



The performance of marketing automation in Finland

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Bachelor of Business Administration

Bachelor's Thesis

2023

Abstract

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Degree Bachelor of Business Administration
Thesis Title The performance of marketing automation in Finland
Number of pages and appendix pages 43 + 2
<p>This Bachelor's thesis discusses the application of marketing automation in Finland, compared with the theory in general. The main objective of the study was to analyze how marketing automation has performed in Finland and predict the future of it in this country. The potential of marketing automation in Finland discussed in this thesis would be a good resource for further study shortly.</p> <p>The thesis consisted of two main parts: the theory section and the research section. The theory section introduced the concept, benefits, and challenges of marketing automation from the theory point of view. Additionally, there was a light overview of the marketing scenarios and trends in Finland. The research part was focusing on the real-life practice of marketing automation in Finland, comparing it with the theoretical study and further discovering the development.</p> <p>The research was conducted in a qualitative method. The data was collected through desktop research and in-depth interview. For the desktop research, high-quality and academic sources were used to investigate. The in-depth interview was conducted with 6 interviewees who have been working closely with marketing automation in companies in Finland. All the answers were recorded confidentially for deep insights and study. Combining all the answers and findings, the research part was carried out to solve all the investigated and research questions.</p> <p>Generally, the research showed an optimistic overview of the performance of marketing automation in Finland. All of the findings supported the idea that marketing automation was worthy of investing, but also considered based on the purpose and the budget of the company. The results from all the interviews agreed that marketing automation was now a trend and would grow very fast in Finland. Marketing automation could be dominant in the marketing industry in Finland shortly.</p>
Keywords Marketing automation, automation system, marketing in Finland, marketing industry, email marketing, artificial intelligence (AI).

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1 Introduction

This is a research-based bachelor's thesis for the Degree Programme in International Business with a major specialization in Customer Service and Communication at the Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the background of the topic of this thesis project. It includes the background of the topic, research questions, investigation questions, and the benefits of the thesis.

1.1 Background to the topic

The thesis will discuss the marketing automation application performance in Finland. Marketing automation is having the support of the automatic system and is different from traditional marketing and becoming more and more popular all around the world, including Finland. With the power of marketing, it is considered a strategic and tactic tool for businesses to attract customers. Therefore, with the support of marketing automation, everything will become much easier and more effective. This thesis will investigate the performance of marketing automation application in Finland and forecast the future of it.

To more successfully target the right customers at the right time and in the right ways, nowadays, instead of targeting a group of customers with normal advertising, many companies try to maintain the relationship with each customer to ensure that they also receive good treatment the most. Digital marketing with social media, website, and direct calls, can help the company to get the customers' data and predict the process but to utilize this data and generate it into the leads and prospects, the marketing automation system is a need. (Todor 2016, 87.) In Finland, it was recorded that only 300 companies started to implement marketing automation tools in 2015, but this number had been increasing dramatically and reached 5929 businesses in 2019. And 95% of the users are satisfied with what they benefit from this marketing method. (Korpiemi 2022, 21.) Therefore, the thesis will update more information about the development of marketing automation and its potential in the future.

1.2 Research question

This thesis aims to investigate the development of marketing automation in Finland and how fit it is for businesses and companies in this country. The outcomes of the thesis were to make the project become a high-quality literature source of this area, especially in Finland. As marketing automation

is growing so fast and Finland is a place for start-ups, they can use this research to have a brief overview of this method to run marketing effectively in Finland.

The international aspect required to be a degree program of all theses is covered by the unlimited area of the topic which relates to marketing, specifically marketing automation. Marketing automation is growing globally and every business all around the world can study and apply it. Also, with the technology era, it is an up-to-date topic everywhere. Finland is the target country for the investigation, which is an international area for the author.

The research question (RQ) of this thesis was: How has marketing automation performed in Finland? What is the potential of marketing automation in Finland? The research question was divided into investigative questions (IQ) as follows:

IQ 1. What is the realistic application of marketing automation in Finland?

IQ 2. How do you evaluate the impact of marketing automation in the company?

IQ 3. What is the impact of marketing automation in Finland?

IQ 4. How potential is marketing automation in the future in Finland?

1.3 Benefits

First of all, the thesis work could be used as material for the one who wants to learn more about this topic because marketing automation is still not so familiar to customers nowadays. A company that does not apply marketing automation to its system yet can take the thesis project as a reference to having more ideas about it. Above all, as it is still a new and potential area in the modern future, it would be a great valuable source for everyone and companies to acknowledge more deeply.

For the author, it is very useful to have a deep knowledge in this area and it will support the future career of the author. Secondly, this project work will be the best proof of the author's knowledge and experience in macro and micro perspectives related to marketing automation. Therefore, this work will be very valuable for the author in her professional journey.

2 Components shaping the investigation of marketing automation in Finland

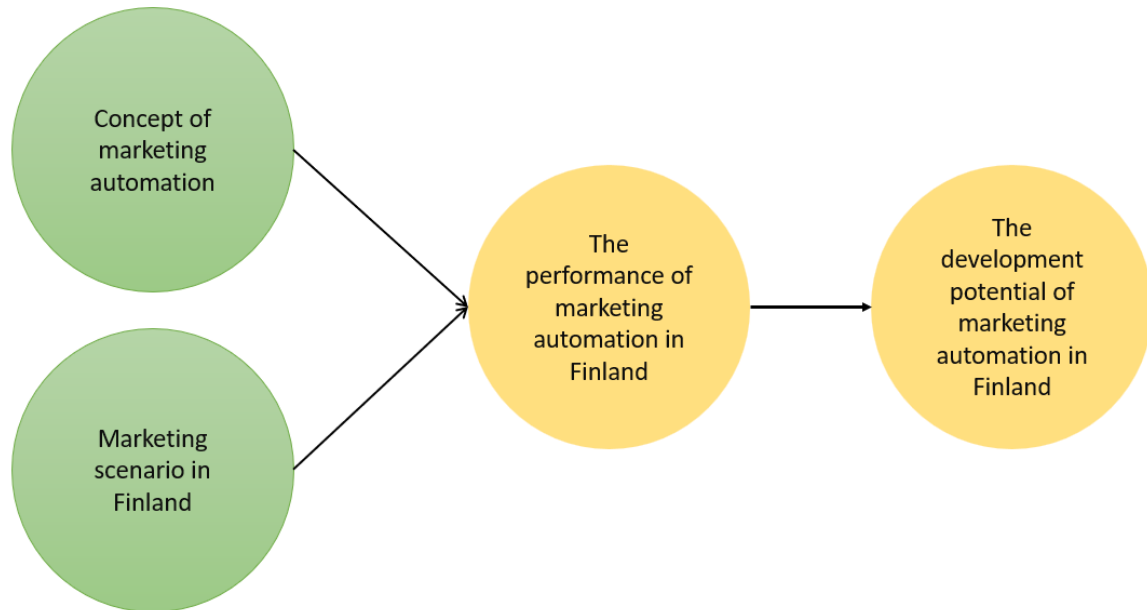


Figure 1. Components shaping the investigation of marketing automation in Finland (Author 2023).

In this thesis project, the theoretical framework will study the theory of marketing automation and discuss marketing scenarios and trends in Finland.

As in Figure 1., the first green circle on the top is to introduce marketing automation in general, which includes: definition, origin, frameworks, and features. Besides, the benefits and challenges of marketing automation will also be discussed. Therefore, in the research part, it would be easier to compare the theory and the real application in Finland. The second green circle at the bottom is to focus on some basic studies of the marketing industry in Finland and the trends to forecast the potential of marketing automation in Finland. This literature review is to prepare for the investigation of marketing automation applicability in Finland and compare the real effectiveness from real practice with theory.

2.1 Marketing automation introduction

2.1.1 Definition of marketing automation

The first definition of the term “marketing automation” was defined by Little as it “refers to the automated marketing decision support on the Internet” (Heimbach, Kostyra & Hinz 2015, 129). The Dictionary of Marketing by Doyle (2016) also stated that marketing automation is “a software system

that enables the automated management and measurement of repetitious marketing tasks and workflow across a wide range of media during the execution of marketing campaigns” (Salmi 2020, 24). While according to Singh, Dode & Barve (2021, 1), marketing automation “refers to the use of historical customer data and technologies designed for businesses to more effectively market on multiple channels online and automate recurring marketing tasks”.

Apparently, there is not any clear definition for marketing automation up to now (Salmi 2020, 25). Marketing automation is also basically understood as “the use of software to automate marketing processes” (Todor 2016, 88) and track for the customers’ behavior and data to make a concise decision on the advertising and marketing work (Phatak, Sexena, Singh & Singh 2020, 2570). With the support of modern software and intelligence, many repetitive marketing tasks could be automated and personalized. It provides the customers with the right experience at the right time and helps save resources of the companies from humans to money and time. Many routine tasks that could be transferred from manual to automatic are email marketing, lead management, personalized marketing, and customer segmentation,... so that the Marketing team can work better together and save time. (HubSpot 2023.)

Marketing automation is not only considered as software but also a tool or tactic that help business to control the whole process of consumers, from analyzing and understanding their customers, nurturing the prospects to turning them into delighted customers. Therefore, with the development of marketing automation, the process of marketing becomes more effective and generates outstanding revenue for the business. (Todor 2016, 88.)

2.1.2 The origin of marketing automation

The origin of marketing automation could be considered as the development based on customer relationship management (CRM), which was first launched in the 1990s (Korpiniemi 2022,15). At first, CRM was just a place where the business stored the customers' information by collecting ro-lodexes and business cards. Gradually, to store all the customers' data, employees, and prospects in one pool, CRM became more complex with various automatic features. Additionally, it was an indispensable part of the business (Marthur Sourabh 23 August 2016). The idea of the CRM was to link the marketing and sales management to track the sales process and insights more easily and efficiently (Korpiniemi 2022,15). Thanks to the power of CRM platforms, which were working as a sales-oriented platforms, the idea of a marketing-oriented platform began and was considered as marketing automation (Marthur Sourabh 23 August 2016). In the late 1990s, some people used automated code to combine the database and divided it into more granular segments for the use of

marketing management. Since then, it became more popular and turned into a massive industry. (Sweezey 2014, 7.) Different from the CRM, marketing automation has been implemented to “employ many data sources to build real-time communication for all the different touchpoints in the 16-customer journey” and get insights into the marketing tools and techniques of the company (Korpiemi 2022,15).

Marketing automation was also a result of digital transformation. With the expansion widely of technologies, the internet, and social media,... the demand for reaching potential customers became higher than ever. Therefore, marketing automation began to develop as an essential tool for web analytics, email, and marketing management. (Marthur Sourabh 23 August 2016.) The first marketing automation platform was introduced in the 2000s with the basic use of email marketing and lead management only (Brocke 2023), but up to now, it has been updated and developed to be more complex and comprehensive to support the most repetitive tasks in marketing.

2.2 Concept of marketing automation

2.2.1 The framework of marketing automation

Marketing automation is being built based on the inbound methodology, which is known as a customer-centric way to reach potential customers. Marketing automation is the combination of many marketing initiatives, such as digital analytics, email marketing, social media marketing, and retargeting... into one software to focus on workflows for lead management (Korpiemi 2022,15). From there, it gradually develops into a lead generation and leads nurturing process that helps to increase sales (Zumstein & al. 2011, 17). In general, marketing automation helps to centralize the data and automate the task from the very beginning of the customer’s journey.

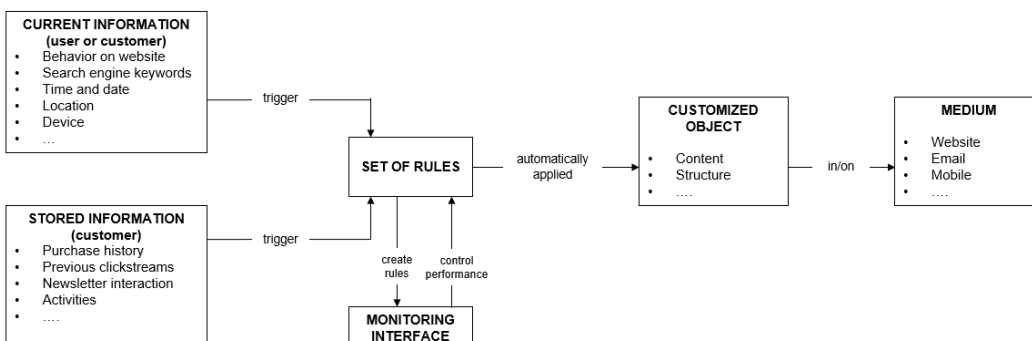


Figure 2. The framework of marketing automation (adapted from Heimbach & al. 2015, 131).

The general process of marketing automation is depicted through the framework in Figure 2. There are two main parts of the whole process: the triggers implementation and the object and medium customization. With the triggers, the technique will be set up to track the information from the customers and users through their behavior on the website (date, time, search activity, purchase history, interaction,), device information (IP address, location,...). From the results, the set of rules will be implemented to work on it automatically. (Heimbach & al. 2015, 131-132.) It is also very important to monitor and control the performance of the rules as it may be necessary to refine the automation process even after it is put into operation (Babet 2020, 24). The second part relates to the object and medium that links with the set of rules. Marketing automation is applied to customize the content and structure that bring to the customers, such as email, message, image, landing pages, etc. (Heimbach & al. 2015, 132.)

2.2.2 Some main features of marketing automation

Marketing automation undoubtedly provides the business with various features and functions that help to optimize the work. With different features, there are different purposes and uses that make it broadly implemented and accessible. (Adobe Experience Cloud s.a.) Here are some main signature features of marketing automation:

Email marketing

Email marketing is considered one of the most effective means of communication between the business and customers due to its personalization (Babet 2020, 25). With email marketing, the marketer could send numerous emails to their subscriber and trace their behavior to get a useful database for marketing automation storage at the same time. By applying email marketing in the campaign, the marketing team can manage a huge number of leads and evaluate them based on the data collected from their behaviors, such as the number of emails sent, the number of emails opened, and the number of people unsubscribe. (Tiitola 2022, 26.) Besides, email marketing does not only fulfill the main objectives of the business to convince the customers to buy the products but also builds trust and brand awareness. Therefore, the more relevant the email, the more engagement the business can get from its customers. Personalization email is highly suggested to make the audience feel relevant to this conversation, products, and business. (Babet 2020, 25.)

With marketing automation, you can avoid sending blast emails, but execute the automatic and personalized email campaign to the customers that support closely to lead generation and nurturing. It means that with the platform of marketing automation, email could create a dynamic interest in products with new potential customers and last longer to engage with existing customers.

(Sweezey 2014, 9.) Some highlight features of using marketing automation for email marketing are: batch email marketing, pre-schedule triggered email, dynamic content, and A/B testing,... (SelectHub 2023). Changing from manual to automatic execution, email marketing in the concept of marketing automation can optimize for the best result and save time for the marketing team (Sweezey 2014, 9).

SEO and SEM

"Content marketing has become another buzzword in the marketing world" (Sweezey 2014, 10), and we are creating much more content than ever before to win on the search algorithm of Google. With the business, they are not only selling the products but also providing helpful information to the audience through marketing activities. Therefore, the run of the content on Google has never been simple in this period to attract the audience. Marketers start to utilize Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and Search Engine Marketing (SEM) to maximize the relevance and easiness to approach the audience, which helps to drive more leads into their pipelines. (Sweezey 2014, 10-11.)

SEO and SEM are both used to optimize the company website for search engines. With SEO, the company tries to reach the audience in a natural way (content, keywords,...) while with SEM, the company has to pay for the listing on the search results. They are also considered a key driver of the company's ROI because it indirectly generates leads and sales. (Sweezey 2014, 11-12.) Therefore, this is a great feature of marketing automation for a business.

Lead management

Firstly, the term "lead" is mostly used in marketing, especially marketing automation and CRM to imply the contact that is generated by the marketing campaign and stored in the data of software. Lead could be existing customers or potential customers who show interest or have a reaction to the business' advertising campaign and products. Therefore, lead management is a technology that helps the business to track the whole sales process of each customer and manage to optimize the prospects and sales. (Todor 2016, 90.) Because of the combination between sales and marketing funnels, lead management is one of the highlight benefits of marketing automation in many pieces of research (Hämäläinen 2020, 22).

The lead management process includes:

- Lead generation: this is the very first stage of the process that applying marketing tactics to get customers interested in the business' products or services. Typically, the company will plan for the marketing campaign to reach the audience through social media, advertisement, blogs, newspapers,... so that customers know about the company and its products.

- Customer inquiry: when the customers express their interest in the products through lead generation, the data will be collected and generated into sales leads in the software. From now on, each of their activities toward the business will be recorded to optimize sales.
- Filtering, grading, distribution, and contact processed: in this stage, leads will be sorted out, categorized into each suitable group, and distributed among the marketing team to have further actions on their leads. The marketing people can even contact leads to define the category accurately the most.
- Lead nurturing: leads in this stage will be divided into several groups about their stage (contacted, uncontacted, follow-up) so that the marketing team can trace it easily.

(Todor 2016, 90.)

Automated workflows

According to Chi (2022), workflow automation is the optimization of applying rule-based logic to run multiple tasks automatically without the need for human interaction. The logic behind automated workflow is when the programming process is complete, the rules and logic will be applied to realistic tasks such as sending emails, scheduling timetables, and more – with everything being done automatically. At present, organizations are facing a highly competitive rate in vast areas and the requirement to upgrade productivity and efficiency for gaining tremendous advantages against rivals. Therefore, the urge to optimize workflow and task-performing processes has become pressure forcing organizations to seek help from workflow management applications. The automation of workflow has undoubtedly been a potential aspect of workflow management in increasing production speed and completing tasks with undeniable benefits. (Chi 2022.) Additionally, according to Wiley & Sons (1999), workflow is defined as tools that assist organizations to specify, execute, monitor, and manage the flow of work cases within the office environment. From the definition of Wiley & Sons, it is assumable that automated workflow is tools or systems that have automatic functionality to help organizations in controlling workflow which possibly reduces pressures for human staff from tremendous amounts of work. IBM Cloud Education (2015), also mentions the utility of artificial intelligence (AI) in practical applications for automation workflow tools, even though this is not a requirement for successful automated workflows. By replacing manual tasks with software that is capable of executing all or part of a process, workflow automation optimizes and ensures time-saving methodologies and efficient business work. Currently, marketers are focusing on improving return on marketing increasing revenue (ROMI) to gain better market share, and marketing effectiveness to achieve milestones in revenue and profitability while keeping the spending at an acceptable limit. However, the complexity of maintaining marketing effectiveness optimization requires efforts in attempting to fulfill a certain number of factors: media mix optimization, product

lifecycle comprehension, privacy rules and regulations, corporate governance, resource constraints, and globalization. One of the best solutions is to invest in developing marketing technologies, and marketing automation is the outcome of the research to automate marketing processes including planning, segmentation, database control, asset management, quality and quantity observations, etc. (Biegel 2009, 202 - 203.) These technologies are the result of the combination of different software, algorithms, technology research, and hardware development to give birth to marketing automation and one step closer to the utilization of workflow automation. As the expectation, marketers' pressure has been increasingly reduced since a major of repetitive tasks has been carried out by tools and platforms which allow more investment into different aspects of organizations to aim for a fully enforcing development.

2.2.3 Benefits and challenges of marketing automation

The main purpose as well as benefits of marketing automation is to enhance the marketing activities by centralizing the database and automating the tasks. The result of this implementation is an increase in return on marketing investment (ROI). (Tiitola 2022, 25.) According to Hämäläinen (2020, 22), with this huge amount of workload, it is impossible to manually sort out effectively. One business could have several customers, visitors, and users to manage on the website, so it will be very time-consuming and inefficient if everything is managed by humans only (Max 2022, 13). Therefore, with the use of marketing automation, the business is enabled to utilize the same resources and same budget but to reach a better result. (Tiitola 2022, 25.) Moreover, marketing automation helps to define the most accurate targeting of revenues through ROI tracking in all channels to implement the marketing plan and campaigns so that it could align with the sales and marketing goal of the business (Hämäläinen 2020, 22).

As a signature feature of marketing automation, the company can also benefit from lead management (Salesforce 2023). According to Todor (2016, 93), by implementing the automating system, companies achieve a 107% higher lead conversion rate, 40% better average deal size, and 17% more accuracy in the forecast. Using marketing automation software, it is possible to track and monitor the whole marketing campaign and purchasing process from customers (Hämäläinen 2020, 22). All the action of the customers on the website is recorded so that the marketing team can understand better the purchasing lifecycle of everyone. Therefore, thanks to marketing automation, the company is provided with a clearer picture of the customer's behavior and also their attitude toward the company's campaigns or products. (Salesforce 2023.) From this huge information and database, the company can more easily come up with strategies to tailor each customer's experience and create a new way to approach them efficiently (Hämäläinen 2020, 22).

With marketing automation, the marketer can tailor the content that brings to customers. As recorded by Marketing Cloud Account Engagement, 77% of customers prefer to have the target content and unique offer in each stage. (Salesforce 2023.) After gathering information and data from customers, personalization and customization is crucial for the interactive marketing strategy and it is one of the main elements in marketing automation nowadays (Sandell 2016, 8). Marketing automation helps the business to provide the right customers with the right content at the right time (Salesforce 2023). When marketers have better access to the database of the customers and their journey, they have more resources to create more personalized communication and experience (Tiitola 2022, 25).

On the other hand, it is also simpler for the sales team to work on the system with the sync database of leads to “monitor real-time activities, keep the leads in order, achieve continuous improvement and in the end get the right leads to make the sale” (Sandell 2016, 8). By combining many features in one platform and software for dashboarding, analyzing, reporting, collecting, and storing databases, marketing automation is undoubtedly one of the most comprehensive solutions for managing campaigns. Since then, the marketer can have a better overview of their customers and make better decisions on future campaigns and actions. (Salesforce 2023.)

Besides many good benefits of utilizing marketing automation features, there are also existing challenges to consider.

One of the most important things to consider when applying marketing automation is the resources of the company. According to the study by Act-On and their partner Ascend2 (2021), 35% of B2B marketers agree that they don't have enough resources to successfully manage marketing automation solutions. Besides, lack of training, knowledge (31%), and budget (26%) to maintain the operation is also an obstacle. Consequently, it is assumable that the needs for qualified resources and budget are the biggest challenge of marketing automation. Due to the comprehensiveness requirement, The NYU Dispatch (s.a.) has also suggested that the company should have a good plan and evaluate the applicability in advance to build the most efficient MarTech stack. Besides, with marketers, the learning curve must be very steep at the beginning, and it is a must to understand the platform and operation very deeply from the starting point to prepare well enough. Otherwise, they may have to face the setting up or troubleshooting (Rav.ai 2022). As explained, the system is very complicated to set up and not integrated with other tools and technology stacks (Act-On 2021). To support this point, 20% of the companies agree with Tucker (2021) that it is difficult to choose suitable marketing automation software that could work well with their current technology stacks. A higher quality and level of maintenance is also required for the automation platform compared to manually operated machines, but on the contrary, it offers a lower level of flexibility

(Groover 2023). In other words, if there are any problems with the system, it is impossible to get support from other software easily (The NYU Dispatch s.a.).

With email marketing of marketing automation, personalization is an outstanding point but also a drawback as well if they are not managed well. With the frequency and the similarity of content sometimes, it will lead to messaging fatigue and spam the customers. Consequently, audiences will delete it right away and unsubscribe to the company's newsletter. You also need to be very careful with all the settings and messages due to the automated features, it will be sent automatically to thousands of people without editability. (Tucker 2021.)

To sum up, there are both benefits and challenges to using marketing automation. It is considered an investment of your company and every decision has to pay; therefore, it is crucial to be able to well organize and accomplish the objectives. Otherwise, you will turn some of the advantages into disadvantages.

2.3 Background of marketing in Finland

American Marketing Association (2017) has developed the definition of marketing as: "Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large".

In Finland, marketing is also set to reach customers in almost every business. It was reported that 1.3 billion euros were spent on mass media in 2019 to create marketing communications between businesses and customers (both current and potential) and it accounted for 40% of the marketing investments. And the total investment in marketing took 1% of the GDP in Finland in 2019, with around 3 billion euros. Among many types of marketing, digital marketing received the biggest investment with 460.2 million, especially half of that amount was used to run the marketing on Google and Facebook. Besides, there are nearly 2600 advertising agencies in Finland in 2019 with 6136 marketer practitioners. (Haavisto 2021, 23-25.)

2.3.1 Demographic information

The total population in Finland in 2022 was 5.56 million inhabitants according to Statista (2023). From 1915 to 2022, the population had been increasing but not so significantly. From 3.1 million people in 1915, it began to rise and reached 5.49 million in 2015. However, after this period, the population has almost remained at about 5.5 million inhabitants. Therefore, the range of age has also kept the same level through the years since 2012 and people at the age of between 15 - 64 occupy mostly, followed by the group of over 65 years old. (Figure 3.) The chart clearly shows the

trend of the old aging inhabitants' group in Finland. Moreover, it is predicted that the median age of population inhabitants in Finland in 2050 will be 47.03 (Statista 2022, 11), which is pretty high.

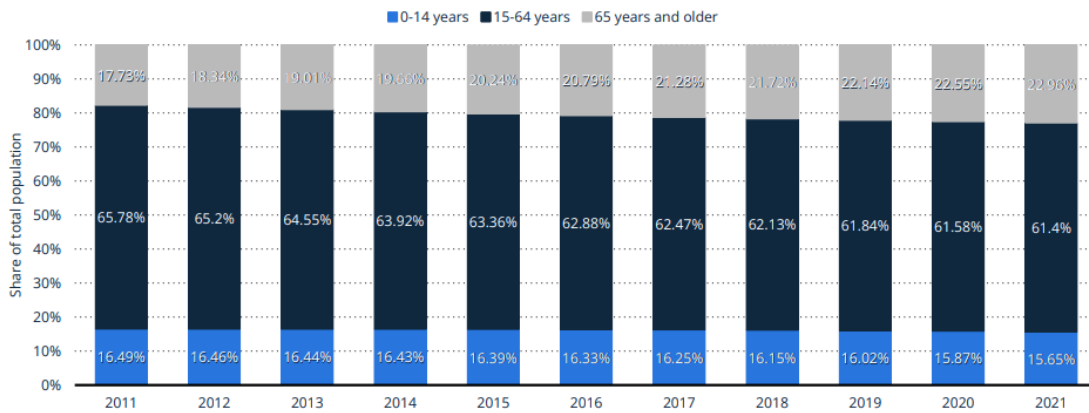


Figure 3. Finland: Age structure from 2011 to 2021 (Statista 2022, 10)

There is also an increase in the number of foreign inhabitants in Finland, which is shown in Figure 4 (Statista 2022, 13). Most of the foreigners live in the region of Åland (12.1%) and followed by the Uusimaa area (9.6%). It was recorded that 59% of foreigners are originally from European countries, 25% from Asia, and 12% from African countries. This is an opportunity to create a more active and global environment in Finland. (Statistics Finland 2013.)

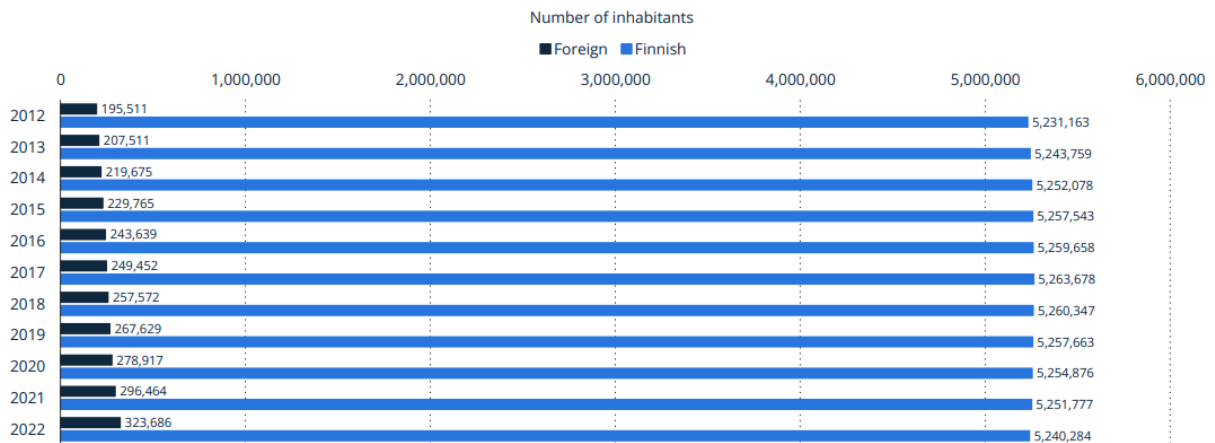


Figure 4. Population of Finland from 2012 to 2022, by nationality (Statista 2022, 13).

2.3.2 The trend of marketing and advertising in Finland

With the steady rise of digital transformation in Finland, since the 2020s, marketing in this country became so complex with a variety of communication channels, platforms, and methodologies. The trend of marketing is also the result of media consumption and customer behaviors, which lead to the challenge of business to segment and reach the potential customers in an effective way as well as maintain the relationship with the current customers. (Haavisto 2021, 24.)

The most popular direct marketing channels in Finland are:

- Direct mail (through unaddressed bulk mail or addressed mail)
- Telemarketing
- Internet marketing (social media)
- Brochures/Catalogs
- Direct-response marketing

(International Trade Administration 2022).

Despite the dramatic growth of digital transformation and the modern way of marketing through the internet, many of the traditional advertising remains in Finland, for example, direct mail, brochures, telemarketing, etc (International Trade Administration 2022). However, the expenditure for this type of advertising was not significantly high compared with others (Figure 5). Consequently, in 2021, the marketing activities of direct and outdoor advertising were recorded to not generate effectiveness as shown in the revenue in 2021 (Figure 6). Only around 92 million euros was made through direct and outdoor advertising, which accounted for only 5% of the total revenue on marketing activities. Businesses in Finland have spent more budget on other media of advertising, for example, print newspapers, television, online, etc as shown in Figure 5.

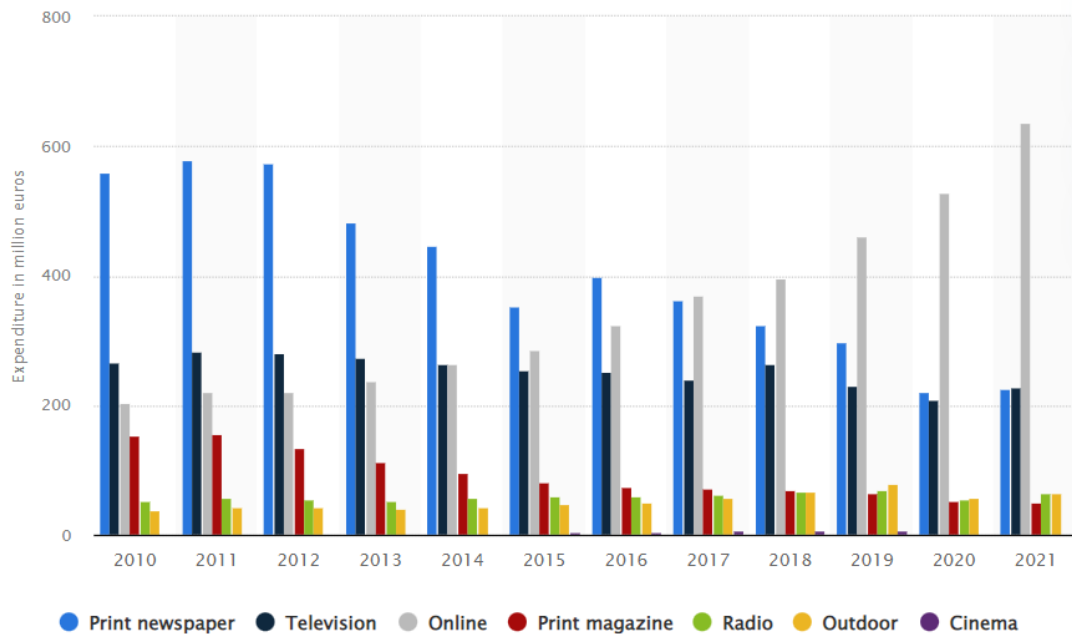


Figure 5. Advertising expenditure in Finland from 2010 to 2021, by medium (Statista 2022).

The expenditure for marketing methods had been changing significantly from 2010 to 2021, which clearly shows the transformation of digital marketing. In 11 years, the most advertising expenditure has changed from print newspapers (nearly 600 million euros) to online methods (more than 600 million euros). The print magazine also faced a reduction stably throughout the year. (Statista 2022.) It is considered by International Trade Administration (2022) that social media marketing and marketing automation is also strongly used to approach new target groups and created tailored service, and experience to catch up with the growth of eCommerce (International Trade Administration 2022). Therefore, it has been a clear sign of digital transformation in marketing in Finland based on Figure 5. Online activities for advertising and marketing have had a dramatic growth in 10 years and become the mainstream advertising medium since 2018 (Statista 2022). Different from traditional text-based advertising, online advertising applies tools and online services to optimize targeting, analytics, and interactivity. Moreover, online advertising can be found on many platforms: social media, community websites, forums, blogs, and even television, etc. (Sell & Wahlström 2015, 16.)

Television has remained the second most popular way to do advertising in Finland, but it is declining slowly as well. (Statista 2022.) According to the research by Katariina and Outi, Finns spend approximately 8 hours per day on different media channels. The most popular channel is television and followed by other sites that combine online services. Therefore, in 2020, the most effective way to do the marketing is through television. It has also been the best mass communication

among businesses and customers and the easiest way to reach almost people in Finland. Using television as a medium for marketing, it is convenient to build brand awareness, introduce the launched products, and special promotions to audiences. (Ridwan 2020, 18-19.)

With the new distribution of marketing methods, the radio still stays stable (Statista 2022). It was reported by Advertising Finland (2021) that half of Finns listen to the radio with commercials whilst, which is much higher than in other Nordic countries. They have the radio almost everywhere: from home, cars to personal devices. Moreover, radio is gradually expanding into the audio market with the rise of podcasts, audiobooks,... Therefore, it is undoubtedly an effective way to advertise in Finland. It was also predicted by Katariina and Outi to grow steadily in the future. (Ridwan 2020, 19.)

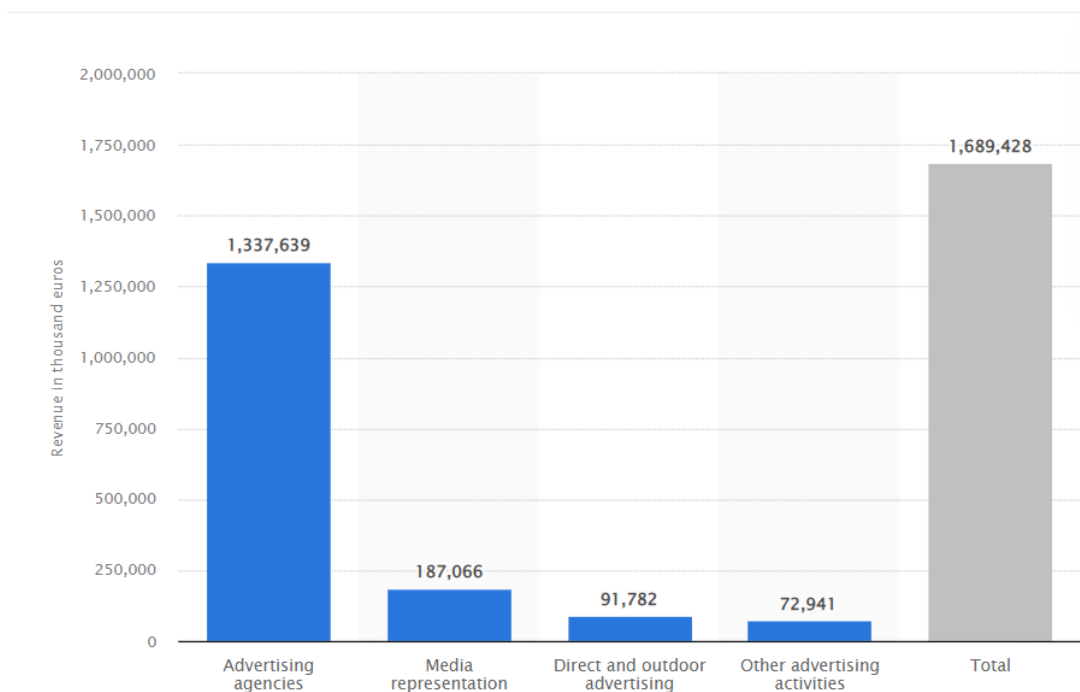


Figure 6. Revenue of marketing and advertising industry in Finland in 2021, by activity (in 1,000euros) (Statista 2023).

Surprisingly, the revenue generated from media representation is not that expectedly high that it is only 2 times more than the traditional way (Statista 2023). With the appearance of technology and digital transformation, the marketing campaign has become more segmented and diversified in Finland these years (International Trade Administration 2022). Therefore, companies started to utilize the work from marketing agencies so that they can receive support from marketers to maximize the potential of reaching customers (Haavisto 2021, 24). With also the huge number of agencies in Finland, it is understandable that the highest revenue in advertising activity comes from Advertising

agencies, which reached nearly 1,4 billion euros in 2021 and occupied almost 72% of the whole of Finland (Statista 2023).

With all these theory reviews, the research will investigate whether marketing automation fits well the market and the trend in Finland and forecast for its potential in the near future.

3 Research Methods

This chapter will introduce how the research was conducted in this study through research design, population and sampling, data collection, data analysis, reliability, validity, and relevance. Generally, the research will be the qualitative base to have a deep insight into this topic.

3.1 Research design

In this thesis, the qualitative research method is applied as the primary data to investigate the topic. Qualitative research is widely used to answer questions that relate to the meaning, perspectives, and experiences, which could not be measured or counted. There are three main types of techniques:

- Small-group discussions: focus on investigating the belief, attitudes, behavior,...
- Semi-structured interviews: get literature on a specific topic and institutional perspectives
- In-depth interviews: understand deeply a condition or event from personal experience, and learn about their private knowledge.

(Hammarberg, Kirkman & de Lacey 2016, 499.)

Besides, there are also other methods to conduct qualitative research, such as ethnography, observation,...(Neale, Alen & Coombes 2005, 1585-1586). In this research, the in-depth interview will be conducted as the primary method to get the most realistic study for the topic. Moreover, due to the niche aspects of the topic, which relates to marketing automation applications, it focuses mainly on the real experience, which is not so common to apply the quantitative one.

In addition to the qualitative research, the author also uses desktop research as secondary data. According to Aela (2022), desktop research is used to collect also data from existing documents or the results of previous research. The author decided to choose desktop research in this thesis because the field of this topic is not so widely known and there is not enough information and data nowadays. Therefore, a literature review of the previous works is very helpful. By combining these two methods, it is easier to make the comparison and evaluation between theory and realistic application of marketing automation, specifically in Finland.

3.2 Population and sampling

The population and sampling are indicated to the primary method only, which is the in-depth interview. To ensure the quality of the qualitative research, some criteria are set for the sample to choose the right candidates for the interview. The interviewee must fulfill these requirements, which are: he/she has been

- Working in business in Finland.
- Working in the marketing department
- Experiencing the marketing automation system of the company

The author has been contacting all people found on LinkedIn as well as people in the community whose profile fits the requirements listed above. As a result, six people are participating in the in-depth interview.

3.3 Data collection

3.3.1 Primary data collection

The interview was conducted virtually via Microsoft Teams so that it was more comfortable for the interviewees because all of them are full-time workers. All of the interviews lasted from 45 minutes to 1 hour because the topic is pretty wide. There were six participants in total and they all met the requirements and criteria as set.

Before the interview, a questionnaire (Appendix 1) was designed and sent out to the interviewees to ensure that they can prepare well for the interview with enough information. During the interviews, all the interviews were permitted to be recorded and transcribed with the only purpose of studying after that. Therefore, it was deleted right after the investigation. After the interview, the data will be interpreted by the author using Excel. This collection of data was to ensure that the author could have a deep investigation by comparing the answers among the interviewees. About the information of the interviewees, everything was anonymous to protect the privacy of both the interviewees and their companies.

3.3.2 Secondary data collection

The secondary data was collected through other resources, such as ebooks, websites, journals, reports,... The literature review was applied to investigate deeply in the topic. Google and Google Scholar was the main search engine for the work. Besides, the information was also collected from several marketing automation software companies, such as HubSpot, Salesforces, and Moosend,... to approach closely to the topic.

3.4 Results and discussions

There were six interviews conducted with six interviewees who were chosen from the criteria set for population and sampling to ensure the quality of the study. All the interviews lasted from 45 minutes to 1 hour. To identify the interviewees, the brief details of each interviewee are as follows:

Interview ID	Age	Position/Title
Interviewee 1	25	Digital Marketing Manager
Interviewee 2	32	Marketing Automation Specialist
Interviewee 3	30	Customer Engagement Specialist
Interviewee 4	29	Marketing Automation Specialist
Interviewee 5	23	Customer Relationship Management Associate
Interviewee 6	25	Junior Campaign Manager

By combining with the desktop research, here are the findings for each aspect that connects to the research questions.

3.4.1 The realistic application of marketing automation in Finland

As introduced in the theory about marketing automation and its relevant aspects (see 2.1 & 2.2), the research will study how it does truly apply in Finland and the realistic situation of the marketing automation market in Finland.

Even though digital transformation was slowly followed by many Finnish businesses, gradually, it has been growing dramatically and more familiar in Finland since then. They started to also offer many services and products related to marketing automation (Sandell 2016, 8). In 2015, a study carried out by Vainu pointed out that only 300 companies in Finland were using marketing automation software. However, in 2019, the number of companies using this platform increased dramatically, which was 20 times more than in 2015 and reached nearly 6000 companies. Marketing automation started to become mainstream since then. (Jokela 2015.)

Marketing automation generally can be used in both B2B and B2C businesses. With similar feature usage, the idea and the purpose are also the same in B2B and B2C businesses, which are: to personalize the marketing experience of audiences, automate the workflow and optimize the efficiency

of marketing campaigns, and generate revenue at the end. However, the focus and the tactics are considerably different a bit from these 2 types of businesses.

Table 1. Marketing automation difference point of view (B2C vs B2B) (Campaign Monitor 2016).

	B2C	B2B
Focus	Brand building	Lead generation Subscriber engagement
Tactics	Customer journeys Data-driven products/service recommendations	Content delivery Lead nurture
Goal	Revenue	Revenue

Table 1 briefly shows the points of view from B2C and B2B when using marketing automation. With B2C, their focus is to build brand awareness, so that marketing automation is used to bring personalized and relevant messages to the audiences. B2C companies must create a unique process through customer journeys and provide the customers with the most customized products from the action triggers and data collected. While with B2B companies, use marketing automation to share valuable information with customers to optimize engagement from customers and lead generation. (Campaign Monitor 2016.) The reason for providing educational and mass-oriented content is because mostly, there are several stakeholders involved in the B2B purchase. The action-triggered information helps to influence their decision in the end. (Decker 2020.) From that, it is easier to nurture the lead through the sales funnel and generate revenue. Therefore, in comparison, B2B marketing automation does not require ultra-personalized and unique content for each customer, instead, they prefer the more educational and event-based, campaign-based email to encourage the onboarding or registration from customers. (Campaign Monitor 2016.)

Qualitative research by Columbia Road and students from Aalto University was carried out to investigate the scenario of marketing automation in Finland in 2016. In Finland, B2C companies had taken more advantages in marketing automation than B2B companies. The reason for this difference was that B2B companies did not see the effectiveness and relevance of marketing automation to apply in their business. (Samarin 2017.) Interviewee 1 was once experienced in an SME B2B company in Finland, and they refused to try marketing automation as they did not feel the

need for it in general. Because the customer database of their company was not that big so “it's much more personalized and more intimate if they just reach out to them directly and they are fine doing that” (Interviewee 1). However, it was obvious that the customers of B2B companies are also people and there are ways to personalize their experience through marketing automation. Generally, even though marketing automation brings also many more leads and efficiencies into the marketing work, many Finnish companies were not ambitious to recognize it. Moreover, there used to be other challenges for businesses in Finland to take into consideration, such as organizational issues, technical issues, financial issues, legal issues, etc. Therefore, for those companies, it made no sense to transfer everything into the new technological way of marketing, which was known as marketing automation. (Samarin 2017.) On the other hand, based on the more recent study by Kopiniemi (2022, 30), 78% of the respondents whose companies are using marketing automation software are B2B and the rest of the 22% comes from the B2C market. Also, most of the companies are small or medium-sized (80%), which reflects the reality of businesses in Finland. As Interviewee 2 also mentioned, all of the companies whatever the customer segmentation more or less take advantage of marketing automation and the key point is whether the company could explore its possibility and creativity or not.

Though the situation varies, the companies which caught up with the digital transformation, literally got the benefits from marketing automation and believed that they were ahead of the curve. (Samarin 2017).

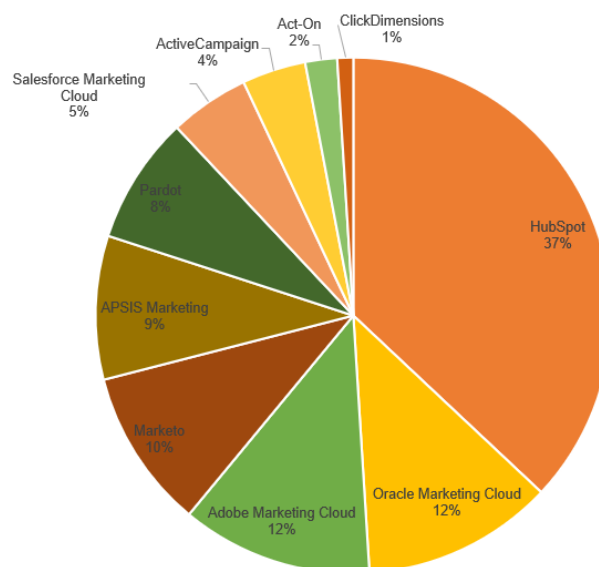


Figure 7. Market shares of marketing automation tools in Finland 2019 (adapted from Jokela 2015).

According to Figure 7, there is some marketing automation software that is used in Finland and the most popular one is HubSpot with around 37%. Following Adobe Marketing Cloud (12%), Oracle Marketing Cloud (12%), and Marketo (10%),... marketing automation became familiar to the marketing industry in Finland. (Jokela 2015.)

With the statistics on BuildWith (2023), HubSpot is also the most commonly used marketing automation in Finland, followed by Active Campaign, Klaviyo, and MailerLite. According to the survey carried out by Korpiniemi (2022, 31) to investigate the most common marketing automation in Finland, HubSpot is also the most widely used among the respondents, which accounted for around 40% and followed by Mailchimp (13%) and ActiveCampaign (10%). To sum up, it is obvious that HubSpot is the most favorable choice for many businesses in Finland. Since 2015 up to now, the marketing market in Finland has seen the strong maturity of not only the number of users but also technologies in general and in marketing. (Jokela 2015.)

There are several factors that affect the decision of marketing automation software. HubSpot is the most popular use due to its different functions and flexibility. Some of the reasons why companies in Finland choose to use HubSpot are the numerous different tools, good ratio (price-quality), high rank in the market, ease to use, possibility to integrate with other systems, etc. On the other hand, MailChimp is an affordable choice to create the email marketing campaign, while Adobe Marketo is popular due to its integration easiness with the current CRM software. (Korpiniemi 2022, 32.)

Besides HubSpot, Salesforces is also considered a good system for marketing automation and software, according to Interviewee 3, as several features are comprehensive in one system and all the departments can work together on the same software.

However, based on the answers from the interviews, all the candidates agreed that due to the cost of this software, many businesses in Finland choose to use several smaller-size software instead of the full-scale stack and some of the software may not be so popular and common. Due to the size of their companies, they thought that it was good enough and budget-friendly. Also, famous software, such as HubSpot, and Salesforce,... usually offer a variety of tools and features as well as the integration of databases in the same system. According to them, it is not necessary in the sense of the small and medium size of the businesses. An obvious example comes from the company of Interviewee 1:

“We use Klavyo for e-mail, Nosto for personalization on the website, Planoly as a social media auto-publishing tool, and then we are also using Zendesk as a customer service software, such as the live chat support popping up as you normally see on e-commerce stores, but with them, you can also create a knowledge base with different questions and the software will pick up the most relevant answers”

The company of Interviewee 6 also installs a set of different tools for marketing automation, which includes: Bloomreach, Salesforce, Zapier, and Typeform. According to Interviewee 2, in her company, at the very first implementation, they used software from the UK, which was Emarsys Solutions due to the good offers and features that included basic tools for marketing automation. And when the company scaled up, the demands also increased so they decided to change to Optimove and keep using it up to now. According to her, both two systems were not so common in the EU or the world; yet, it fits the purpose and the budget of the company. This happens the same with the company of Interviewee 5, which applies Iterable as the marketing automation tool. Interestingly, even though HubSpot was recorded as the most popular software used in Finland, all of the companies of the six interviewees are using the others. So in Finland, HubSpot is well-known, but choosing the suitable software depends mostly on the target, objectives, and budget of the company. (Pulkka s.a.)

Besides that, the application of marketing automation also brings the presence of AI, which is gradually common in Finland as well. According to Interviewee 1, there are now more and more companies in Finland that offer AI for the marketing solutions, such as Supermetrics, Smartly, Nosto,... Interviewee 2 stated that AI contributes around 30% to the features of marketing automation systems in her companies but pretty much more to the impact of the marketing strategy. In general, all of the interviewees agree that AI is also growing but not so visible in marketing automation. However, it is promisingly potential shortly to make marketing automation more powerful.

In conclusion, nowadays, more and more companies in Finland are starting to use marketing automation. Most of the companies are big corporations and use some famous software, such as HubSpot, and Salesforce..., which is more comfortable as all of the database and features are stored in the same system. On the other hand, these software are very costly, which is why small and medium-sized companies are almost using other different software, even for each activity to minimize the cost of it. And nowadays, with the fast growth of start-ups in Finland, it is understandable that 4 over 6 interviewees' companies are using different tools, which are considered as not so popular and common in Finland and all around the world. Nevertheless, we could not deny that a lot of companies now in Finland are more or less using some automated system in marketing to maximize efficiency and reduce manual repetitive tasks. Besides, marketing automation is good for both B2B and B2C companies, but it depends on the customer database and the purpose of the companies mostly.

3.4.2 The benefit of marketing automation applied in companies in Finland

Based on the benefit of marketing automation in theory (see 2.2.3), the research will investigate how true it is with companies and businesses in Finland through the evaluation of the interviewees toward the system used in their company.

Firstly, regardless of the efficiency of marketing automation, all the interviewees agreed that the application of the automated system is time savings and reduces a lot of manual work in their company, which used to be considered as a lot with humans only. Interviewee 4 added that marketing automation truly helps to scale up the marketing campaign in the highest volume, but still ensures that the message sent to the customer is based on their behavior and their position on the journey map. She judged that the journey map of customers is very complicated and time-consuming to analyze, especially in the sense of each individual following and treating well, which marketing automation could be the best solution. Interviewee 1 gave an example of her company that they must send four personalized emails every week to around 50,000 people in total and it is for them impossible. Email marketing has been applied to make it more convenient and streamlined. Besides that, according to Interviewee 3, it is not only helpful for the marketing team but also for other departments as marketing automation makes the workflow faster and more effective within all the departments. Interviewee 2 thought that with the support of marketing automation, the most obvious benefit is that it helps to reduce manual work, especially the one that relates to communication with customers, which is usually done by a person. By saving time, it saves the resources of the company (Interviewee 5). Not only saves time but it does help reduce human errors, according to Interviewee 6. She specified that “automation is computer-based, so everything that is stored will be transferred correctly if we put the right conditions whereas comparing to manual work, we might have a wrong formula that our eyes couldn't catch, and with the small error, it could cause the mess up of the system”. In general, the most benefit of using marketing automation is saving time and making everything more efficient by reducing manual work and errors are applicable in Finland as well as in all other companies.

Related to lead management, all of them thought that it was a crucial part of marketing automation. Interviewee 6 said about marketing automation:

“It appears throughout the whole customer journey from the very first touch point, it captures the behaviors of customers when they first visit our website and with those data, we'll be able to create retargeting campaigns based on their behaviors. And once we have managed to nurture them into the middle part of the funnel as the customers are aware of us, they would like to consider us. Again with marketing automation, we can trigger cadences, and emails to target them with relevant content and even personalized those content so that the customers are even more encouraged to purchase from us”

It is agreeable that by using marketing automation, they can track all of the activities of the customers on the journey map, which better gives them insights into the customers and how to treat them at each point. Furthermore, thanks to marketing automation, the customer journey is a consistent process that does not consist of any leakage on the way. And it links to the next benefit mentioned of marketing automation.

With the personalized characteristics that marketing automation could offer for each customer, it becomes easier for the marketing team to communicate with the customers as well as treat them well through the message. This benefit is also agreed by Interviewee 2 and she also lists it as the top two benefits of marketing automation “Obviously the selling point of marketing automation is to communicate with the customer, the right customer at the right time, the potential customer at the right time”. And Interviewee 1 supported

“It is like feeding the customer one piece of information at a time and then nurturing the customer so that they become slightly interested to heavily interested in becoming a customer. So in a sense, it helps us to communicate better with the customers and to ultimately generate sales”.

Interviewee 3 also added that with the communication and content of marketing automation, there are two sides to it: firstly everything can be done in mass production but secondly, at the same time it goes very deeper into what the customers want based on their: behavior, regions, etc. Therefore, it undoubtedly creates a very good message sent to the customers. The dynamic content creator is a good feature according to Interviewee 4 as her company is working globally with other countries and this one helped to customize and personalize to the most familiar and suitable with the customers in each region, for example demographic, language, tone of voice, word use, etc. And Interviewee 5 also agreed that marketing automation is undeniably the best communication tool between the business and the customers. She took a very typical example of the abandoned cart:

“If some users put some products in the cart and they left before finishing the checking out process is about to check out, then the tool receives that information and begins to react. After receiving the information, the event can be triggered in the app to retarget those users, such as sending a reminder message to them: “Hey, you forget some items in your cart. Do you want to check out something?”

Regarding data integration, it is more complicated to define because some companies only use one software for everything, and some companies choose to use several systems to minimize the cost as mentioned above. With Interviewee 3, whose company is now only using Salesforce for everything, it is very convenient to have all the data sorted out comprehensively and connected with other departments. According to her, “As the reporting is within the same system so everything is always being sorted out faster compared to transferring the data into another tool, doing the analyze and report separately”. On the other hand, with Interviewee 1, whose company use

several systems for marketing automation, even though it took time at the beginning to connect all the database and integrate the system, she thought that it work pretty well after that. Therefore, it could be counted as a benefit as well. As the company of Interview 4 is now using Salesforce Marketing Cloud as the main service for marketing automation, she found that the data integration of this software was great because it could integrate and connect the data more easily to other systems in the company than other software.

None of the interviewees mentioned the support of ROI tracking in marketing automation. One of the reasons for that could be it is not necessary at this time for the company. Besides, there are several systems used as the marketing solution in the companies of some interviewees, therefore, it is not possible to link them together and analyze them automatically.

Above all, with these benefits and support from marketing automation, all the interviewees agreed that it helps a lot in saving time and cost by reducing manual work. This is considered the most benefit of marketing automation. And generally, according to Interviewee 1, “I think the benefits are as good as they advertise”.

3.4.3 The challenge of marketing automation faced by businesses in Finland

In addition to the benefits, the research also studies the real challenges, which the company could face in general as shown in Chapter 2.2.3 and specifically in Finland.

The first and the most mentioned challenge of applying marketing automation is undoubtedly the resources of the company from the people to the skills and knowledge. Interviewee 4 stated that “the biggest challenge of the marketing automation is that it is very complicated to use, which requires a skillful team or specialist to control and manage it well”. Based on the implementation of marketing automation at Konecranes, it was considered that “marketers might lack needed skills for system use. This might lead to underutilization of the system” (Pirinen 2018, 122). Interviewee 3 also mentioned:

“It used to be not necessary that everyone know how to use it, so when it came to applying the tool, there's only certain people know how to do it. Therefore, it was difficult for other people to keep up or contribute their ideas or even build something by themselves in the tool. It was necessary that everyone have a learning curve to take when they learn about automation in marketing. Besides, not all the tools or features were easy to learn, so it would take some time to understand how it worked and started to apply”

On the other hand, as Interviewee 2 mentioned, at first, they had to work very hard on it with the collaboration with not only the marketing team but also other departments: such as the IT team,

legal team,... whoever uses it in the future. She also took an example from her companies that the sales team with a hundred of the salesperson in all the stores needs to be notified as well because:

“We issued the personalized offer from the marketing automation platform and the salespeople need to be aware of that like what kind of messaging we are sending to the customer, what kind of offer we are sending to the customer, and who can use the offers so that kind of coordination also take time to establish the process you know.”

Therefore, the training and setting up process could be very challenging at the beginning. Not only the implementation and guidance of how to use the software but also the data management should be taken into consideration in training as well in Finland. Because regarding data management, it turns into another challenge in Finland as it should follow the GDPR, which is obligatorily implemented in all European countries. Not only the data but also all the employees should work on GDPR compliance in marketing automation (Pirinen 2018, 102). Interviewee 4 also mentioned that all of the marketers in her company took the GDPR very seriously and it was something more crucial than a marketing automation system because it related directly to the customers' data and private information. Interviewee 2 shared that:

“The data migration is always the challenge regarding at least in Finland and in the EU in general where we have GDPR implementation or the legal stuff so it always needs to involve the legal perspective here to make sure that we are processing the customer data when we transfer the platform in the right way and set it up correctly so that all the GDPR rules can be applied without any issues.”

And Interviewee 5 stated:

“Even nowadays when we talk about the integrations of marketing automation in social media, the subject is already hot and complex because it even targets users on an even more personal level. As GDPR law in Europe, it is preventing business and any related party from doing those things beyond the limit.”

All of the learning at the very beginning stage is to avoid the mistake the most because a chaotic system could account for a big problem and challenge for the company. Interviewee 1 admitted that the platform is very easy to get messing up and sometimes it is very hard to check for the results of your work. And Interviewee 4 once experienced that:

“When I got some mistake or trouble with the system, it was really hard for me to find the right people who could fix it. Because I did not have the admin right to access the system technically, I had to find and work closely with the person who is maintaining this system in my company. It took pretty much time for me.”

It is agreed by all the interviewees that the marketing automation system should be in good maintenance all the time, otherwise, it will be very hard to handle. Interviewee 3 clarified that

“Sometimes we set up everything at first and we think that it is all right. Later, when we have more demand for extra information, more changes in the purpose of the information, or different attributes in the data input, then there will be a lot of work to catapult matching updates and clean the data before or even after it's imported into the automation system”.

Another trouble could come from the data integration. As mentioned above, data integration could be a great benefit but also a challenge, which is why it varies from case to case. According to Interviewee 5, as all the data should be integrated carefully among all the systems of the company to ensure that it works well together, in the worst scenario when the integration was disconnected or broken, it's not possible to do the trigger-based automation. She added that "The whole communication with customers will be disconnected and it requires a ton amount of effort to rebuild the whole thing again". Interviewee 6 listed data integration as the most challenging part when working on marketing automation in her company. Therefore, according to her, everything should be well-versed and updated all the time. As she shared, the company is using Bloomreach as a main marketing automation system, but it is not so popular. Therefore, it is not easy to connect and integrate the data with other systems in stacks and they have to spend time finding hacks to solve it. However, it is not 100% guaranteed. Additionally, it was mentioned that during the implementation of marketing automation for Konecranes, it should be taken into consideration that the IT and admins should work closely with the teams, and "there should be at least one dedicated key user in the headquarters marketing and communications whose full-time job is to operate and administrate the system as well as to provide support for marketing and sales users" (Pirinen 2018, 119). Therefore, it comes to suggestion of the Interviewee 2 that "it's very expected feature no matter what system you are implementing for your company's marketing automation, ERP, human resources, every time the data need to be maintained and making sure that there's no breakage there".

Another interesting challenge mentioned by Interviewee 6 is that as they rely heavily on the tools for all of their work if the company has a downtime, such as a system outbreak or outage, there are totally no alternatives. Therefore, they cannot do anything for the whole day. Every other system that relates to this should also be shut down for the whole time. Interviewee 6 shared that her company once experienced and it was literally a nightmare.

The email marketing of marketing automation was also mentioned by one interviewee as a challenge as well. Interviewee 1 experienced once about the maintenance of email marketing due to the small-sized of marketing automation team, she shared:

"I just found out the other day that our welcome flow in our e-mail automation was so outdated. It contains all the wrong information about our company and we had been using it for the last two years, so it's not good, and we had to do it all over again. So, it is important that you must keep paying attention to it and do a little bit of maintaining once in a while".

Additionally related to email marketing, one interesting fact added by Interviewee 2 was that customers' behavior in Finland somehow affects the strategy and challenges the marketers to utilize marketing automation. As having experience working in marketing automation in both Finland and the USA, she explained that Finns were not willing to receive numerous offers emails, while

American people did not mind about that and they always wanted to receive as many as they can. For that reason, email marketing is applied in Finland pretty much less than in other leading countries, which could be approximately 2 times per week. Despite the Interviewee 4 shared the same thoughts in this case, she also added that once Finnish people agreed to sign up for email marketing, they were willing to interact with your automated advertising and pay much attention to it. Interviewee 5 shared another experience about the attitude of customers toward advertising and marketing

“It is not right to conclude such Finnish market people prefer to not have many columns, but compared to Japan, the Finnish market is less aggressive and more calm in selling. In the Finnish market, people refer to emails instead of push notifications because it relates to personal matters. If someone receives the notifications all the time, they will feel annoyed and turn down the notification. But the Asian market is the opposite, the best strategy is to send at many pushes as possible because it is an Asian market and offers to play huge roles in contributing to selling efficiency. For automation use, giving a lot of incentives in the business is not a good method and it is not suitable for the Finnish market as well. If the customer knows the values of the business well, then they would come to you no matter what. So, there's no point to make such intensive and aggressive marketing in the Finnish market as in Japan”.

Apart from the general challenge discussed in the theory, another challenge faced by marketing automation in Finland is considered as the small market size with very low volumes. Let's start discussing the case of e-mail automation marketing. A B2B company sets a target audience of 5000 people on Facebook and achieves a great advertisement campaign to get the result of 10% CTR (Clickthrough rate). As a result, 500 ended up landing on the company's page. Adding up to the success of the campaign, 30% of these 500 downloads the guide and appear in your email automation. Totally, the company achieves 150 potential customers. But the real question is how many of these 150 customers are actually interested in the business. Of course, there will be a certain quantity of people whom the company can take advantage of, but since the volume is so low, it reduces the speed of data-collecting progress, even though it will not prevent the implementation process of marketing automation. In conclusion, low volumes do not affect the implementation of marketing automation, but since data is essential for marketing automation, it might create a lot of obstacles to applying these tools in Finland. In Finland, the quality of e-mail messages and headers and content quality is critically important. Even with low volumes, it is possible to receive requested quotations and contact information well. (Pulkka s.a.)

Even though there are several challenges when implementing marketing automation, specifically here in Finland, all the interviewees agreed that it was not a big deal at all. All in all, it was still worth investing and compared with the benefit, marketing automation is truly considerable for business. Some of the interviewees also thought that there are still rooms to develop and make it

better. But it depends on the purposes of the company and the system that they are using at this moment.

3.4.4 Evaluation of marketing automation in Finland

To evaluate the impact and the effectiveness of marketing automation, it relies heavily on the KPI of the business as well as each platform and feature.

According to Interviewee 2, the two main metrics and objectives of her company are the effectiveness of lead nurturing and sales generation. In her opinion, most of the company are measuring the effectiveness of marketing automation by their final sales. But for each program, there are several internal targets. She took an example of one email marketing campaign from her company. When new customers subscribe to the newsletter, a series of five emails will be sent out with educational content to engage with the customers. And the last piece of the email contains a coupon or present that they can claim in 30 days. This campaign helped the company to raise 60% of sales more than the traditional method with the printed ads and the board right in front of the stores. Generally, Interviewee 2 thought that it was a success to implement the marketing automation system in her company because the sales grew up very fast and the company expands to be bigger, which forced them to switch to another marketing automation platform to meet the demand. According to her, there are branches in other Nordic countries, and in each branch, they have different marketing automation teams and specialists to work the best on that local personalization due to the difference in language.

While according to Interviewee 3, the marketing automation impact is evaluated through the number of people approached. For example with email automation, they pay attention to the open rates and click rates and then further with the lead generation and nurturing. With her company, it is important to take into consideration the action of the customers after reading the email and the assumption of success through the conversion rate. Though, there are still other metrics to work on with other features. According to Interviewee 3, within marketing automation, generating the least is more likely as the outcome than the sales. She provided an example of the good impact of marketing automation, especially email marketing in the campaign of her company on the trial service. Before using the marketing automation, the rate of unsubscribing after the 30-day trial was very high. And once they tried to use the automated emails, which according to Interviewee 3 that it "help us to engage better with them at a certain point with some helpful instructions", the rate of converting into real customers increased a lot compared to before.

For Interviewee 4, as the purpose of the marketing campaign in her company is mainly to support the partners, the metrics to evaluate all the marketing work matters to the sales of the partners

mainly and following by her company. Therefore, the metric in her company relied on the metric of the partners' companies. According to her, the most crucial criteria to evaluate the effectiveness of marketing automation is the impact on the end users through conversion rate and renewal rate. It meant they were interacting with the marketing from her company and potential to be a customer or loyal customers of the partners'. In general, marketing automation is working well in the company of Interviewee 4 and she thought that it was also playing an essential role in the collaboration between her company and partners.

Interviewee 5 also agreed that marketing automation was worth investing in in her company. She clarified that "it does contribute much to the business growth of the company and communication on personal levels to the customer as well as maintaining a very high conversion rate. And at the moment, the top-level managers are satisfied with the investment in marketing automation and the budget that the team is spending, which is a sign proving marketing automation is making the actual impacts to the company."

According to Interviewee 6, the impact of marketing automation will be evaluated based on the comparison of time and cost spent between automation and manual work.

"So in terms of cost, we divide it into human resources cost and then the product cost itself. So human resources cost means that if a person needs to take like 8 hours per day and then five days per week to do this task. We will check based on the salary rate, rate and add up to that total number versus the actual cost of the marketing automation product itself comparing those two criteria you'll be able to notice that marketing automation tools will save a lot of time, even though at first it looks more expensive. But if you add up the total number of hours and the salary rate that a person has to spend doing things manually, then you can say for sure that marketing automation is more powerful compared to manual work."

She also provided an example of the task to do after the webinar organized by her company. Usually, there are a lot of people who showed interest and they may ask for demo requests. Previously, they had to do it manually by adding the requests into Google Sheets, then revising the Sheets to upload manually the information into the CRM system. Then, they need to assign other reps and departments who could be responsible for this sales process accordingly. Therefore, it is used to handle this kind of task. But now, with the support of marketing automation, it takes only a few hours to complete and everything is uploaded automatically and more accurately. This is a big difference and obviously, marketing automation is a success and worth investing in her company.

Regardless of the time to convert into success, Interviewee 1 confirmed that the effectiveness of marketing automation is almost immediately, as long as everything is set up properly. The setting-ups could be A/B testing to see how it could process and what kind of target audience. Therefore, it takes time during this stage, but after that, the operation could work well and bring the results immediately for the basic one. And if there is anything that needs to be changed, then they have to

continue to work on it and it takes probably two months to have every gone smoothly. Interviewee 2 and 3 agrees that it depends on the project but generally, it takes about two to three months to get the result. According to interview 2, it takes a couple of months for the data to reach the right people to generate sales. Therefore, it is very crucial to measure and monitor the results very often and to analyze and compare them with the results from other periods. Email marketing and abandoned cart are considered the typical and pretty simple operations of marketing automation that could work well after one month. For more complicated features, it requires more time to brainstorm the idea, set it up, and test it... Interviewee 4 stated:

“It is very hard to define because there is no endpoint for the process. The marketing automation system has to work continuously to feed the customers and it takes time to convert one person into a real customer. However, if you set up and run something but got no response from the users, it means that it probably gets into trouble”

Interviewee 6 agreed also that due to the marketing automation activities varying, the results could be collected in different means of time. With the basic one, such as email automation, she said that the results could be visible once the campaign ended.

To conclude, it is very hard to evaluate the impact of marketing automation, as there are several activities taken by automation. However, most of them are considered good results and the proof of that is the benefit that the interviewees provided. Even though some of the interviewees believe that there are still rooms to improve and utilize the capacity of marketing automation, they all agree that it is a success in their company and worth investing in general. And the company of one interviewee is also looking for better software as her company has scaled up and they want to upgrade the system to deal with the bigger amount of tasks. Therefore, it could be seen as a good sign of marketing automation's performance in Finland.

3.4.5 The potential of marketing automation in Finland

Based on the marketing scenarios discussed in Chapter 2.3 and the evaluation from interviewees, this part will discuss the future of marketing automation in Finland.

Nowadays, in Finland, most companies are using marketing automation in one or another way, which is agreed by all the interviewees. According to Interviewee 2, it could not have to be a full-scale marketing automation platform but in some way, the tasks may be automated in the marketing process. That's why she was pretty sure that a lot of companies now in Finland were implementing marketing automation. Additionally, Interviewee 1 thought that most of all the company now is using at least the email marketing features to send welcome e-mail automation or cross-sell, which presents the performance of marketing automation in the company.

In addition to the most common features of marketing automation, such as email marketing, and automated workflow,... Interviewee 1 added that marketing automation was popularly used to manage social media as well and a lot of companies in Finland were applying marketing automation in that way. According to her, even though up to now, the USA and the UK are the most dominant in this market thanks to the huge investment in technology, soon marketing automation will grow up dramatically in other countries as well, including Finland. The reason for this prediction is the increase in personalization. She thought that nowadays, people love to see relevant content while with the traditional ways of advertising such as newspaper, radio, and television,... the audience does not have a chance to filter what they want to receive. The content sent to the audience will be more centralized and personalized by marketing automation, but the contrary is the exchange of manual marketer dismissal. Additionally, reporting will develop a lot in marketing automation, followed by content creation, and influencer marketing, according to Interviewee 1.

To forecast the marketing automation market in Finland, Interviewee 2 said:

“I think with more development, more technology being introduced, the prices for this marketing automation software will decrease gradually and it will be more accessible for people to use it, even the small business. And with the fast-changing nature of the world in marketing, people will just fail to adopt new trends. If we look back to 10 years ago, not everyone was using social media in their marketing strategy. But now, it's a must-have! So I think maybe in the future marketing automation will also be a must-have as well”

According to her, go along with the development of marketing automation is the development of AI in Finland and both these two topics share the same story and scenario in the future between human workers and technology replacements. Even though the majority of Finnish people belong to the old-aging group, Interviewee 2 believes that marketing automation is still applicable and could become more popular. She clarified: “With the growth of the generations, like our generation or our parent generation, who are getting more or less something digital familiar, then over time it will replace the old generations that are completely refused to interact with the digital world”. Different from the point of view of Interviewee 1, Interviewee 2 believes that in the future, marketing automation more or less could be a part of all the traditional types of advertising (see 2.3.2) so that they will bring something beneficial to the audience. She gave an example of direct mail, which was delivered to your address daily or weekly. She specified: “If you have a big database of the customers and you notice that 30% of them never opened their e-mail or open your e-mail once for six months or haven't opened anything in the past six months. What they could do is that if you know their address, you could send a print ad to them.” Therefore, Interviewee 2 was sure that “it's just the next 10 years that the marketing automation could reach everyone.” Another interesting point Interviewee 2 thought is that it would become more sophisticated than ever as a form of advertising that the audience could not even be aware of they are a part of the marketing automation by one company. And according to her, marketing automation will be widely applied even if you are a small

start-up or big corporation. While big corporations usually have a huge demand for storing and sorting out the database and making them comprehensive, the SMEs will use marketing automation as a tool to support the marketing team as it is not that big to cover a lot of manual work and there are a variety of price options for the marketing solution that helps to automate a certain process in marketing. And in the next ten years, marketing automation will become more and more dominant in not only Finland but all around the world. However, she mentioned that despite its popularity, “it doesn't mean that there's a lot of people who are capable of managing”, which means that marketing automation is still very emerging in some countries, including Finland.

Interviewee 3 shared the same thought as nowadays in Finland, almost all company is starting to use marketing automation more or less to reduce the manual work even though they are small or big companies. And she did not think that the situation of the population in Finland could affect the growth of marketing automation and digital transformation in general. In contrast, she predicted that it would grow very fast in the near future and become influential heavily. And according to her, if the company is only focusing on the Finnish market, then it should not be a requirement of adopting marketing automation. However, if the target is wider, marketing automation is a must-have to reach the customer efficiently. For small and medium companies, she would recommend to start adopting the technology, and she clarified:

“It's for long-term growth and long-term vision, once they grow bigger, they would not have any challenge or trouble integrating the data and transferring all the things that have to do with the automation system later. For me, if considering a small company with 10 or 20 people that's already meaningful to have an automation system.”

Discussing the trend of marketing automation and its potential in Finland, Interviewee 4 shared her thoughts that a lot of companies now were using marketing automation, and there was also the trend to outsource this task to the agency companies, such as Fluido, Columbia Road,... According to her, the traditional channel is not an obstacle to marketing automation, but they support each other's well. And in big companies like hers, it is very normal that they provide all types of advertisement approaches because once they can afford the marketing automation cloud, it is not at all a problem to afford other kinds of advertising to reach the best customers. But she admitted that due to the trend of digital transformation, marketing automation in Finland gradually becomes very popular and heavily developed. Therefore, many companies now are having good marketing automation software offers with affordable prices and suitable purposes for small and medium enterprises. According to Interviewee 4, there are more and more user-friendly and budget-friendly tools and systems to fit the scale and fulfill the demand of these companies. For the big companies in Finland, the application of marketing automation is already indispensable and understandable. Therefore, marketing automation in Finland is undoubtedly growing fast and in the next ten years, it will be dominant in the industry. She said “In the last ten years when I was first in Finland,

marketing automation had been something very strange to me. But now, everyone surrounding me was working on this aspect and more or less they know about marketing automation.”

Discussing the future of marketing automation in Finland, Interview 5 stated a very optimistic point of view. According to her, the younger generations keep growing, and they are the ones that are using the digital tools the most and they are the ones that will be laid out as our main targeting audience. Their frequency of opening e-mail is much higher in comparison to the old generation, as every day since it is a part of daily life and work life. Therefore, she believed that marketing automation was promising in Finland advertising. Marketing automation could be widely implemented in Finland either in big or small companies, which means that it does not depend on the size of the company. With Interviewee 5, the main thing to define before using the automated system is the purpose and the resources of the company, otherwise, it is possible to turn into a burden for the company. Also, she suggested considering the industry of the company, the range of the database, and the frequency of communication with the customers to maximize cost efficiency. Therefore, in her opinion, marketing automation would gain more attention and play a more important role in the industry in Finland as well as in general because it helped to solve so many pain points of other marketing channels. The most obvious one should be the personalization benefit from marketing automation and people now prefer to receive the most relevant information to them than the general message. Interviewee 5 concluded: “Even though Finland is a small market, marketing automation will keep growing and expanding to a lot of businesses”.

Interviewee 6 shared the opinion that marketing automation was a great supplement to traditional marketing. She gave an example:

“There is a person who hosts an event live on TV and there are a lot of phone calls to that event asking for the product demo from the company. So marketing automation would help those kinds of traditional activities to reach the right salespeople or reach the right departments in the company faster. And then the company can take it faster with relevant actions to those leads as well”

On the other hand, she thought that marketing automation is not growing as fast as in some other countries due to the number of big corporations was not that many and the need for marketing automation was not yet urgent. In her opinion, marketing automation will be more helpful in the big companies than the others because they have a more complex database set. With the huge amount of data and information, the support from computers and automation is truly valued. In contrast, with small and medium enterprises, due to the limitations of budget, she recommended that they should first identify very clearly the purpose and objectives of using marketing automation. She added “They can choose one to two tools to start with and they shouldn't start from the very beginning with a very big tool stack because that will be extremely costly. Besides, choosing the right one with the objectives could make more sense.” Additionally, she also predicted the rise of

marketing automation in Finland and described it as a trend since more and more companies are implanting marketing automation into their marketing works. To give extra support for her idea, she explained that Finnish start-up companies could eliminate time-consuming tasks with the assistance of marketing automation because it automatically executed repetitive tasks as its core function. Moreover, she became aware of marketing automation as a strategic role instead of a supporting role since it is capable of helping to decide data-driven decisions which is beneficial for planning and strategizing. But to completely transfer into a main role as such, it needs to fit with the company to become a support role as a foundation for every further development.

In conclusion, the optimistic future of marketing automation in Finland is undeniable, which is proven by the prediction of all the interviewees. All in all, the world is changing and the digital world is as well. Therefore, the development of marketing automation is obviously affecting the marketing industry in Finland and furthermore, it is predicted to dominate the market.

3.5 Reliability, validity, and relevance

As this is a research study, the reliability and validity of the database are very important and it should be clarified.

The questionnaire and the idea for the research process were carefully prepared after reviewing the theoretical framework to ensure that they collaborated well together and supported the study.

The primary data collection was conducted through the in-depth interview with six participants, which was good enough to have a deep insight into the topics. All of the interviewees meet the requirements mentioned in the population and sampling. The answers from the interviewees were recorded and studied correctly to ensure the accurate original ideas of the participants. In conclusion, all of the interviews are of high quality, reliability, and validity. As mentioned above, the questionnaire for the interview was created based on the overview of the thesis topic so it was undoubtedly relevant to the investigated questions and research question.

The secondary data collection was built from reliable resources to acknowledge more perspectives. Even though it was a bit hard to find the resources as not so many articles are talking about marketing automation in Finland, the author found some good resources that fitted and supported well to the primary data collection. Therefore, it could be considered relevant and valuable data in this research.

By combining these data, the research question was pretty well answered. However, as the topic of this thesis is too wide, the answers may sometimes be in general as well.

4 Conclusion

This chapter will conclude all the important points relevant to this topic based on all the thesis findings. From there, the recommendation for further study in the future will be adopted. This part is the reflection of the thesis writing process and the writer's learning.

4.1 Recommendation for the future research

Based on the findings, the thesis successfully answered the research question "How has marketing automation performed in Finland? What is the potential of marketing automation in Finland?"

It is optimistic that marketing automation is growing gradually in Finland and its good impact is undeniable by the businesses in Finland. Obviously, nowadays, there are more and more companies using marketing automation systems, at least email marketing to automate their workflow. It is proven that the most advantage of using this tool is to save a lot of time and make everything more efficient with automation. Besides that, personalization is the key point of marketing automation in general as well as with companies in Finland. On the other hand, implementing marketing automation requires the advanced level of the responsible teams of the companies so challenges are unavoidable at the beginning as well as during the operation, but it is generally insignificant compared to the benefits. Through the research, it is assumable that marketing automation is working well in the companies in Finland, and it supports businesses a lot. In addition, marketing automation is considered a good supplement marketing method in the sense that traditional advertising on television, newspaper, and radio... is still very popular and common in Finland. Therefore, it would be growing very fast in the near future.

Regardless of the potential of marketing automation in Finland, it is apparent that marketing automation will soon dominate the market in this country because simply this is a trend nowadays. Nobody could deny digital transformation and its efficiency on work and companies; therefore, the growth of marketing automation is understandable, especially in a developed and innovative country like Finland. Even though people mostly said that marketing automation is better used for the big corporation as they have a huge database and a lot of repetitive tasks that could be automated, marketing automation is believed to be widely implemented in Finland by SMEs. As mentioned, it is a trend, and to better provide the service that fits all the types and sizes of the company, there are a lot of new software adopted, which is clearly proved through the ones used by the companies of some interviewees. In the near future, not only automation but AI is also being explored and developed, which will promisingly bring a more sophisticated and intelligent system. In conclusion, marketing automation is performing very well in Finland and potentially developing in the future.

For this thesis, the topic was still too wide that it included almost the general picture of marketing automation. Therefore, it would be recommended that further research could investigate deeper in details of each individual aspect of marketing automation. From that, the impacts could be more obviously shown. Besides that, AI is now being widely researched to make marketing automation become more intelligent. Therefore, further research could investigate its applicability and its potential as well.

4.2 Personal learning

For the author, at first, the topic was not so easy to work on. However, as I wanted to achieve something and acknowledge more about marketing automation, which I have pursued for my future career, I decided to continue with it. The problem with me was that the topic was too wide and it was very hard to decide what to include in the research. Also, another trouble came once the qualitative research required conducting interviews with people who are working in this area, which was not easy at all to find. But finally, everything was solved and I appreciated that after the interview, I learned a lot more about this topic in real life. For myself, I was very happy as I could acknowledge from several points of view, which is truly valuable for me, not only for my thesis but my mindset about my future career. In conclusion, I could not deny that I have learned a lot of things through this thesis and I have more ideas about what to do next to achieve my career goals thanks to the investigation of the research and the interview with the participants. Marketing automation is growing up and has promising potential for the new marketing age. As a foreigner in Finland, I personally used to be struggling to find an internship that related to my specialization. And then I knew about the new way to do marketing with data, technology, and AI in the future, I think it will be much easier for me to find a job. Above all, I remember that one interviewee told me that “technology is the way to go, from human to automation and from automation to AI”, which means that the world is changing fast and I have to catch up with the growth of digital and technology.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Questionnaire of the interview

Identification questions

- What is your name?
- How old are you?
- What is the name of your company?
- Which industry does your company involve?
- What is the size of your company?
- What is your position/title in the company?

Investigate questions

- Which software is your company using for marketing automation?
- Do you think that your company has utilized marketing automation the most? Do you think that any more features should be added and why?
- Does AI also contribute to the marketing solutions of your company? About how many percentages and in which specific aspects?
- What are the significant benefits of marketing automation with your company?
- What are the challenges of your company since implementing the marketing automation system?
- Are there any unique considerations or cultural differences that Finnish companies need to keep in mind when using marketing automation?
- How do you evaluate the effectiveness and impact of the marketing automation application of your company? Based on which criteria or metrics?
- Can you give me some examples of the difference between before and after using it in number?
- How long did it take to get good results from marketing automation activities?
- Do you think that marketing automation is a success in your company?
- Do you agree that now in Finland, there are a lot of companies using marketing automation in their marketing campaigns? Please specify your answer.
- Due to the situation of the population in Finland, marketing and advertising on traditional channels, such as television, radio, and newspaper are still very common. Do you think that marketing automation will grow very slowly in the near future? Please specify your answer.
- It is said that marketing automation is just mostly used by only big companies or international companies because they have a mass database of customers and a lot of repetitive tasks. On

the other hand, SMEs do not need it at all. Do you agree with that? Do you think marketing automation will be widely implemented by SMEs in Finland as well? Please specify your answer.

- What is the role of marketing automation in the marketing industry in Finland in the next 10 years? Will it be a must-have for all companies in Finland?