential (Figure 4.2). International trade through online services is seen to have an emphasis especially on the importance of findability and quality of customer contact information. The customer contact potential is assessed based on the quality of contact information (x-axis), findability of contact information (y-axis), and overall customer contact potential (size of the bubble).



Figure 4.2: Digital customer contact potential by companies

Contact information should be readily available to facilitate ease of contacting. All of the case companies have contact information available on a separate contact information page, but only half of the companies provide

¹<https://segment.com/>

²<https://mixpanel.com/>

this information readily accessible on all pages. Likewise, 50% of the companies make use of targeted or detailed contact information, for example, based on the contact's responsibility either geographically or in business segment visible directly on pages where the digital sales pipeline can be considered to start. Only 25% of the companies make use of all the aforementioned.

Companies are to facilitate ease of contacting by providing general contact information accessible on all pages. For example, in the footer section at the bottom or have it in a toggleable side navigation. In addition, companies need to support targeted communication on the pages, from which the digital sales pipeline are considered to begin. Furthermore, companies are use a chat client to minimize the threshold for contacting, especially for customer first contact. To begin with, an online service Crisp ³ can be used which is free for small use.

In addition, companies can add a more advanced contact form with a support for callback request in order to complement their digital contact potential. This advanced contact form should be similarly accessible as the general contact information and have a technical capability to indicate and track at least on which page the contact was requested to highlight the customer interest, and thus allow to-the-point discussion when contacting.

Develop the marketing and sales potential of the digital product information. Data shows that companies are not yet fully exploiting digital opportunities in supporting their marketing and sales activities. Figure 4.3 reveals the analyzed digital product information potential of the companies in relation to the digital marketing potential (x-axis), sales potential (y-axis) and overall potential (size of the bubble)

Digital product information needs to be developed with regard to product information discovery, volume, and channels. Industry trend and analysis reveals that companies focus on digital product information by providing product category-specific pages, news streams, and product-specific pages and customer references. Some of the larger companies have also implemented virtual showroom online services and launched mobile applications. Similarly, the companies are still in their starting blocks concerning the sales potential of digital product information as they are mainly focusing on downloadable product catalogs, website search features and providing partners areas and material banks.

Companies are to improve their website to provide product-specific pages and to have a search feature available on the website, and also improve quality of references with added descriptions and images. At each step, the

³<https://crisp.chat/>

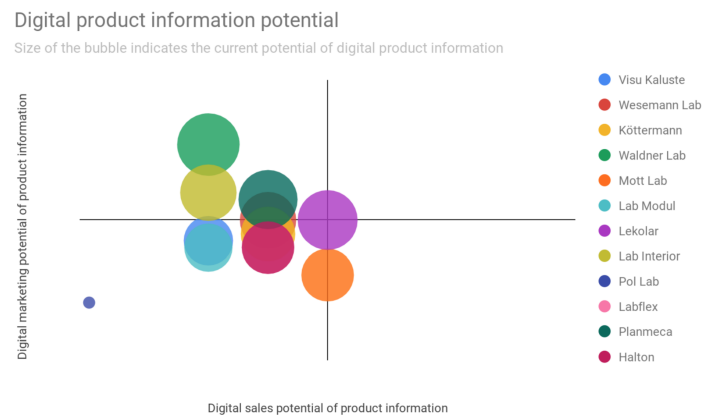


Figure 4.3: Digital product information sales and marketing potential by companies

website content should be implemented using crawler friendly technology to support search engine indexing and optimization. Companies should make sure to develop the customer references so that they can be shared outside the website, for example, directly into news or social media.

In addition, the companies should implement a virtual showroom web service and to provide an open material bank or a partners sections, as well as, have public price information available on the digital channels. Companies can further benefit from the public price information by launching an online store.

Similarly, an online laboratory planner can be implemented as an add-on service to the online store. In addition, the companies can implement a mobile catalog application and an online virtual showroom service. However, an introduction of a 3D sales interface for sales representatives is not directly recommended as part of the marketing and sales digitalization. Moreover, it can be prioritized and included as a streamlining function of manufacturing and production processes as it can be used as an integral part of the digital sales pipeline directly connected with production.

4.4 Management and integration of customers across channels

Management and integration of customers across channels defines the actionable context for the shift from multi-channel to omni-channel marketing

strategy that allows companies to manage, optimize and benefit from all of the potential digital channels [50]. The findings take on the digital marketing, which covers aspects, such as, the search engine optimization (SEO) keyword potential and overall SEO potential, as well as, the overall use of digital channels and tools for marketing. Figure 4.4 reveals the analyzed digital marketing potential of the available online content of the company when comparing the SEO keyword potential (x-axis), the overall SEO potential (y-axis), and the total marketing potential (the size of the bubble).

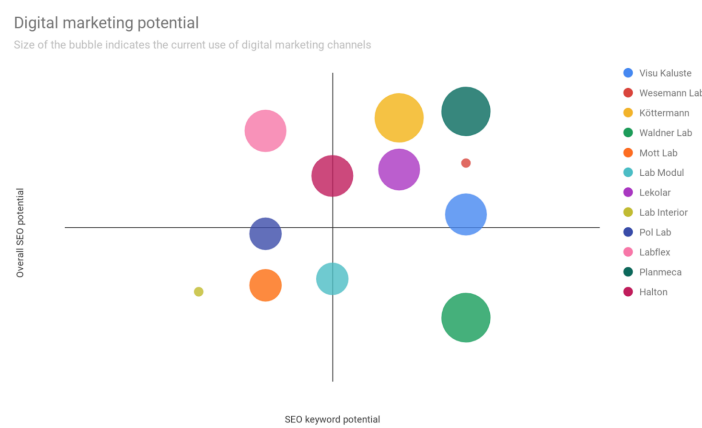


Figure 4.4: Digital marketing potential by companies

Emphasis is on the fact that every digital customer contact point [43] is to be considered as a digital channel [7] [28], including, but not limited to, one-way communication and two-way interaction between firm and customer, and customer-to-customer and peer-to-peer interactions, for example, in social media. Customers are using these channels seamlessly and interchangeably during their search and purchase process [61].

Introduce new digital tools and channels to improve digital marketing. Analysis indicates that from the view of digital marketing potential, the case companies are only beginning to react to the imminent digitalization while only maintaining online visibility rather than actively conducting digital marketing. Industry trend and analysis reveals that the case companies do not exploit digital opportunities in their marketing, but rather rely on traditional website and email marketing.

In addition, data indicates that the search engine optimization and mobile marketing are on the rise. Furthermore, study highlights that 83% of the companies have the necessary capability required to do search engine adver-

tising, and that 25% of them make use of mobile marketing, for example by offering mobile product catalog or virtual showroom applications. However, bulk of the companies are doing practically none digital advertisement at least during the period of data collection. Moreover, companies are not doing active keyword advertisement or do not use targeted display advertising based on customer behavior or the advertising is completely seasonal and was not recorded during the analysis.

Companies are to improve their online visibility through increasing the number of links from external sources, for example, from news and publications in industry related external online media. Similarly, companies are to improve their search engine optimization and start benefiting from it through use of active search engine advertising. Furthermore, companies are to implemented a support for sharing website content directly, especially on product and customer reference pages, which will facilitate ease of sharing quality content. Finally, this development is to be considered as a recurring ordeal and therefore companies should continuously assess and develop previous measures, for example, to initiate a targeted display advertising based on measured customer behavior or start mobile marketing by implementing and publishing a mobile catalog or a virtual showroom mobile applications.

4.5 Directing and shaping social media interaction

Directing and shaping social media interaction sets the actionable context for the social media influence and engagement. The findings reveal the use of social media influence and engagement in the industry by analyzing the current social media presence by followers and activity, as well as, the use of different types of content in social media.

The key finding from the analysis of use of social media in case companies. Study reveals that case companies use social media in varying degrees, focusing mainly on trade fair news, product presentations, commenting on industry-related publications, publishing product and product catalogs, and raising the employer image and company culture. The analyzed social media potential by companies in relation to the social media presence by followers (x-axis), social media presence by activity (y-axis) and content variety (size of the bubble) is shown in Figure 4.5.

Better understanding in use of social media as an online based medium has made it possible for one person or business to communicate and interact with hundreds or even thousands of other people about products and

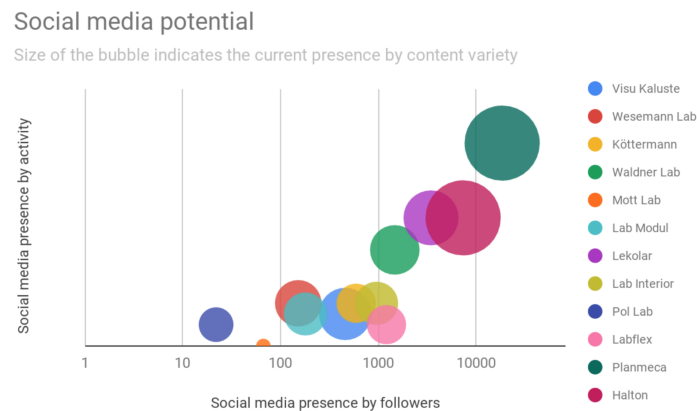


Figure 4.5: Social media potential by companies

businesses that provide these products. A concept of integrated marketing communication can be suggested to be used as a guiding principle to produce a unified and customer-focused message aligned with firm objectives across promotional mix including marketing and sales channels [13].

Furthermore, as the content, timing and frequency of the user-generated content that is created, initiated, circulated and used by other users in social media is out of the hands of the company, the company's effort should concentrate on directing and shaping the social media discussion in a manner that is inline with the mission and performance goals of the company [41]. In addition, the interaction between buyers and sellers has changed since the emergence of social media and has been found to have a positive effect on sales in B2B context [1].

Furthermore, social media has been studied to improve business exposure, increase online traffic, and provide customer insight [56]. Social media activities should build social capital in encouraging customers to interact, engage, and establish relationships with the salespeople [2]. However, customers have been found to have higher expectations in social media channels for firm representatives to either adapt or risk losing or alienating their customer base [30]. All of these considerations in social media antecedents, metrics and engagement activities have increased the importance of social media in both C2C and B2C communication.

Implement a company wide social media content strategy to increase engagement. Data reveals that the case companies use social media in varying degrees. They are mainly focusing on trade fair news, product pre-

sentations, commenting on industry-related publications, publishing product and product catalogs, and raising the employer image and company culture. Only a few companies appear to have an active strategy for publishing content on different social media platforms. These same companies are seen to try to take advantage of the emerging social media platforms.

The number of followers and subscribers are seen to reflect, but not guarantee that the company is active in use of social media, as some of the companies are inactive despite a larger number of followers. Larger companies are seen to use social media comprehensively to distribute either same, slightly modified or completely different content on several social media platforms simultaneously, which can also be seen as an encouragement for SMEs to start investing in social media.

Analysis shows that Facebook and LinkedIn are the most popular social media channels. Companies also use Twitter, Instagram, Youtube and Vimeo to share their content. Study highlights that 58% of the case companies publish new content in one or more social media channels on a weekly basis, and that 33% of companies publish their content daily. Furthermore, 25% of companies publish content on at least three or more platforms.

To be successful in introducing new social media channels and content types, the company is required to implement an active digital content strategy (Appendix B) and introduce tools for managing, scheduling, and publishing content in social media channels. These include, but are not limited to tools, such as, Buffer ⁴ for content planning and scheduling, and Feedly ⁵ for finding potential industry-related publications and content.

Companies in their content strategies should focus especially on the first two stages of ideating and planning. They should appeal and help the people who are eventually going to become their customers. All of their shared content should support their mission. Their content should inspire customers to invest in new product range, make it easier to distinct particular expertise in products (e.g. Finnish or German quality), and uphold their company values in traditions, quality, people and decades of experience.

The mission of the content is to make it easier for people to explore the range and potential of the products, inspire them to invest in new product range, and envision company values in upholding traditions, quality, people and decades of experience. Every piece shared should be vetted by asking whether it accomplishes one or more the the above things. There are tons of content types and channels, and companies cannot and should not invest in all of them right away. Company should create a content that best serves

⁴<https://buffer.com/>

⁵<https://feedly.com/>

their audience and their business goals. Furthermore, they need to invest in channels where their audience is available at.

Investing in social content also means investing in the content shared on the company website. Besides useful content, company should also make it easy to find different kinds of content. The starting point is easy navigation, but internal search should be implemented when possible. Also, the company should make sure that the target audience is actually on the chosen channel. Therefore, it is crucial to choose only the relevant channels and avoid choosing too many, as the it is a necessity to remain committed to maintain company presence.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The fifth and final chapter concludes the thesis by summarizing the key findings providing answers to the research questions. The conceptual framework synthesized in literature review is extended to provide a holistic approach in to digital online strategy for B2B internationalization in terms of different aspects in actions and metrics that companies should consider in their pursuit international growth through digital channels in B2B internationalization. The most important theoretical and practical implication are covered, and study limitations are discussed critically before, finally, providing conclusion to summarize the thesis.

5.1 Summary of the key findings

The aim of this thesis was to contribute into the better understanding on how manufacturing SMEs can implement a digital online strategy for B2B internationalization. This has become relevant as the use of digital technologies and online has been studied to offer a viable and a cost-effective path for companies to internationalize. However, as previous research has studied digital transformations mainly as transformation initiatives needed to enhance digital capabilities and resources, or similarly, as new potential technologies to use in order to improve business. Research had left a gap in defining concrete measurable strategic actions and metrics for companies to take in order to improve the digital readiness and competence of their digital services in the context of B2B internationalization. Furthermore, the late adoption of digital technologies, or no adoption at all, that has been hindering international growth of special furniture manufacturing SMEs industry-wide emphasizes the timing of this thesis.

Moreover, the case companies analyzed in this study were not character-

ized only by their internationality but by their digital readiness and competence in use of online and digital technologies. The following research questions were identified to study the identified research gap as it was not understood what are the minimum requirements for companies, and what are critical aspects in building a solid foundation, or on the other hand, and what actions companies should take in their pursuit for digital online strategy for B2B internationalization.

RQ1: What are the minimum requirements for companies?

RQ2: What are the critical aspects in building a solid foundation?

RQ3: What actions should manufacturing SMEs take?

Answers to the research questions can be started by answering to more general question on *how companies can measure and improve their digital readiness and competencies in digital online strategy*. As a result, on a conceptual level, the digital online strategy for B2B internationalization is outlined by the deliberate use of ICT in foreign market entry, use of DTS as blueprints to govern the transformation, use of digital media and channels with analytics and big data, management and integration of customers across channels, and directing and shaping social media interaction.

RQ1: What are the minimum requirements for companies. Minimum requirements entails that the company has to have an online presence at least in the form of a website and has either started or is beginning its internationalization activities. In addition, the company should have the capability to add analytics into their website. Similarly, the website should have contact information, as well as, product information readily available.

RQ2: What are the critical aspects in building a solid foundation and RQ3: What actions should SMEs take. In more detailed level, this entails the need for companies to set up metrics to measure the actions needed to be taken in order to complement the deficiencies revealed during analysis of the collected data disclosed by the topics covered in data analysis, such as, digital analytics, quality of digital contact information, findability of digital contact information, outreach potential of digital contact information, digital marketing potential of product information, digital sales potential of product information, quality of customer references, digital marketing, overall SEO potential, quality of SEO keywords, and social media potential. See data analysis in Section 3.4 for more details or different aspects to improve.

5.2 Implications of the study

This study has contributions to the research in use of digital technologies and online in internationalization. Firstly, a large body of literature was synthesized into a conceptual framework that enabled structural analysis of manufacturing companies that are internationalizing and using online and digital technologies. This framework provided a basis to reveal actions and metrics through derived actionable contexts to consider when implementing a digital online strategy for B2B internationalization. The conceptual framework is presented in the summary of the literature review in Section 2.6.

Secondly, the thesis filled the gap in research by revealing tangible actions and metrics to take when using digital technologies and online in internationalization activities. Moreover, this study reveals practical implications for the management. These managerial implications can be considered important for all companies who are considering utilizing digital technologies and online in their internationalization activities.

5.3 Evaluation of the study and limitations

Natural limitations for any study includes assessing the validity, reliability, and generalizability of the results. Gibbert et al. [24] suggest four common criteria to assess the rigor of field research such as case study. These include internal validity, construct validity, external validity or generalizability, and reliability.

Construct validity studies the extent to which a research procedure leads to an accurate observation of reality. This refers to the process of conducting the study from the initial research question to the final conclusion. Internal validity refers to the causal relationship between observations and concepts in the conducted data analysis between the data and the findings. Both the construct and internal validity act as prerequisites for the external validity referred also to as generalizability, in which the biggest concerns are usually a small sample size. Eisenhardt [21] has analyzed that a cross-case analysis between four to 10 case companies can provide a sufficient basis for generalization. The sample size in this multiple case-study was 10 manufacturing SMEs with two large successfully internationalized companies from adjacent manufacturing industry to improve comparison.

The chosen case study method has been criticized not to provide a sufficient result set for scientific generalization. However, through analytic generalization, for example, through use of a theoretical framework to analyse and support case findings, as was used in this thesis, the results from case-study

can be applied to other situations. Furthermore, the multiple case-study approach of 12 companies can be considered to improve the generalization as each case supported, rejected or shaped any tentative propositions emerging from the individual cases, and as they enabled comparison of cases to reveal whether those emergent findings were idiosyncratic to single case or recur in several cases.

The approach to study the elements of online internationalization and strategic actions in digital transformation strategies was pragmatic: concepts of digital innovations, digital disruptions, technical barriers, drivers for digital transformation, and leadership practices and leadership structures were excluded both from the theoretical and empirical part of the study. This allowed the thesis to focus on the concrete elements of digital online internationalization to provide strategic actions and metrics to guide the use of digital technologies in SMEs in manufacturing industry.

Finally, the reliability concerns the reproducibility of the study by other researchers. The study improves the transparency and reliability by specifying how the study was conducted. This allows the replication of the study and analysis of the case companies.

However, as effective success requires scheduled and steady implementation of the actions and metrics in order to improve digital readiness and competence. Therefore, the suggested actions and metrics are subject to false positive and negative results as the reasoning behind changes are based on point-in-time analysis and are not actually evaluating the implementation of the changes and observing their end results over time.

5.4 Future research

The theoretical importance of this thesis comes from providing an in-depth analysis on underlying concrete actions and metrics the manufacturing SMEs can take, observe, and measure when implementing their digital online strategy for B2B internationalization. For academic research, this thesis provides a deeper understanding on evaluating and analyzing digital readiness and competence of companies and in the form of a synthesized conceptual framework that can facilitate future research overarching industry boundaries and company sizes.

This thesis studies a point-in-time and is not following whether implementing the suggested actions and metrics are having the desired outcomes for the companies over time. More case studies could be implemented to verify the validity of the digital readiness and competence assessed through the revealed actions and metrics.

5.5 Conclusions

This thesis explored the elements of digital online internationalization and the strategic aspects of digital online strategy to provide concreteness in actions and metrics that SMEs should take in improving their digital readiness and competence in their international growth efforts. The objective was to provide a holistic approach on how digital online strategy for B2B internationalization can be implemented in manufacturing SMEs.

A large body of literature regarding the elements of digital online internationalization and the strategic aspects in digital online strategy were synthesized into a conceptual framework for digital online strategy for B2B internationalization. The empirical part of the study analyzed the case companies' digital readiness and competence in the context of digital online strategy for B2B internationalization. Finally, the findings of the study were analyzed with relevant literature, and concrete strategic actions and metrics were given to companies to undertake in their digital initiatives towards B2B internationalization.

The case companies are suggested to step up in order to benefit from the opportunities in the use of digital technologies. The industry-wide slow adaptation, or lack of adaptation, in use of digital technologies in internationalization, sales and marketing activities of companies reveals significant opportunities to companies to undertake. We expect that companies adopting these changes will dramatically increase their international growth in terms of new customer acquisition, online marketing and sales.

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Appendix A

Company profiles

Visu Kaluste

Visu Kaluste ¹ is a family-owned company, located in Visuvesi, Finland about 260km north from Helsinki. History of their furniture manufacturing dates back to 1894, when the company name was Höyrypuuseppä which was later merged to another company named Visuvesi. Visuvesi started to manufacture laboratory furniture and were the first manufacturers of Finnish fume cupboards. In 2011, Visu Kaluste bought the VISU® from Visuvesi. After that, Visu Kaluste has continued to focus more on the development of laboratory furniture and has since become the market leader in Finland.

Their strategy identifies them as high quality Finnish laboratory furniture manufacturer with comprehensive services to laboratories, research institutes and other healthcare facilities. Their values highlight the fact that they are a family company that respects quality, traditions, people and decades of experience. Their vision pictures them as customers' first and foremost trusted partner who is constantly developing industry pioneering product range. Their R&D statement is to constantly invests in product research and development to match the special features of the evolving industry and with the technological advances in cooperation with different parties.

Wesemann Lab

Wesemann ² group consists of an association of medium-sized companies, specialising in the development and manufacture of high-quality interior sys-

¹<https://visukaluste.fi/>

²<https://www.wesemann.com/>

tems. With over 200 employees they produce high-end laboratory furnishings and interiors for science classrooms, and offices as well as high-end systems for workplaces, and are oriented on people and product protection. Since the establishment of the company in 1963, their goal has been to convert their customer's desires into user-friendly tailor made laboratory furnishing concepts.

Wesemann group offers intensive consultation through dedicated specials who are carefully selected to meet the specific needs of their customer to ensure that their customer will have one contact person throughout the realisation of the project. Customers rely on their expertise because of their wealth of experience. Wesemann's product portfolio covers the demanding fields of both laboratory and education facilities, and are thus able to supply everything from one single source and to elaborate the ideal solution together with the customer.

Köttermann

Köttermann ³ headquartered in Hänigsen, Lower Saxony (Germany), is a leading international vendor of comprehensive steel-based laboratory furniture and systems. Their product portfolio includes laboratory furniture, safety storage cabinets, service supply systems and fume cupboards. All of their products are made in Germany and their laboratories are installed by their own distributors in eleven European countries and by using authorised partners worldwide. Köttermann has around 250 employees and a total turnover of around 50 MEUR.

Their strategy has always focused on customers with an ambition to make it easy to do business with Köttermann. They want to have enthusiastic customers, for which reason they have launched a company-wide project: "Total Customer Care" having standard set on outstanding quality. Intelligence, innovation, education and training of their employees are amongst their most important tasks as testified by opening of the Köttermann Academy in its own building in 2013.

Waldner Lab

Waldner Laboreinrichtungen ⁴ is a company of the Waldner group, which employs approximately 1,350 employees worldwide. They have developed

³<https://koettermann.com/>

⁴<https://www.waldner-lab.de/>

and produced laboratory furniture for all applications in Wangen im Allgäu (Germany) for more than 60 years. They have their own modular laboratory furniture system SCALA. Depending on the situation and requirements, the system can provide to completely new layout solutions or supplement the existing furniture.

The constant orientation of their work towards the customers' requirements have made them as the market leader in Europe. Their motto is to "Act instead of react". Many of their innovations and developments are regarded worldwide as the benchmark and have significantly influenced the workplace in the laboratory.

Mott Lab

MottLAB ⁵ is the Canadian source for Mott Manufacturing's line of laboratory casework solutions, flexible & mobile systems and fume hoods. MottLAB has been serving the industrial, pharmaceutical, education, health care and government markets since the early 1960's. Since each laboratory's needs are unique, Mott can design and engineer products to meet your exact requirements. They have trained designers, planners and builders of quality steel laboratory furniture assemblies and fume hoods. From a single room to an entire building, MottLAB's expertise in meeting customer laboratory and hospital furniture needs are advertised as second to none.

MottLab guiding principles are to assist customer on every step of the way: from planning and design including work flow analysis; to layout for supplies and instruments; to conducting performance tests on fume hoods; to evaluating products under actual laboratory conditions; to on-site installation expertise. Their skills include not only those required for laboratory installations, but also for the pharmacy, washup, utility and casting rooms, radiology, nurservers and many other areas of the hospital environment. MottLAB provides planning and design services to every detail along the way, from concept to completion and beyond.

Lab Modul

Lab Modul ⁶ is one of the leading European manufacturers and suppliers with years of expertise in advisory services, BIM drawing design and project management. Their architects and engineers take pride engaging customer on

⁵<http://www.mottlab.com/>

⁶<http://www.labmodul.com/>

a personal level to find the right solution at all times. Their high-performance production facilities are advertised to focus only on best thinkable quality and materials.

Lab Modul advertises that one of the decisive things that distinguishes their unique laboratory furniture from other manufacturers, is the way how they integrate design, high-performance quality materials, logistics, and ergonomic functions. Their guiding principles describe a laboratory as a space that must appear as a beautiful whole where legal requirements and safety conditions meet ergonomic and efficient working environment. They manufacture and supply furniture to laboratories, hospitals and educational environments.

Lekolar

Lekolar ⁷ is the market leader in the Nordic region in creating learning environments in schools and pre-schools through supply of educational products, furniture and equipment, consumables and arts & crafts materials. The business began life as part of BRIO over 40 years ago. In 2004, BRIO sold off its business area BRIO Educational, since when Lekolar has tripled its business, making it better placed to meet the purchasing demands of Nordic municipalities.

Lekolar is active in Norway, Denmark, Finland and Sweden. Head office is located in Osby, in the south of Sweden, and the group has its own purchasing office in Shanghai, China. The company had 281 employees in 2015, and an annual turnover of 88 MEUR and ambitions to grow further in Northern Europe.

Lab Interior

A company named MIKRO+POLO was established in 1990. In just a few years, they became the Slovenia's biggest supplier of laboratory equipment, instruments, chemicals and diagnostics. For an easier breakthrough into foreign markets with better recognisability, they introduced their own brand of laboratory furniture in 2014 – Lab Interior ⁸, which was successfully introduced during the same year at the international Achema ⁹ trade fair.

⁷<https://www.lekolar.com/>

⁸<http://www.labinterior.eu/>

⁹<https://www.achema.de/>

Today, with a team of ninety employees in Maribor (Slovenia), ten employees in Sarajevo (Belarus) and in Munich (Germany) they have a vast expertise and technical knowledge. Through the wealth of experience and almost unlimited number of new ideas, they are capable of finding solutions even for the impossible challenges and have been glad to please even the most demanding customers with their furniture. So far, they have equipped over 1.500 laboratories of various purposes, levels of demand, and sizes. Their references include control laboratories in the industry, large research laboratories in institutes, chemical laboratories in the education system, and microbiology laboratories in the healthcare system. Most of the laboratories are abroad, customer ranging from Austria and Germany all the way to Norway and Singapore.

Pol Lab

Pol Lab ¹⁰ has been involved in the production of laboratory equipment and laboratory furniture on the Polish market since 2004. They are distinguished by their products from highest-quality materials with increased durability and chemical resistance as well as attractive design. Their laboratory furniture are designed according to customer needs and preferences. Already during their first seven-years they managed to equip over 200 laboratory facilities, which then completed successful accreditation procedure. Their products already equip numerous laboratory facilities, not only locally, but all over Europe, and are even used in countries such as: Syria, Egypt, India.

Through cooperation with their clients they have managed to create several dozens of modern measuring laboratories which have been created in accordance with the binding European standards, rules of good laboratory practice (GLP), ergonomics as well as work safety and hygiene regulations. Their crew consists of designers, engineers, salespeople and fitters who together make up a good team and put their products to the most difficult tests at every stage. This has been made possible because the whole process related to the production of furniture and equipment is in their hands. The solutions and materials which they use function perfectly in the difficult conditions they are exposed to in their everyday work; consequently allowing their customers to take a “step into the future”.

¹⁰<http://www.pol-lab.eu/>

Labflex

Labflex ¹¹ is one of Europe's leading suppliers of innovative customised furnishing solutions to industrial, technical school, and university laboratories and to the research and hospital sector. They provide laboratory solutions to customers all over the world with more than 50 years of experience. They are a reliable and quality-conscious cooperation partner at local and international level. Labflex supplies custom-made turnkey laboratory solutions. They offer everything from consulting, project planning, concept development, and a wide, well-documented product range to project management, installation, service, financing, and much more.

A common denominator for Labflex solutions are flexibility and user innovation. They envision them as cooperation partner that sets new standards for functional customised solutions where pride of place is given to high safety and an impeccable working environment. Their team is made up of architects, engineers, construction designers, and laboratory technicians, among others, and thus they have a wide range of professional and practical experience. Key competencies and know-how in producing state-of-the-art furniture and equipment for a laboratory requires intimate knowledge on standards, regulations, and trends, thereby giving the customer the best feedback and guaranteeing a future-proof laboratory solution.

Planmeca

Planmeca ¹², headquartered in Helsinki, Finland is a global leader in several fields of health care technology, with products distributed in over 120 countries worldwide. Their product range covers digital dental units, world-class 2D and 3D imaging devices, and comprehensive CAD/CAM and software solutions. They are the largest privately held company in the field of dental equipment and the parent company of Planmeca Group of which turnover in 2017 was 703 MEUR, employing nearly 2,750 people worldwide.

Their strong commitment to R&D and close collaboration with health care professionals and leading universities are behind their success in innovations. Their unrivalled scientific knowledge and an in-depth understanding of clinical workflows are vital parts of their product development. Their dental care units, X-rays and software solutions are designed and manufactured in Helsinki, Finland with a goal to create functional, durable and beautifully

¹¹<https://www.labflex.com/>

¹²<https://www.planmeca.com/>

designed products that stand the test of time through following four design principles: ergonomic workflow for professionals, patient and staff safety, patient comfort and long lasting aesthetics. Their products are hand-made and tailored to each customer's specifications using the latest technology and the best materials.

Halton

Halton ¹³ is a family owned company established in 1969 and is headquartered in Helsinki, Finland. Production units are located in Finland, France, Germany, UK, USA, Canada, China and Malaysia and in eight of which encompasses R&D units. Furthermore, licensed production facilities are located in South-Africa, Mexico, New-Zealand and Australia. Halton Group altogether employs nearly 1500 people in over 30 countries and had a turnover of approximately 205 MEUR in 2017.

Halton Group is the global technology leader in indoor air solutions for demanding spaces. They provide solutions for commercial and public premises, healthcare institutions and laboratories, professional kitchens and restaurants as well as energy production environments and marine vessels. They provide their end-users with safe, comfortable and productive indoor environments that are energy-efficient and comply with sustainable principles. They offer a globally unique range of indoor environment expertise and pioneering technology to enable indoor environments that are healthy, comfortable, productive and energy-efficient throughout their life cycle.

¹³<https://www.halton.com/>

Appendix B

Guidelines for content strategy

Digital online strategy requires a supportive digital content strategy for the digital marketing. The following section provides the reasoning for having a content strategy and how to align it with the company business goals.

What is content strategy?

Content strategy guides the creation, delivery, and governance of useful, usable content. Most of all, it defines how the company is going to use content to meet its business goals and satisfy its customers' needs. It guides decisions about content throughout its lifecycle, from discovery to deletion. It sets benchmarks against which to measure the success of the shared content. The goal is to deliver the right content to the right people, in the right place at the right time.

Why company should invest time and effort in creating content?

Companies should not do content just because they “need to do content”. Many companies do not, or should not, do content at all. Creating content does not make sense for, say, a company producing tweezers and selling those in bulk. However, for other companies it might make sense because it can drive sales and support their bigger mission that overarches through their strategy, values, vision and R&D efforts. When a company stands for their values they have a point of view. Content can have a huge role in fulfilling their mission and achieving their business goals.

How does the company strategy identify them as special furniture manufacturers and with kind of expertise and customer segments. How does their values highlight the facts about the company ownership, structure, quality, traditions, other values and decades of experience. How do they want to be portrayed towards customers. Do they indicate their R&D statement, for example, to constantly invests in product research and development to match the special features of the evolving industry and with the technological advances in cooperation with external parties.

Guiding questions

Three questions should guide the content strategy. These questions will help the company align and organize their content creation towards business goals and making an impact.

What business goals do they want their content to impact?

Content should help and delight customers during their five-staged journey: ideating, planning, purchasing, using, sharing. Content should focus especially on the first two stages of ideating and planning, to capture leads on who can make a purchase from the company. Content should appeal and help the people who are eventually going to become their customers. Through shared content, the company can be useful, evoke positive feelings, establish industry and domain expertise, and earn customer trust.

What is their mission?

Company should have a clear evaluated mission as the shared content should support this mission. This can be broken apart into specific types of content that the company should produce, for example:

- Content that inspires customers to invest in new product range
- Content that makes it easier to distinct the country of origin as expertise in products
- Content that upholds company values in traditions, quality, people and decades of experience

What is remarkable?

As goes for all of company's marketing effort and their whole business, their content should be remarkable. Consider the Red Bull Stratos ¹, the mission to the edge of space, that is remarkable. A price example of what Seth Godin calls a purple cow [25], a something that people want to talk about.

Of course, something like the Red Bull Stratos cost a lot of money to make, but remarkable does not have to cost that much. The company does not need to get a million people talking, they just need one. A single conversation starter, "Hey, this is cool, this is something we need in our laboratory".

Content strategy is divided into four parts: substance, structure, workflow, and governance. Next we will go through each of them.

Substance

Substance begins with the content mission, that supports the company mission and satisfies the goals of their audience. This section answers to the following questions:

- What kinds of content do we need (topics, types, sources, etc.)?
- What messages does content need to communicate to our audience?

Content mission

The mission of the content is to make it easier for people to explore the range and potential of the products, inspire them to invest in new product range, and envision company values in upholding traditions, quality, people and decades of experience. Every piece shared should be vetted by asking whether it accomplishes one or more of these three things.

What company should invest in and what not?

There are tons of content types and channels. Companies cannot and should not invest in all of them right away. Company should create content that best serves their audience and their business goals. Furthermore, they need to invest in channels where their audience is available at.

¹<http://www.redbullstratos.com/>

What types of content and which channels make sense for the company?

Company should evaluate the potential use of content types (Table B.1). This includes content types such as audio, video, photos, blog posts, infographics, multimedia articles, e-books, courses and webinars.

Content type	Evaluation of the content type potential
Audio (podcasts, audiobooks)	Heavy time investment and questionable impact. Neglect for now.
Video (everything from short clips to full-length documentaries)	Makes sense: Instagram story clips, IGTV, video testimonials, customer stories, footage of products. Does not make sense (yet): documentaries.
Photos	Very important. On website and on social platforms.
Blog posts	Makes sense. Sharing customer stories and testimonials, product footage.
Infographics	Might make sense, as they are very shareable.
Multimedia articles	Heavy time and money investment. Maybe in the future. Can be very remarkable.
E-books	Can enough value be provided here? Perhaps a industry guidebook collected from the blog posts and customer insights. Could be useful because a customer can access it easily offline and on mobile. These are usually done in order to capture emails.
Courses	Does not make sense.
Webinars	Does not make sense.

Table B.1: Evaluation of the content type potential

Content types that would make sense for companies in special furniture manufacturing are, for example, blog posts, photos, and some types of video, and in future, infographics and e-books. Companies should also evaluate the potential use of possible channels (Table B.2).

Companies should invest on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. Companies can also use Instagram, YouTube, Vimeo, email, and other blogs and sites thoughtfully.

Company website content

Of course, investing in social content also means investing in the content shared on the company website. Besides useful content, company should

Possible channel	Evaluation of the channel potential
Instagram	Makes sense. The Instagram is growing exponentially, and its where some audience is already seen to be in. Excellent for the ideation and sharing company values.
Facebook	Makes sense. Strategy for Facebook requires creating a group for targeted audience. However, they need to make sure that its delivering value.
LinkedIn	Makes sense. Increasingly connect to firms, delivers knowledge about products and selections.
Snapchat	Does not make sense. The audience is mostly too young, and it's more about messaging between friends.
Twitter	Should invest. It is a grown-up crowd, interested in news and insights.
Pinterest	Does not make sense.
YouTube	Makes sense. However, to have a real impact, it would require consistent work. YouTube videos with only few views looks off-putting.
Vimeo	Makes sense. Same as with YouTube. Just to increased coverage.
Email	Does make sense. Email is a great tool for building personal relationship.
Medium	Does not make sense. Medium is informative and in-depth. There is a place for Medium, but it should not be a priority right now.
Other blogs and websites	Makes sense as this builds social proof and inbound links. A level of credibility is often needed, so this works especially well once we have a compelling brand and product.

Table B.2: Evaluation of the possible channels

also make it easy to find different kinds of content. Company should think about the questions their audience might have in mind, answer them, and make these answers easy to find. The next section addresses the structure of the content.

Structure

Structure defines, for example, how content can be found, prioritized, organized, formatted, or displayed. The starting point is easy navigation, but internal search should be implemented when possible. A good structure is able to provide answers to the following questions:

- How does the content need to be structured in order for customers to find it? Where is the best place on the website to share the content?
- What models need to be in place for the CMS to deliver the content, wherever and however customers need it?
- How is the content prioritized, organized, formatted, and displayed? Structure can include metadata, modeling, linking strategies et cetera.

Workflow

Workflow covers the processes, tools, human resources, and responsibilities in creating and sharing content. This section answers to the following questions:

- What processes, tools and human resource are required for content initiatives to launch successfully and maintain ongoing quality?
- Who makes the content?
- Who fixes it when it is broken or outdated?

Content calendar

Company should have a content calendar. It includes both an editorial calendar for their shared content (Table B.3) and a channel calendar where they plan and track their posts (Table B.4). Before producing any piece of content, the author or owner has to answer the following questions (the answers are to be documented into the spreadsheet):

- Why does our audience care?
- How does this help them?
- What task can they complete once they are finished reading, watching, or listening this?

Table B.3 shows an example of an editorial calendar for content. It highlights the fact that content creation becomes a continuous weekly or even daily ordeal. Editorial content calendar is used to schedule, plan and organize the potential content on the higher level.

Table B.4 shows an example of a channel calendar for content. It highlights the fact that same editorial content can be shared to multiple channels whether simultaneously on the same day, or with scheduled publishing in

Week	Publish date	Author	Content type	Topic	Abstract	Keywords	Why our audience cares	How this helps	Call to action (offer, campaign, etc.)
45	Fri, Nov 9, 2018	Juhana Harmanen	Customer reference	Arts laboratory for Aalto University	Laboratory furniture and fume hoods.	aalto university, laboratory furniture, fume hoods, aalto, university, arts	Cultivates credibility	Build trust, earn trust and get trust.	Links both back to the reference and to the customer website
46	Mon, Nov 12, 2018								
46	Fri, Nov 16, 2018								
47	Mon, Nov 19, 2018								

Table B.3: Editorial calendar for content

Publish date	Owner	Content type	Topic	Abstract	Social channel	Share copy	Link	Publishing time
Fri, Nov 9, 2018	Juhana Harmanen	Customer reference	Arts laboratory for Aalto University	Laboratory furniture and fume hoods.	Facebook	Aalto University needed, we delivered! #aaltoarts #aaltouniversity	<a href="https://<website>/references/aaltoarts-aaltouniversity-espo-finland-2018">https://<website>/references/aaltoarts-aaltouniversity-espo-finland-2018	08:10
Sat, Nov 10, 2018	-- // --	-- // --	-- // --	-- // --	LinkedIn	Aalto University pleased with the new arts laboratory by Visu Kaluste Oy #aaltoarts #aaltouniversity	-- // --	08:50
Sun, Nov 11, 2018	-- // --	-- // --	-- // --	-- // --	Twitter	New laboratory for Aalto University School of Arts #aaltoarts #aaltouniversity	-- // --	09:10
Mon, Nov 19, 2018								

Table B.4: Channel calendar for content

timely fashion. It is noteworthy, that content owner should to update the copy to match the handles used by the targeted companies in each respective social channel. However, quite often companies have same handles throughout different social media channels.

Ideas and progress

Company should keep a list of all content ideas and track their progress. Trello² - a tool for tracking progress - can be used. There should be a board for ideas, and another board for tracking progress. When starting with new content, add it in the “Writing” column. When finished with first draft, move it under “Editing” and ask for feedback. In addition, add all needed photos and other media to the same Trello card. Once ready, move the Trello card under “Ready to schedule”. The person responsible for scheduling handles the timely sharing of the content in all of the chosen channels. Circulate the role if necessary, for example, on weekly or monthly basis. In addition, some ground rules should be made when choosing content channels:

²<https://trello.com/>

- Make sure that the target audience is actually on the chosen channel.
- Choose only relevant channels and avoid choosing too many.
- Be committed to maintain company presence.

Channels are consumed differently. Platform consumption can be both active or passive. Passive consumption involves the creation and distribution of content on company social media. This includes the use of content calendars, promoted posts, replying to inbound questions and comments. Whereas, active consumption is more dynamic and interactive in the management and engagement of the social media community. This includes social media listening, active search and interaction, user-generated content, lead-generation, competitions, and following other social media accounts.

Similarly to consumption habits, the channels are optimal for different key formats. These include formats, such as, photos, graphics, images, gifs, videos, live, newsletters, announcements, articles, news, links, job postings, stories, short and long form editorials, photography, infographics, and blogs.

Table B.5 shows the differences between platform consumption and key formats per chosen channels as an example. It also includes the potential of paid, reporting, and customer service capabilities of particular channel. In addition, a posting cadence on short-term, mid-term, and long-term is provided.

Channel	Platform consumption	Key formats	Short-term posting cadence	Mid-term posting cadence	Long-term posting cadence	Paid capabilities	Reporting capabilities	Customer service
Instagram	Active + Passive	Photo, graphic, image, stories, live	Monthly	Weekly	Weekly	Medium	Medium	Yes
Facebook	Active + Passive	Video, photo, graphic, image, live, stories, announcements	Monthly	Weekly	Weekly	Very high	High	Yes
LinkedIn	Active + Passive	Short form editorial, articles, news, links, job postings	Monthly	Weekly	Weekly	Low	Low	No
Twitter	Active + Passive	Photo, graphic, image, gif, video, announcements	Monthly	Weekly	Daily	High	High	Yes
YouTube	Active	Video, live	Yearly	Monthly	Monthly	High	Medium	No
Vimeo	Active	Video, live	Yearly	Monthly	Monthly	Medium	Medium	No
Email	Passive	Newsletter, links	Yearly	Monthly	Monthly	-	High	Yes
Website	Active + Passive	Short form editorial, photo, graphic, image, stories, announcements	Monthly	Weekly	Weekly	-	High	Yes

Table B.5: Chosen content channels

Suggested channels include Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter, and YouTube, Vimeo, Email and Website. Similarly, Table B.6 shows the channels that are not suggested for the case companies.

Channel	Platform consumption	Key formats	Short-term posting cadence	Mid-term posting cadence	Long-term posting cadence	Paid capabilities	Reporting capabilities	Customer service
Snapchat	Passive	Stories, photography	-	-	-	Low	Low	No
Pinterest	Active	Photo, graphic, image, links, infographics	-	-	-	Medium	Medium	No
Medium	Active	Long form editorial, articles, blogs	-	-	-	Low	Low	No
Other blogs and websites	Active	Short form editorial, blogs	-	-	-	-	-	No

Table B.6: Content channels not chosen

Unsuggested channels include Snapchat, Pinterest, Medium, and other blogs and websites. Companies are unlikely to find their potential customers in these channels.

Governance

Company and its personnel are all owners of their strategy, including the content strategy. Company has to discuss internally and make a credibility and role-based decisions. Remember to answer briefly to the following questions:

- How are key decisions about content and content strategy made?
- How are changes initiated and communicated?

Studying the answers to the above questions will indicate whether the governance is at sufficient level. Analysis may also reveal that the responsibilities in implementation of the content strategy are unclear and additional governance is required.

Appendix C

Exemplary strategic actions

This chapter synthesizes the suggested short-, mid-, and long-term strategic actions by providing exemplary implementation plans and potential deliverables as the study objectives were to highlight actions and metrics that are to be considered when developing a digital online strategy for internationalization. Resulting study on conceptual framework for digital online strategy for B2B internationalization are providing companies with measures to take in order to enhance their digital readiness and competence in taking advantage of the possibilities of digitalization in the international export trade and information communication as part of their sales and marketing activities.

The proposed solution encompasses the insights and suggestions revealed during the industry analysis and is divided into actions for short-, mid- and long-term implementation. When assessed through the analyzed measures, applying all suggested actions will in the long-term raise any of the case companies as the most digitally active company with the highest digital potential in the industry.

In order to succeed in use of metrics the companies are required to develop their analytics. The companies should at least introduce real-time monitoring tools such as Segment ¹ and Mixpanel ². In addition, to be successful in introducing new social media channels and content types, the company should start to utilize tools for managing, scheduling, and publishing content, such as, Buffer ³ for content planning and scheduling and Feedly ⁴ for finding potential industry-related content and publications.

¹<https://segment.com/>

²<https://mixpanel.com/>

³<https://buffer.com/>

⁴<https://feedly.com/>

Short-term implementation

In the short-term, the companies are suggested to take the following actions:

1. Companies should continue with the current approach where a decision on the export trade model is made on a case-by-case basis.
2. Companies has to facilitate easier contacting by adding general contact information visible from all pages. For example, into the footer section at the bottom or into a toggleable side navigation.
3. Companies will have to provide product-specific pages and add a search feature on the website, and also improve the quality of references with added descriptions and images.
4. Companies will need to increase their visibility and the number of links from external sources, for example, from news and publications in industry related external online media.
5. Companies will need to introduce new social media channels and start monthly content sharing over Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and Instagram, as well as annual content sharing in Vimeo in addition to Youtube.

Mid-term implementation

In the mid-term, the companies are suggested to take the following actions:

1. Companies need to develop their international growth approaches and make a strategic decision on the use of potentially different export trade patterns depending on the region, taking into account at least the target country, customer language and other diverging business practices.
2. Companies need to support targeted communication and real-time tracking of analytics on the pages, from which the digital sales pipeline can be considered as starting. Furthermore, the companies must set up a chat client service to minimize the threshold for contacting, especially in customer first contact.
3. Companies should develop the customer references so that they can be shared outside the website, for example, directly into news or social media. In addition, the companies should implement a virtual showroom

online service and create an open material bank or a partners section as well as open their price information online as much as possible.

4. Companies should improve their search engine optimization and start active search engine advertising, and also implement a support for website content sharing especially on product and customer reference pages.
5. Companies should start publishing content on weekly basis on Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and Instagram, and monthly on Youtube and Vimeo.

Long-term implementation

In the long-term, the companies are suggested to take the following actions:

1. Companies need to keep on developing their international growth approaches in making a strategic decision on the use of same or differing export trade patterns in the region, taking into account at least the target country, customer language and other diverging business practices in the country of destination.
2. Companies will need to add a contact form with a support for callback request in order to complement their digital contact potential.
3. Companies will have to take an advantage of the public price information by opening up an online store. Furthermore, an online "laboratory planner" should be implemented as a complementary e-commerce add-on service. In addition, the companies are suggested to implement a mobile catalog application and virtual showroom online service.
4. Companies should continue to develop all previous measures and also initiate targeted display advertising based on collected customer behavior. Companies should also start mobile marketing, for example, by publishing a mobile catalog or a virtual showroom mobile application.
5. Companies should start publishing daily on Twitter.

Deliverables

Case companies can take on most of the actions by themselves, but some more tangible deliverables require outsourcing or consultancy from external companies. Estimations for deliverables are described as follows:

1. Virtual showroom -online service suggested for mid-term will cost approximately 5,000 euros.
2. Mobile catalog application suggested for long-term will cost approximately 7,500 euros.
3. Mobile virtual showroom application suggested for long-term will cost approximately 7,5000 euros.
4. Online "laboratory" planner suggested for long-term will cost approximately 25,000 euros.
5. Online store suggested for long-term will cost approximately 50,000 euros.

Estimations given here are mainly indicative and to be used solely for high level budget planning and scoping of deliverables. Actual cost approximations should be quoted from different software companies or providers using standard process of request for quotation.