



BENNETT SALEEM

**An in-depth study on how to  
develop marketing activities and  
customer relationships. Case:  
Upgraded Ry**

DEGREE PROGRAMME IN BUSINESS MANAGEMENT  
AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP  
2023

Author(s) Saleem, Bennett	Type of Publication Master's thesis	Date March 2023
	Number of pages 84	Language of publication: English
Title of publication An in-depth study on how to develop marketing activities and customer relationships. Case: Upgraded ry		
Degree Programme Business management and entrepreneurship		
<p>This master's thesis was commissioned by Upgraded ry, which is a non-profit association for health and well-being startups and innovations in Finland. The author of this master's thesis worked as a marketing strategy intern at Upgraded ry.</p> <p>The purpose of this master's thesis was to study the current marketing activities and customer relationships of Upgraded ry. The primary objectives of this study were to find out how to develop customer relationships by strategic marketing and to provide recommendations for Upgraded ry about improving customer relationships and overall marketing take on it.</p> <p>The theoretical objective of the study is to define the concept of customer relationship management (CRM), strategic marketing, integrated marketing communication, digital marketing, and to construct a theoretical framework for improving customer relations and marketing strategies which can be viewed as a part of Upgraded ry's CRM and marketing communication strategy.</p> <p>A qualitative research approach was used in this study and a case study method was applied. The data for the case study section was collected by interviews, discussions and documents provided by the Upgraded ry team. Furthermore, internet sites were used as data sources.</p> <p>In the empirical section of the thesis the research seeks to investigate the concept of current customer relationships and marketing regarding the case and on how the case company could improve such areas after gaining crucial insights and data from interviews and discussions. Several customers and members of Upgraded ry were contacted by phone and email and the questions were asked directly on the phone or sent as a questionnaire by emails. Important insights were gathered and eventually realized the need for improvement when it comes to marketing and CRM. The empirical section includes recommendations and suggestions to improve.</p>		
Keywords Strategic management, Customer relationship management, integrated marketing communication, digital marketing, case study, healthcare, wellbeing		

## FOREWORD

I would like to thank my family, especially my wife for encouraging and supporting me during my studies and for having faith in me. Thanks to Satakunta University of Applied Sciences and Upgraded ry for commissioning this master's thesis.

# CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION.....	6
2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION.....	8
2.1 Introduction to the case company.....	8
2.2 Theoretical framework.....	9
2.3 Objective, purpose and limitation of the study .....	10
2.4 Structure of the study .....	11
3 CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT .....	13
3.1 Development of CRM.....	13
3.2 CRM and relationship marketing.....	13
3.3 CRM and organization.....	15
3.4 Customer-centric marketing communications .....	17
3.5 Customer mix or ‘6Ws’ framework.....	18
3.6 CRM strategy cycle.....	19
4 STRATEGIC MARKETING.....	21
4.1 Marketing Strategy.....	21
4.2 Integrated Marketing Communication .....	23
4.3 Strategic Planning Process (Integrated Marketing Communication).....	26
4.4 Marketing planning process .....	28
5 DIGITAL MARKETING.....	31
5.1 Digital marketing strategy.....	31
5.2 Digital marketing communications.....	34
5.3 Digital media channels.....	36
6 METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY .....	42
6.1 Purpose of the research .....	42
6.2 Research methods.....	42
6.3 Research strategy .....	44
6.4 Data collection method .....	47
6.5 Data analysis .....	51
7 EMPIRICAL STUDY .....	55
7.1 Main findings .....	55
7.1.1 Current state and development needs .....	56
7.1.2 Research outcome for the case company: Upgraded ry.....	57
7.1.3 Recommendations/Suggestions .....	57
7.2 Implementing Marketing Communications .....	58

8 CONCLUSION, SUMMARY AND LEARNING OUTCOMES ..... 70

REFERENCES

APPENDICES

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century where globalization has become more intense, the need for effective marketing management has increased immensely. Within strategic marketing, the importance of developing and sustaining customer relationships is the key factor when introducing a new or reinventing a product or service in a market whether domestically or internationally. The strategic purpose of any business is success and to create value, hence an important emphasis for any organization is building customer relations and customer retention.

Building a ground for a new or existing product or service in a market is a challenging process that requires time, costs, innovativeness, and productivity. However, the success of a new or existing product or service in a market depends on the marketing process and customer relationships before, during and after the launch.

Customer relationship management (CRM) is key in any strategic marketing activity through which companies or organizations concentrate on retaining existing customers. Building customer relationships through proper CRM and strategic marketing support the execution of said tactics and strategies, marketers apply to manage the relationship with their customers throughout customer lifecycle.

This study is conducted to build and maintain customer relationships through strategic marketing successfully with an example of the case study about a health and wellbeing association; Upgraded ry. Effective customer relationship management with proper marketing can provide brand awareness, generate sales and a customer base. Therefore, this study is significant because it exposes precise procedures that influence the success of building stronger customer relations and retention. Due to increased demand in medical services and social care, increased standard of living and the high financial situation of the elderly, an attractive market opportunity has been created for

medical and social services provider including healthcare and wellbeing start-ups, one of them being Upgraded ry.

Upgraded ry is trying to bring innovative services to such market as healthcare and wellbeing by providing different medical and social services providers opportunities to be more visible and play a part in improving the current healthcare and wellbeing status of the Finnish society. Handling such a task requires careful and effective marketing with the focus on improving relations with existing customers and building new ones.

## 2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The main purpose of this research study is to examine and evaluate current customer relationships and marketing activities of a health and wellbeing association called Upgraded ry and provide appropriate measures to improve current customer relations and strategic marketing activities. The research target of the study is to determine how to plan and execute customer relationship building process by also involving integrated marketing communication tools effectively, in order to develop marketing activities to achieve the objectives.

### 2.1 Introduction to the case company

The case organization for this research study is Upgraded ry, which is established in 2012 and is a non-profit association for health and well-being startups and innovations in Finland. The *mission* or main objective of this association is to create opportunities for different startups, corporates, public sector, and even educational institutes to come together and work on health and well-being solutions for the betterment of society. It is relatively a *small sized* company/start-up association, located in the largest start-up concentration in Finland, Maria 01. Figure 1 below illustrates different areas of business and also current hierarchy of Upgrade ry. (Upgraded, N.A)

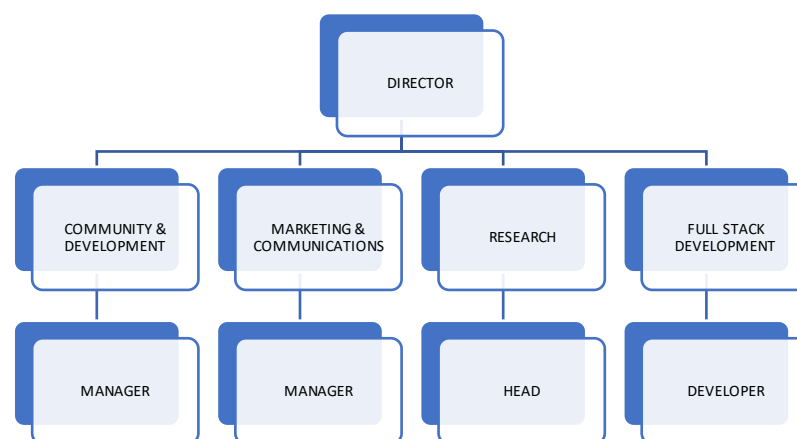


Figure 1. Areas of business/departments and hierarchy. (Upgraded, N.A)

Upgraded ry has over 80 members who are their main customers along with dozens of partners and associates. Members are provided with *services* such as a part in active

startup community and network with an aim to offer benefits including services from partners, visibility in events, exclusive opportunities, invitations for different health and well-being related conferences and activities. Major *goal* of Upgraded ry is to produce an inclusive image of the health and well-being startup industry in Finland in order to encourage the ecosystem and also to improve the position of Finland in health and well-being sector. (Upgraded, 2018). While working with Upgraded ry, author of this research study found that the case organization provides different options and platforms for other such startups in health and well-being sector to get visibility by arranging different events, online and in physical form. This is the main objective of Upgraded ry, try and provide visibility to upcoming startups and small sized organizations. The members of Upgraded ry were the main customers, and after interviewing them, the author of this research found that there is a need to develop such relations along with the betterment of marketing activities in general.

## 2.2 Theoretical framework

The theoretical objective of the study is to define the concepts of customer relationship management, strategic marketing, digital marketing, and integrated marketing communications that supports empirical needs of this study and to elaborate the theoretical framework for improving customer relationships and build new ones. The priority of any business is profitability and organizations in the health services industry such as Upgraded ry are no different and profitability is the fundamental aim. According to Chai et al (2023) customer relationship management (CRM) is the blend of practices, technologies and strategies that organizations select to design, manage and evaluate customer data and interactions throughout the customer lifecycle. These practices assist in customer gaining, retention, and eventually driving sales growth. While working with Upgraded ry, the author of this research study found out that there was a serious lack of customer relationship management and very low effort put on marketing activities to attract or retain customers. Therefore, a need for such research about current state of customer relations and marketing efforts with findings and recommendations arose and Upgraded ry commissioned such study and assigned the author of this research study to the task.

Another important aspect of this research study, apart from customer relations, is marketing and how it could play a part in gaining the confidence of customers and members of Upgraded ry back. Marketing is a practice that include actions an organization takes to attract an audience to the organization's product or services by superior quality messaging. Any organization's marketing objective is to demonstrate product or service value, strengthening brand and customer loyalty, and eventually boosting sales. (Forsey, C. 2022).

This research study and its theoretical background also included different aspects and dimensions of marketing such as integrated marketing communication (IMC) and digital marketing, because such aspects could directly influence relationships with the customers and thus improve sales and results. IMC is important when an organization decides to use several channels to communicate with its audiences. IMC could assist in maintaining consistency during the whole customer journey, facilitates in brand building, increase campaign(s) effectiveness, and contributes to marketing channels reinforcing each other. (Pecanek, M. 2022). Upgraded ry was in serious need of proper strategic marketing improvement as sensed and witnessed by the author of this research study. Hence, the author researched, came up with findings, and presented recommendations to improve.

Digital marketing is also considered important and included as one of the theoretical backgrounds of this research study. Marketing have come a long way from traditional channels such as TV, radio, newspapers, and mailboxes. According to Patel, N (2023) promoting products and services through digital channels is important and could include social media, SEO, email, and mobile apps. Digital marketing is considered important because, for instance, Google and Facebook generate more revenue than any other media organization. Section 3 of this thesis is the theoretical background and includes the above-mentioned points and aspects in detail.

### 2.3 Objective, purpose and limitation of the study

The empirical objective of the study is to answer the following questions:

- How to develop marketing activities? and
- How to develop customer relations in the light of strategic marketing?

Additionally, analyzing and providing improvement suggestions with regard to relevant theory and findings from interviewing some of the main customers and members of Upgraded ry, and detailed information could be found in empirical section of this thesis. Thus, future customer relationship management and marketing activities of Upgraded ry could be improved with this research study. The main purpose of this master's study being evaluating and delivering recommendations to improve customer relations through proper marketing. It is a practical project that is based on relevant literature research and evaluations. This study could help the case company Upgraded ry to better understand the current state of its marketing and customer relationship management strategies, and by adopting proper tactics, Upgraded ry could influence customer retention and even attraction.

This research concentrates on evaluating and improving marketing activities and customer relations of Upgraded ry, because it was clearly the lack of proper marketing that was reflecting on Upgraded ry's customers relations. This was found out by the author of this research after working with Upgraded ry. However, delimitation of this case study is that customers may not always base their purchasing decisions solely on relationship with the organization. There are other factors such as cost, transactions quality and speed, and comfort that could impact a customer's intention to enter a relationship.

#### 2.4 Structure of the study

The structure of the study is divided into four sections and the first section is the introduction. In the introduction the first stage is the research context that presents the subject and background information, furthermore, the purpose of the study includes objectives and limitations. Figure 2 highlights the structure of the study:

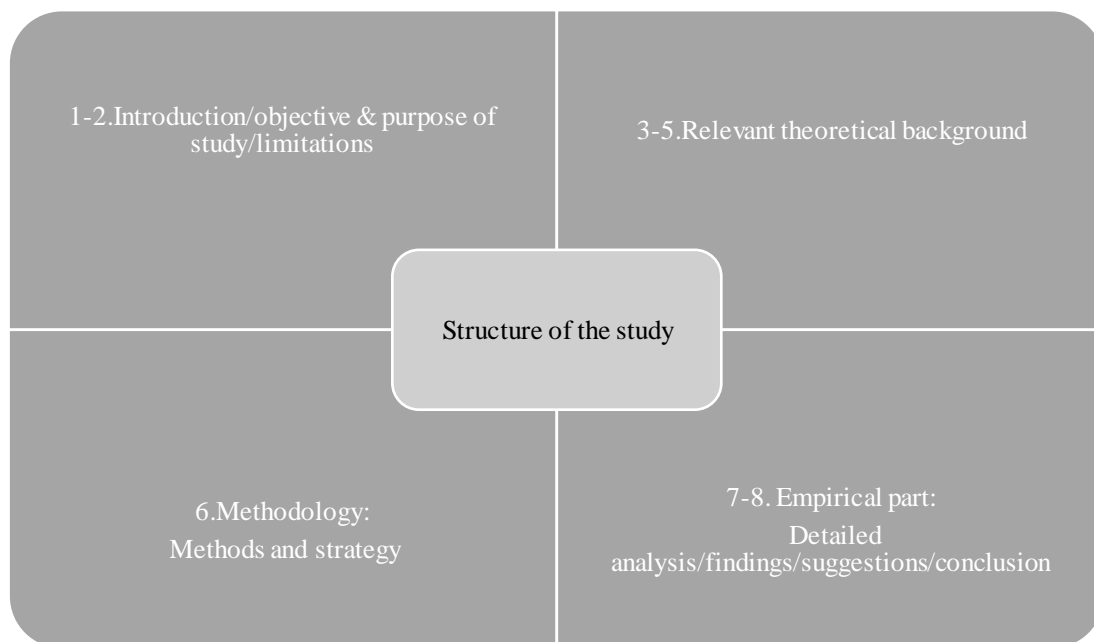


Figure 2. Structure of the study.

Theoretical background is the second section that focuses on the main terms, concept, and theoretical aspects relevant to this case study, which leads the readers to be acquainted with the study. The third section assesses the methodology of the study and includes the research purpose, qualitative and quantitative research method, research strategy, data collection and analysis method, reliability, and validity of the study.

In the empirical section of the study, the case of customer relationship building process in regard to proper strategic marketing is presented and the current customer relationships and marketing activities are analyzed according to relevant theory and interviews findings. The conclusion is the final part, where the research briefly outlines the issues and findings that are relevant for the study and the development suggestions are proposed.

### 3 CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

Over time the dynamics of customer relationship management (CRM) have changed as customers are at the heart of any enterprise's long-term marketing/sales efforts, growth strategies, labor/force allocation, product development, and general profitability mandates. Recent times have forced companies and organizations to be structured and managed around the products and services that are offered. Therefore, the main goal of any company or organization is simply get, keep, and grow customers which could be achieved by proper customer relationship management. (Peppers & Rogers, 2004, pp. 3-5.)

#### 3.1 Development of CRM

The general idea of customer relationship management is to create improved shareholder value by developing suitable and proper relationships with key customers and customer segments. The term CRM is not very easy to define as it could apply to several different levels of customers, for instance key components of CRM could easily shift when considering business-to-business versus business-to-consumer relationships and CRM systems are different in bigger comparing to smaller companies. But the main objective of CRM is to create long-term relationships with customers and stakeholders that are profitable. An effective CRM requires a cross functional combination of processes, operations, people, and marketing capabilities that could be attained from suitable technology, strategic development, value creation, applications, information management, and performance assessment.

(Baran & Galka, 2017, pp. 4-5.)

#### 3.2 CRM and relationship marketing

The basic concept of relationship marketing is sustaining a continuous relationship with customers and their commitment to the company through providing value, which eventually could increase customer retention and profits. It's best described as a marketing attempt to create a link between the customer and a company. A business

organization's or a company's relationship marketing should be based on basic features such as relational databases, capabilities for dialogue, and integrated marketing communications. These basic features directly correspond to key concepts of relationship marketing which are development of personalized relationship with the customer, interactive process rather than transactional exchanges, and value added activities between suppliers and customers that could facilitate the company in gaining accurate knowledge about customer's needs and wants over time. Relationship marketing is different from traditional marketing because it focuses on customers as opposes to prospects, on relationships rather than a one-time deal or transaction, and on individuals rather than masses. Table 1 below highlights the factors and reasons why consumers may want to engage in relationship marketing. (Baran & Galka, 2017, pp. 80-83.)

Table 1. Factors affecting consumers relationship marketing engagement. (Baran & Galka, 2017, p. 83.)

<b>PERSONAL FACTORS</b>	<b>SOCIOLOGICAL FACTORS</b>	<b>INSTITUTIONAL INFLUENCE FACTORS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Achieve efficiency in decision making.</li> <li>-Reduce the task of information processing.</li> <li>-Achieve cognitive consistency in decisions.</li> <li>-Reduce perceived risks related with future selections.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Adhere to the norms of behavior set by family.</li> <li>-Adhere to the influence of peer groups such as social class and reference groups.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Adhere to factors such as: Government mandates, Religious principles, Employer influences, Marketer induced policies</li> </ul>

Relationship marketing attempts to improve the customer-company connection and therefore makes marketing more effective and efficient. Relationship marketing includes a key term 4 Cs, a modern adaptation of the 4 Ps of marketing, that is based on consumer's viewpoint rather than company's, and it consists of Customer value, better Convenience, lower Costs, and better Communications. (Baran & Galka, 2017, p. 101.)

### 3.3 CRM and organization

Customer relationship management initiatives can be directly impacted either positively or negatively by organizational dynamics. Therefore, it is necessary for an organization to boost awareness of such areas when planning CRM initiative. Such areas like people or human factor, organizational structure and environment, and value chain relationships lead to biggest challenges when shaping CRM programs and initiatives. (Baran & Galka, 2017, p.105.)

- Human factor: The human factor starts off with the leadership of an organization, as CRM requires to establish a complete customer centric mentality, it is up to the leadership at the CEO or high executive level to successfully self-contain the CRM implementation. And that has triggered organizations to create more executive leadership positions such as Chief Data Officer (CDO), Chief Analytics Officer (CAO), Chief Customer Officer (CCO) et cetera to support information based initiatives such as CRM. Another important factor is human resource capacity, that can be categorized as CRM enablers and CRM users. Enablers are technologists who design, develop, and implement CRM enabling technology and users are employees and consultants involved in CRM strategies and direct marketing. Communication is also important throughout the organization before planning a precise strategy of a CRM approach and should include all the value chain members such as buyers, suppliers, and enablers. Employee customer interaction and CRM skill set, that includes new technology platforms, social media, internet of things (IoT), Cloud, Mobile and GEO apps, plays an important role in forming and sustaining relationships and is important to the success of CRM.
- Organization environment: Organization's environment includes features such as its culture, which is an intangible variable that might include a reward structure, production orientated, technology, leadership, risk taking habits, decision making and information flow, internal competitive work methodology et cetera. These characteristics could affect an organization's CRM initiatives. Size and structure of an organization is crucial in CRM and includes

magnitude, functions, brand alignment, geography, key account management, industry categories, matrix, and customer base. Technology boosts CRM efforts to the most when integrated properly, for instance, order processing systems should be designed to deliver ideal internal and external service levels in accordance with customer satisfaction. Processes are crucial also for the success of CRM building standpoint, because a company should determine the best possible process that should not be the one that prevents the employee from satisfying the customer and hence a company must define, deal, and resolve as many customer interactions as possible through a proper process.

- Value chain, knowledge management and financial challenges: The capabilities and willingness of value chain members play a crucial role in the success or even failure of a company's CRM strategy, even if it is planned well. The whole value chain involves infusion of strategic collaborations, for instance there could be new partners and processes within radio frequency identification (RFID) and self-service technologies. Same applies to internet and mobile commerce that have provided endless opportunities but at the same time requires skills and expertise, usually supplied, or provided by partners. Therefore, a more formal approach is required when integrating all the value chain channels which are essential to an organization's CRM efforts. Information is a key CRM enabler when transformed into knowledge and sharing the knowledge within the organization and value chain is called knowledge management (KM). Companies rely on KM to increase efficiency and reduce costs and with time, KM becomes an asset that increase in value because it is strengthened with new information constantly. Financial investments, either initial or continuing are a major challenge for companies and due to metrics not in the right place, it could be difficult for a company to substantiate investments in CRM, for instance public organizations have an obligation to their shareholders and private ones to their employees, board of directors and investors. Hence, it is ideal to proceed with a CRM strategy that increases profitability, and it could be achieved by careful phased financial implementations.

(Baran & Galka, 2017, pp.106-126.)

### 3.4 Customer-centric marketing communications

Traditional marketing tools such as advertising still plays an important role in the process of acquiring new customers and brand awareness. But since recent past, digital marketing channels proved essential drivers for customer gain and retention. Many companies and businesses generate a substantial percentage of their sales from a small percentage of customer base, so it is wise not to overlook the value of loyal customers and find answers to such basic questions as what made them loyal and how to get more loyal customers. Basic characteristics of marketing communications include identifying the customers, and the key to identifying is segmenting. Attracting the customers towards the offered product and brand. Adopting new channels that could boost the business's reach. Know how about 'growth hacking' which is focused on growth in customer database, engagement, sales, and profitability, unlike traditional marketing communications which is more focused on brand awareness. And due to recent proved success of social media, it too should be considered an important part of marketing communications. Figure 3 below highlights the fact that everything within marketing communications is connected, and a holistic approach is therefore needed to plan cross media and e-commerce. (Newman & McDonald, 2018, pp.171-179)

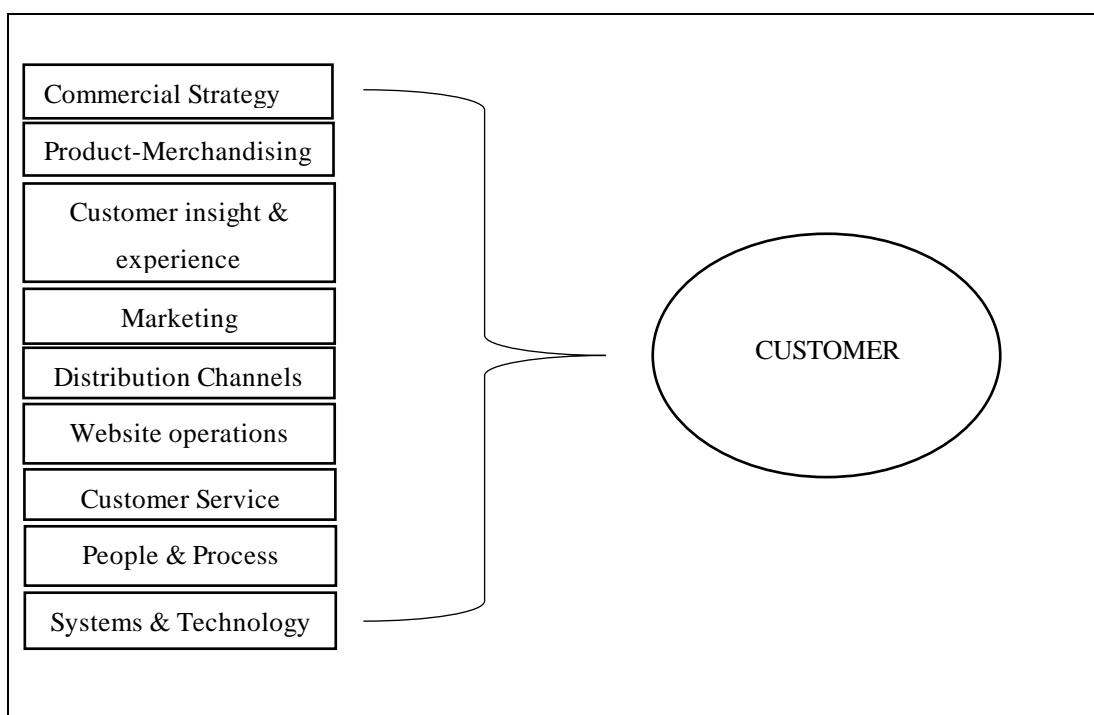


Figure 3. Connection between customer, cross media, and e-commerce. (Adapted from Newman & McDonald, 2018, pp.178)

### 3.5 Customer mix or '6Ws' framework

According to Newman & McDonald (2018, pp.189-191) the original marketing mix framework of 4Ps or 7Ps was created well before the internet was accessible to everyone. Adding to that, the framework did not consider customer's choices, motivations, and loyalties, for instance it did not contemplate that different segment of customers could be interested in different items from the same particular business or company. There was a need to create a framework with the focus more on customers and hence, the customer mix framework of '6Ws' was created.



Figure 4. Customer mix framework of 6Ws. (Newman & McDonald, 2018, p.192)

Considering who the different target customers are and analyzing customer data to understand who the best customers of a certain business or company is crucial. This can be done by creating customer segments which is an important part of customer centric marketing communications. Decision making process of a company when considering products, prices, or services should be based on the impacts on customer segments. And this could be gained by thorough understanding of core customer segments. When blending with who, why enlightens the fact of target customer segments and their motives and inspirations. It encourages a business to focus on not just customers wants, but also on customer journey, purchase decision and fulfilment timeframe that leads to a business becoming more pertinent to their customers.

Marketing mix framework presented with the element product but what replaces it in the customer mix framework as it focuses more on what the customers want including value, convenience or personalization of the offer and services. Hence, product or service providers need to think about what they could deliver to become more valuable to their customers because sometimes products and services cannot be separated. Where directs consumer facing businesses to design and focus on their multichannel strategy and how they could upgrade locations for fulfilment in the customer journey, that includes research and purchase. For instance, making it easier for the customers to shop online, physical collection points and delivery options. Convenience is a key to customer experience and determining it can be achieved by combining where with when. Timeliness has become an important part of today's developed economies and consumers expect their demands to be fulfilled within a specific timeframe. Therefore, businesses need to optimize their marketing and trading calendars in order to boost sales prospects. Marketing mix lacks customer retention element, but in customer mix framework, what's next or lifetime value or ongoing customer relationships is crucial. It is difficult to earn customer loyalty with a single transaction so it is important for a product or service provider to have a strategy in place that could bring the consumers back for more and this could be accomplished by proactive CRM rather than reactive and transaction driven CRM. (Newman & McDonald, 2018, pp.193-196)

### 3.6 CRM strategy cycle

For an organization to have successful CRM that results in quick wins, it must focus on a particular stage of the customer-business life cycle. Existing information and processes are key parts of tactical CRM and determines profit opportunities in the identified stage. The customer-business life cycle consists of acquisition stage, retention stage and winning backstage, and can also include development, cross-selling, up-selling et cetera. Acquisition strategies are necessary for any company to gain prospects, and eventually customers and hence, is a must for a company to focus on their databases to detect the types of such prospects, or in this context customers, that would act in response to company's acquisition efforts. Pointers for acquisition strategies include reduction of unfavorable or adverse selection, meaning companies should try to avoid wasting time and money on customers or individuals that are of no

interest for the company and vice versa. Determine the benefits and weaknesses of company's own proposed plans and procedures against competitor's plan and procedures through qualitative or quantitative marketing research. Timing holds an important place in acquisition, as it could certainly change the outcome of a business deal if the offer was presented at an appropriate time to the consumer. Retaining customers has become ever so important because it is difficult to acquire new customers on a regular basis. Retention itself is not an easy process because of different product or service providers made available to the consumers in recent history as consumers have an opportunity to switch from one provider to another.

(Baran & Galka, 2017, pp.275-277.)

## 4 STRATEGIC MARKETING

Marketing is a concept which is more than any other function of business relates and deals with customers because the main theme and objective of marketing is engaging customers and managing profitable relationship with customers. Marketing is mostly accepted as just selling and advertising, nevertheless, selling and advertising are just the tip of the marketing iceberg. It is also very important that marketing should not be understood not just in the sense of selling and telling or just making a sale, but emphasis should be on understanding and satisfying customer needs. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2020, p.25)

Relationship marketing is a concept that gained recognition during the 1990s and helped in shifting the traditional marketing incline towards concentrate on the single transaction with a short-term focus, to focusing more on the lifetime value of the customer. The utmost aim of relationship marketing is determining who would be the most faithful and dedicated customer throughout her or his lifetime, and it is the responsibility of marketers to establish and maintain these relationships. Business-to-business world has proved to the best for relationship marketing as it has met its greatest success within business-to-business environment. It has been seen in recent times that companies which sell to other companies have largely been more proactive in forming long-term cooperative relationships. Normally, relationship marketing consists of key elements such as creation of customer loyalty, mutually rewarding connection, and a readiness to adapt behavior to preserve the relationship.

(Blythe, 2012, pp.8-9)

### 4.1 Marketing Strategy

It is crucial for a company's strategic plan to include overall mission and objectives. A company that offers a service or product, should be involved in managing activities in relation to customer driven marketing strategy and the marketing mix. The main objective of any such company should be to create value for customers and build and maintain profitable relationships with the customers. For creating such customer value

and achieving such profitable customer relationships, comes marketing strategy next which could clarify segmentation, targeting, differentiation, and positioning that helps in determining which customers to sell and how. Figure 5 shows marketing's role that summarizes the major activities involved in managing customer driven marketing strategy and the marketing mix. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2020, p.68)

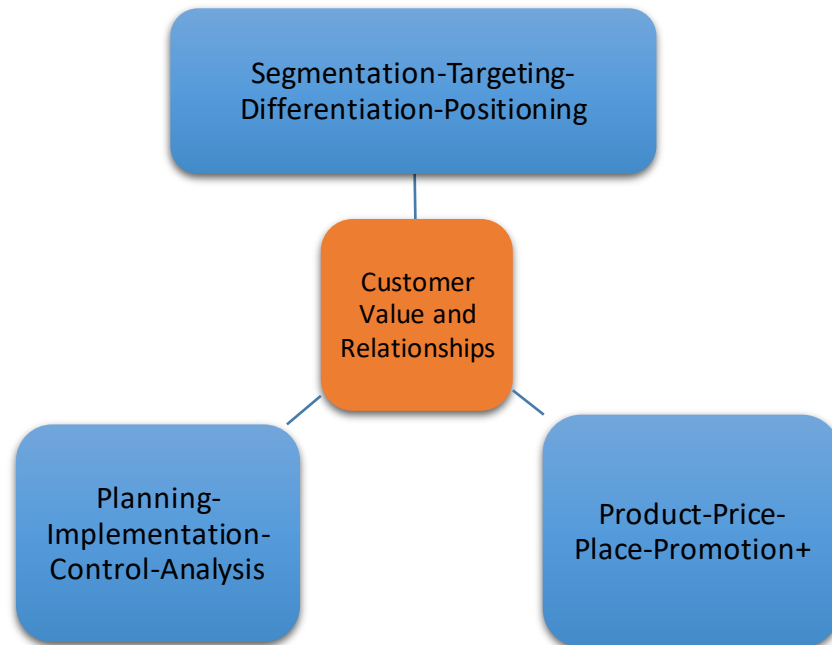


Figure 5. Managing marketing strategies and the marketing mix. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2020, p.68)

In a competitive marketplace such as today's, being customer centered is crucial for companies to succeed. Companies must take the customers away from the competition and engage and grow them by providing superior value. Satisfying customers requires understanding customer needs and wants and therefore, cautious customer analysis is required for good marketing. It is difficult for some companies to satisfy the needs of different consumers and some companies could serve some segments much better than other. Therefore, for profitable serving chosen segments, a company or a business organization must choose the best segments and divide up the total market, and this kind of practice requires the below mentioned approaches proposed by Kotler & Armstrong (2020, pp.68-69)

1. Market Segmentation: It is vital for marketers to determine the segments that offers the best opportunities because the market usually consists of several types of customers, needs, and product/services. It is possible for marketers

and companies to serve the customers according to geographic, demographic, psychographic, and behavioral factors. This sort of process is called market segmentation, where there is a requirement of separate marketing strategies due to dividing the market into distinct groups of consumers with different needs, behaviors, and characteristics.

2. Market Targeting: Market targeting could happen after a company or business organization decide on entering either one or many market segments that has been defined already. The main purpose of market targeting is to evaluate each and every defined segment's attractiveness and there after selecting the one or even more segments to enter. This very process also requires from a company to carefully target segments that could help the company to beneficially produce the highest customer value and maintain it over time.
3. Market Differentiation & Positioning: After segmenting and deciding on which market segment to target, it is crucial for a company to carefully determine how to *differentiate* its offering to the market for each and every targeted segment and also determine the positions it desires to dominate in those segments. Arrangement of a product or service in such a manner that it could lead a clear, desirable, and distinctive place in comparison with the competing products or services is called market *positioning* and marketers should plan their positioning strategy in accordance to having the greatest advantage in their target markets.

#### 4.2 Integrated Marketing Communication

Integrated marketing communication can be referred to a process of aligning marketing and communication channels and elements such as public or customer relations, social and traditional media, audience analytics, business development principles, and also advertising. The key to integrated marketing communication or IMC is planning, and the ability to finely execute different types of marketing, advertising, and promoting messages that are selected for either a brand, a service, or a company to ultimately achieve a common set of communication goals, or much more

precisely, to provision a single positioning. Since recent times, integrated marketing communication is also considered and talked about on the subject of customer relationships. IMC nowadays, is considered as a method of seeing the entire marketing process from the perspective of the customer. (Percy, 2008, pp.5-8)

Despite the recent success of integrated marketing communication or IMC, there are still a number of companies and business organizations that are still not practicing IMC. It has been proven that a brand's marketing communication could actually be significantly less effective if IMC had not been practiced properly or at all. There are some barriers to proper implementation of IMC programs such as the way managers think about or approach marketing questions and also the structure or the organizational make-up of the company. (Percy, 2008, p.14)

Marketing communications involve latest theories, techniques, technological advances, and cultural changes combined to create such an environment within which marketers attempt to guarantee that the messages created are delivered well through to the target audiences. The key elements within the communications process are that it should be intentional, it is a transaction, and it must be symbolic. Meaning that a deliberate effort is made to bring about a response, participants should be involved in the process, and all the sensory stimulants are used to convey the thoughts respectively. (Blythe, 2005, p. 2)

Means and tools that a company or a business organization uses to engage consumers, convincingly communicate consumer value, and build stronger customer relationships are called or a part of promotion mix or marketing communication mix. A promotion mix of a company usually consists of elements explained below proposed by Kotler & Armstrong (2020, pp. 410-411)

- Advertising: It includes promotion of ideas, products or services by a known sponsor with paid form of conveying messages. For instance, advertising includes mainly broadcast, print, mobile, online and other related forms and types.
- Sales promotion: This sort of promotion involves short term incentives to promote the sale of a product or a service and includes elements such as events, demonstration, discounts, displays and so on.

- Personal selling: This aspect of the promotion mix is about personal interactions with the customers by a company's sales team to facilitate growth in sales and also building strong customer relationships. It includes trade shows, sales representations et cetera.
- Public relations: It includes activities such as stories, events, sponsorships, and webpages that are organized or designed in order to engage the company's numerous publics and build good relations.
- Direct and digital marketing: It is a new form of engaging directly with the targeted individual consumers, especially digital marketing, and includes direct mail, email, social media, catalogues, mobile marketing and so on.

Integrated marketing communications is a concept under which a company carefully incorporates most of its communication channels to produce a clearer, reliable, and convincing point about itself and its brands (Kotler & Armstrong, 2020, p. 414). Therefore, when a company or a business organization decides to incorporate its marketing communications channels, it needs to focus on several components of integrated marketing communications such as the foundation which consists of detailed analysis of the product/service and also the target market. Corporate culture includes features of product/services that are in accordance and relevant to the work culture of an organization. Brand focus concentrates on commercial distinctiveness of the brand. Consumer experience involves the actual feelings and thoughts of the end users about the product/service. Communication tools includes ways to promote a product/service such as advertising, direct selling, social media and so on. Promotion tools includes modes such as personal selling, trade promotion et cetera, and integration tools such as tracking on customer feedbacks and reviews. (Juneja, 2022)

It is very important to understand that marketing communications environment is shifting and so as the roles of marketing communicators. Initially, the consumers are changing because of the current digital/mobile age, moreover, marketing strategies are changing in terms of developing more focused marketing programs, and ultimately, the digital technology have triggered astonishing changes in the communication process (Kotler & Armstrong, 2020, pp. 411-412). Therefore, it is crucial to not only understand the traditional promotional tools but also digital communication channels and forms of media such as paid media, which incorporates traditional forms of

advertising as well as online counterparts such as display ads, pay per click advertising et cetera. Earned media is another form that consists of a third-party endorsement of the brand and examples of it are press coverage, influencer relations, backlinks and so on. Owned media on the contrary, refers to all the assets a company or an organization own such as company website, video content, social media pages et cetera. Shared media is a relatively new addition to the digital media model and is about creating a positive image about the brand by content and social media interactions such as on Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and so on. (Timson, 2018)

#### 4.3 Strategic Planning Process (Integrated Marketing Communication)

Effective marketing and integrated marketing communication requires carefully administered and implemented strategic planning process. The strategic planning process itself commences with consideration of the overall marketing plan and marketing planning process which is explained in the following chapter of 2.2.4. The end user or the ultimate consumer is usually at the heart of any marketing and communications program, and generally, the marketing plan identifies whom a company wishes to reach as ultimate purchaser or user of a product or service provided. It also indicates whether the brand is considering largely to attract new customers or simply to increase business from existing ones. It is required for managers to have all the information about all the influences in the market that could contribute to a positive response to the brand, and with that, the end users or purchaser along with anybody who influence or impact their buying decision, should be considered potential targets for communication. Gaining this information on consumer buying influences, the trade, and the overall image reputation of the company would be the part of strategic planning process. Furthermore, the marketing plan provides a well sorted general positioning for the product or service, and also identifies the brand's major competition. For developing effective marketing communication for a brand, it is necessary for managers to get their thinking organized in accordance with how the integrated marketing communications program would assist in meeting the brand's marketing objectives. Strategic planning for integrated marketing communications consists of a five-step process that is illustrated in table 2 below. (Percy, 2008, pp.25-28)

Table 2. The five-step IMC strategic planning process. (Percy, 2008, p.26)

The five step IMC strategic planning process	
Step 1	Identify and select the appropriate target audience
Step 2	Determine how that target audience makes product and brand decisions
Step 3	Establish how the brand will be positioned within its marketing communication and select a benefit to support that position
Step 4	Set communication objectives
Step 5	Identify appropriate media options consistent with the communication objectives to optimize message delivery and processing of the message

The very first step is to think about the target audience and the managers are required to look well beyond traditional demographic considerations and also to think well ahead about what type of consumers would be important to the future of the business, and at this stage three important questions should be addressed which are: what are the relevant target buyer groups? What are the target group's demographic, lifestyle, and psychographic profile? How is the trade involved? (Percy, 2008, pp.247-248)

The second step is determining how decisions are made by the target audience, meaning that gaining knowledge about how purchases in a category are made by the target audience, and a great way to discover how purchase decisions are made is by examining whom all is involved and what roles do they play, what stages are involved in decision making process, what is the timing of the purchase and how it is most likely to happen. (Percy, 2008, pp.249-250)

The third step incorporates the message development which helps the leadership or managers to understand the marketing objectives of the brand and where it might be ideal for the brand to look for business. This includes defining how the brand is positioned within its marketing communication. It is also important within the strategic planning process for the IMC that the manager must determine the appropriate positioning for the brand such as central or differentiated position, and also the also selecting a benefit around on which to base the communication or message. (Percy, 2008, pp.256-259)

The fourth step about setting the communication objectives. They are simply the communication effects a company, a business organization, or a manager is looking for. Communication effects are category need, brand awareness, brand attitude, and brand purchase intention. No matter what type of marketing communication is chosen by a company, it would most certainly stimulate any of the main communication effects, and therefore, it is important to remember that all communication effects are the results of all forms of marketing communication. (Percy, 2008, pp.260-263)

The fifth step entails identifying and choosing suitable media options to deliver the brand's image and it is also critical to finely select such media options that are consistent with the communication objectives. Three keys areas in which the media differs and might impact the communication process and objectives are the ability to deliver the visual content, time available for processing the message, and delivering high frequency ability. Furthermore, it is also important to consider media options in regard to the size and type of the business. (Percy, 2008, p.263)

#### 4.4 Marketing planning process

According to Kotler et al (2019, pp.96-97) the marketing planning process consists of analyzing marketing opportunities, researching, and selecting target markets, designing marketing strategies, planning marketing programs, and organizing, implementing, and controlling the marketing effort. Each level in the process can be achieved successfully by a well-defined marketing plan. A marketing plan is a written document that should contain elements which summarizes the subjects a marketer has learned about the marketplace and indicates the company plans to reach its marketing objectives. It contains tactical guidelines for the marketing programs and financial allocations over the planning period. It is one of the most important outputs of the marketing process. Jobber & Fahy (2003, p.273) states that the process by which businesses analyze the environment and their capabilities, decide upon courses of marketing action, and implement those decisions is called marketing planning. The role of marketing planning would be to ensure that the marketing mix for the product/services matches the changing customer needs, as well as seeking

opportunities to use the companies' strength to market other products in new markets. The contents of a marketing plan are explained below.

- ✚ Executive summary/Mission statement: A marketing plan should have a brief executive summary that must outline the goals and recommendations followed by a mission statement. According to Bennett and Blythe (2002, pp.15-16) the process of formulating and implementing strategies can be viewed as a continuous cycle which begins with a statement of mission of the business that is its fundamental purpose. Mission statement includes five components, starting with purpose which reflects the organization's reason to exist, strategic objectives that states the objectives the company wants to achieve, values, meaning how it relates to its stakeholders, organizational policies and behavior norms describe the standards and strategic pathway is the way and means the company uses to achieve its goals.
- ✚ Situation analysis: Situation analysis presents relevant background data on sales, costs, the market, competitors, and the different forces in the macro environment. It seeks to answer the question how the market is defined, how big it is and how fast it is growing, the relevant trends affecting the market, the product offering and the critical issues facing the company. Situation analysis assesses the market at a particular moment in time and the company's capacity to meet its marketing objectives. All this information should indicate the direction in which the company needs to move and what precisely it has to do to achieve the desired objectives. (Kotler et al., 2019, pp.96-97)
- ✚ Marketing strategy/Strategic planning: Marketing strategy must define the mission, marketing, and financial objectives. Jobber & Fahy (2003, p. 284) define strategic planning as a stage when objectives have been set, a way to achieve them must be decided upon. Core strategy focuses on how objectives can be accomplished and consists of three key elements. The first element is target markets that clarify the decision regarding which markets to serve. Competitor targets explain the organizations against which a company chooses to compete directly, and sometimes the competition is face-to-face. Establishing a competitive advantage is the key to superior performance and company can gain a competitive advantage through differentiation of their product/services offering. The success of strategic planning relies on creating

the right marketing mix (4/7-P's) strategies for achieving objectives and the right type of marketing strategies.

- ✚ Financial projections: This very element of the marketing plan consist of a sales forecast, an expense forecast, and a break-even analysis. This would help a company to determine the forecast sales volume by market portfolio category, the expected cost of marketing divided into finer categories, and the amount of units a company must sell monthly in order to offset its monthly fixed costs and average per-unit variable costs. (Kotler et al., 2019, p.97)
- ✚ Implementation controls: Kotler et al (2019, p.706) define marketing implementation as the process that turns marketing plans into action assignments and ensures that such assignments are executed in a manner that accomplishes the plan's stated objectives. A strategic marketing plan with the right objectives would not be successful if it is not implemented properly. Strategy concentrates on the questions what and why, but implementation manages who, where, when, and how of marketing activities. Companies or business organizations must also conduct internal and external measures such as spelling out the goals and budget on a monthly or quarterly basis to evaluate progress and propose feasible modifications. (Kotler et al., 2019, p.97)

## 5 DIGITAL MARKETING

Digital world of media and technology has come a long route ever since Sir Tim Berners Lee created the world wide web more than quarter of a century ago. There have been serious developments within this vast field of digital media and marketing to accommodate businesses and customers alike. Usage of online services to find products, friends, food, entertainment and so on has grown significantly with over 3 billion users and therefore how companies market themselves to consumers and businesses have changed radically too. Interaction with audience within digital marketing today is much more complex and is more than just websites. Digital marketing today involves harnessing the 5D's of managing digital marketing interactions, and they are:

- Digital devices. Interaction between consumers and businesses using a blend of TV's, laptops, desktops, smart phones, tablets, gaming devices, virtual assistants like amazon echo and so on.
- Digital platforms. It includes interactions through several online browsers and apps such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, LinkedIn, Microsoft, Apple, Amazon, Google et cetera.
- Digital media. Media includes different communication channels for reaching end users such as advertising, search engines, email and messaging, and social networks.
- Digital technology. Under this category, businesses use their marketing technology to create or enhance their interactive services and experiences from websites, mobile apps, in-store kiosks and email campaigns.
- Digital data. Data collection about consumers profiles and interactions should and must be protected by law and businesses are responsible for making it sure.

(Chaffey & Ellis, 2019, pp. 5-6.)

### 5.1 Digital marketing strategy

According to Chaffey & Ellis (2019, p. 13.), a channel marketing strategy which needs to be incorporated with other different channels as a part of multichannel marketing is

referred to as digital marketing strategy. It basically is an integration and interaction between digital and traditional channels. An effective digital marketing strategy should be more specific about annual business priorities and initiatives and must align with business and marketing strategy. Any business's digital marketing strategy should include or make use of clear objectives for business and brand development, including online support of leads and sales for Internet and other involved digital channels. Another important aspect of a digital marketing strategy is that it requires consistency with the types of customers because it is ever so necessary to be certain about through which channels customers could be reached, followed by a clear and convincing value proposition for the channel. A business organization digital marketing strategy must also be specific about the combination of online and offline communications tools which plays an important role in attracting visitors to company's website and other brand interactions mediums such as emails or mobile apps. A key feature of digital marketing strategy is that it supports and manages the complete journey of customer buying process including the selection and purchasing of the products using digital and other channels to stages of online customer lifecycle that involves attracting potential customers to the website and converting them into loyal and long-term clients by providing them with the best possible experience.

Digital marketing strategy should ultimately deliver reliable and steady direction for a company's online marketing endeavors and interests and also channel assimilation. Strategy's goal is to incorporate digital with other marketing activities and eventually support the business aims and objectives. Traditional marketing strategy objectives are very much similar to those of digital marketing strategy and that is to expand business by customer acquisition and retention with emphasis on digital media, and data and technology combined with traditional marketing activities and channels to achieve overall marketing objectives. Several different factors affect the success of a company's digital marketing strategy; therefore, a company must determine the importance of digital channels in accordance with other communication channels used to reach existing or potential customers. Figure 6 highlights some key factors affecting a digital marketing strategy of an organization. (Chaffey & Ellis, 2019, pp.138-139.)

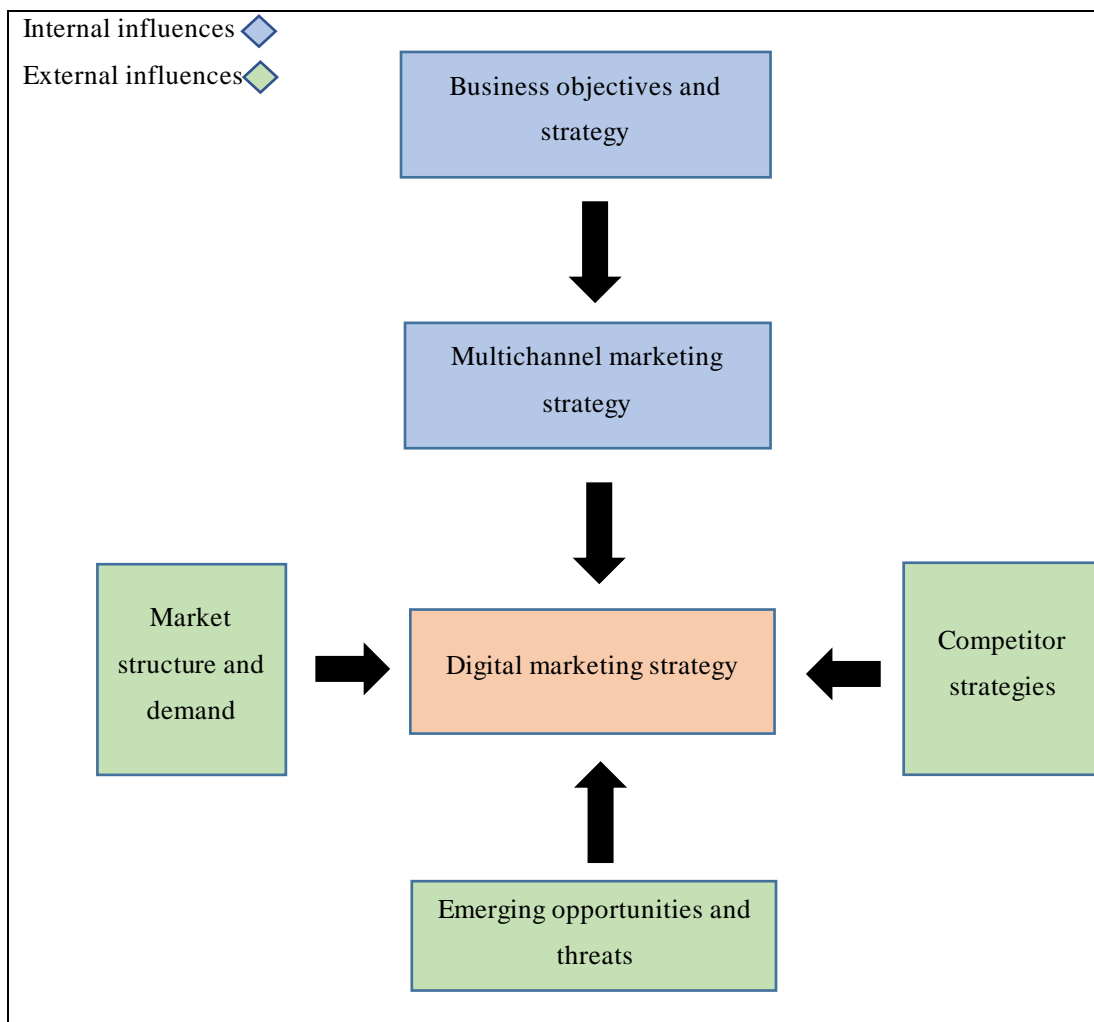


Figure 6. Internal and external influences on digital marketing strategy. (Chaffey & Ellis, 2019, p.139.)

For a successful digital marketing strategy development, as stated by Chaffey & Ellis (2019, pp.142-146.) redesigning business processes by integrating with business partners such as suppliers and distributors is a key factor. This includes marketers must ensure how to protect the competitive positioning aspect of the business and not just search for opportunities to enhance technological offers. Therefore, it is ever so necessary for an organization or its marketing manager to outline the obstacles and potentials of digital marketing planning process. And this includes:

- Starting with the right goal in the context of actual economic objective of an organization.
- Value proposition must be clearly specified, for it to be distinctive and deliverable.
- Designing a distinctive value chain, to do business differently.

- To outperform competition, a business organization must be willing to make tradeoffs.
- Creating and maintaining a balance or fit between different areas of company's business and its resources.
- Forming and maintaining continuity, initially set forth by original objectives.

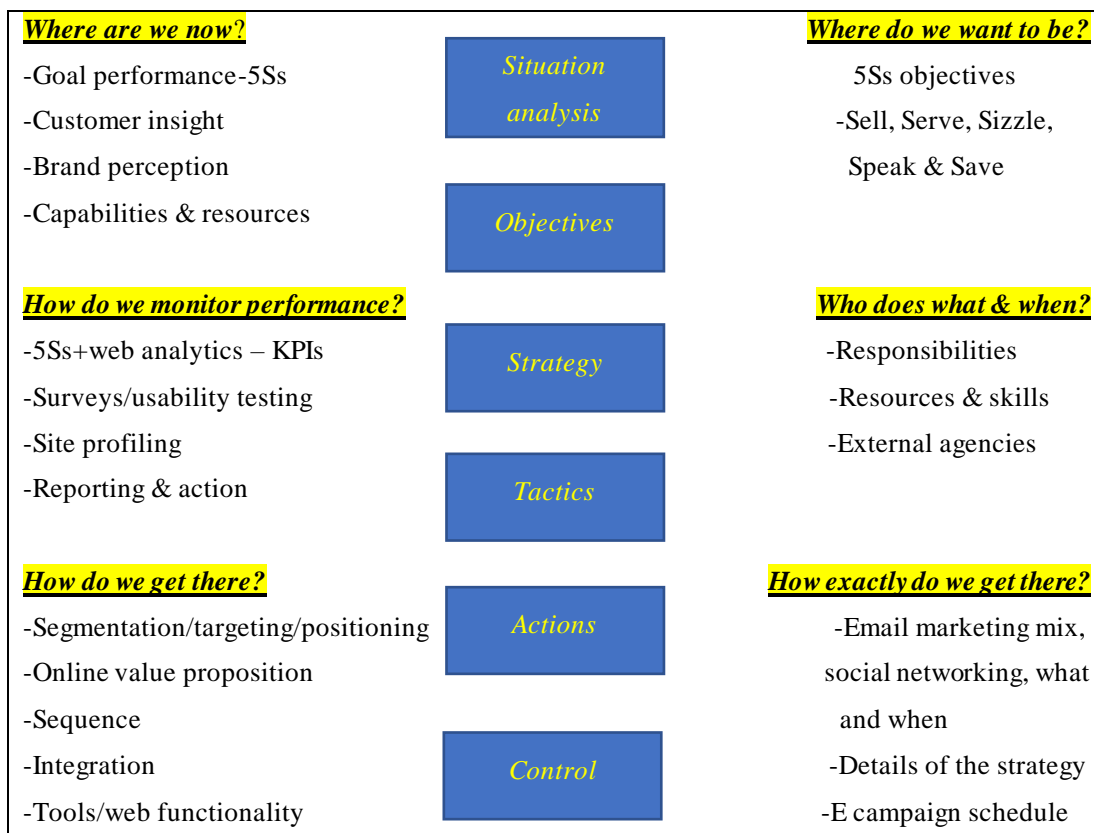


Figure 7. SOSTAC planning framework for digital marketing strategy development. (Chaffey & Ellis, 2019, p.147.)

For developing a successful digital marketing strategy, figure 7 above highlights a planning framework SOSTAC which stands for situation, objectives, strategy, tactics action and control. (Chaffey & Ellis, 2019, p.147.)

## 5.2 Digital marketing communications

Marketing operations of a business organization have been based on traditional marketing tools since many years. Media tools such as television, print media, radio advertisements, direct mail et cetera were used to reach target audiences, but lately, the whole perception of marketing has changed and shifted to a great deal on digital

media channels for the sake of marketing communications. Traditional marketing tools are still important and a great way to reach customers, but nowadays marketers have options to utilize digital marketing tools as well, for an effective online marketing campaign in order to attract and reach existing or potential customers. The benefits of online approaches are that they facilitate in targeting audiences based on their profile and previous interaction with communications, for a better chance of delivering suitable and more appropriate messages. That is why marketers, for some time now prefers to make use of websites and also other digital media channels such as display ads, pay per click (PPC) ads, search engine optimization (SEO), affiliate marketing and email marketing. Digital media channels play an important role in improving the commercial value of an organization gained from digital marketing and gives marketers a proper insight when considering actual business goals of their company. Few steps that should be taken into consideration when designing the digital communications approach of a company are explained below.

- Reach: a company should establish its product, service, or brand awareness by acquiring help of different websites, offline media and create or increase visits to own webpage and social media. Key performance indicators (KPIs) of step reach could be uniqueness of audience, share, and goal value per visit.
- Act: encourage customers to interact with the company and connect them with the brand offered, meaning to acquire permission to market via email, mobile apps notifications, or SMS. KPIs of step act are lead conversation, pages per visit, and bounce rate.
- Convert: in order to generate sales a company must achieve conversion to marketing goals on web presences and in offline mode of doing business. KPIs of this step are revenue and margin, conversion rates, and sales.
- Engage: in the due course of time, a company must build and retain customer relationships for the sake of attaining retention targets. KPIs of step engage are repeat conversion, percentage of active hurdle rates and customer commitment.

The best way to make work of digital channels is to integrate them with other traditional media and channels and determine when and where customers are most comfortable and prefer to interact. (Chaffey & Ellis, 2019, pp.26-27.)

### 5.3 Digital media channels

Traditional media and communication channels such as TV, radio, advertising, direct mail, and PR are still important and a great medium to interact with the potential audience, but business organizations nowadays have several other options to choose from when it comes to digital media channels in order to communicate with the customers and to create brand value and awareness. Few main digital media channels are explained as follows. (Chaffey & Ellis, 2019, p.396)

#### 1. Search engine marketing (SEM)

Reaching an audience during their consideration phase of a product or a service, search engine marketing has grown into a highly competitive segment of digital marketing. It is a crucial method for a company to undertake in the process of generating value visitors to the company's website. Two main types of SEM are quite popular, and they are search engine optimization (SEO) and paid search (pay per click) marketing (PPC). SEO includes improving ranking or achieving highest possible position in the natural listing of the search engine result pages (SERPs) with the help of processes such as crawling by bots or spiders (software processes) for the creation of series of page references with associated URLs. Indexing facilitates the search engine to speedily obtain the best appropriate pages that contains the query that has been typed by the searcher. Key phrase analysis helps in matching the blend of keywords typed in the search box to the best possible relevant target content page. External linking and SEO for mobile devices are also processes proved to be successful when boosting external links from other sites or increasing visibility and good experience on a mobile device.

Table 3. Advantages and disadvantages of SEO and paid search marketing (PPC). (Chaffey & Ellis, 2019, pp.406-417)

<u>ADVANTAGES</u>	<u>DISADVANTAGES</u>
<u>SEO</u> -Significant traffic driver -Highly targeted -Potentially low cost visitors -Dynamic  <u>Paid search marketing (PPC)</u> -No need to pay for ad to be displayed -PPC advertising>highly targeted -Good accountability and predictability -Simpler and remarket able -Speedy postings and has a branding effect	<u>SEO</u> -Lack of predictability -Complex nature -Ongoing investment -Time consuming for results  <u>Paid search marketing (PPC)</u> -Expensive and competitive -Inappropriate for companies with lower budget -Requires specialist knowledge -Time consuming to manage PPC account -Irrelevant when searchers do not trust adverts

Other main aspect of SEM is paid search marketing (PPC), which is very much comparable to traditional advertising and a well-designed paid search marketing strategy could bring a great volume of business for a company. It can be best explained as biddable media where companies have to bid against each other in order to score the best possible visibility for their adverts and it depends not only on the bidding amount but also on the relevance of the ad. Few advantages and disadvantages of SEO and paid search marketing (PPC) are highlighted in table 3. (Chaffey & Ellis, 2019, pp.400-416)

## 2. Online public relations

For some time now, online public relation projects are impacting corporate and social blogs substantially. More and more companies are focusing on developing their online PR because it contributes heavily to better branding strategies. Small and medium sized businesses are also keen on improving their online PR because together with efficient content marketing, online PR could assist in improving company's reputation, awareness and trust and is also cost effective. Though traditional PR still holds a special place in marketing, online or digital PR has changed the whole scenario of marketing a product or service. Few fundamental changes it has brought are that the potential customers or audience are more connected to the company or business

organization, which was previously not the case because of communication barriers. The audience are connected to each other by posting blogs, vlogs, social profiles, e-newsletters and also take part in conversations, discussions and reviews which allows company to shape up their brands according to customers need. In the past, customers did not have enough access to information, but digital PR enabled them to make a statement, and access numerous online sources of information rapidly. Other few advantages of online PR are, its ability to reach a niche audience with a relatively low cost approach, it is cost effective because there are no media placements costs. A retailer can gain trust and credibility by audiences personal comments and recommendations that can help generating backlinks to the company's or retailer's website that are beneficial for SEO. And therefore, enhance the brand reputation among its target audience. A main disadvantage of online PR is that it is considered a high-risk investment because it is not a controlled discipline. (Chaffey & Ellis, 2019, pp.419-422)

### 3. Affiliate marketing

Affiliate marketing is also known as pay per performance marketing method because it divides marketers and agencies as to its value. Affiliate marketing facilitates in generating more sales at a controlled cost, but it is not the case in scenarios where brand is already well known and does not need to rely on affiliations, therefore, making it a commission-based arrangement.

Table 4. Advantages and disadvantages of affiliate marketing. (Chaffey & Ellis, 2019, pp.429-430)

<u>ADVANTAGES</u>	<u>DISADVANTAGES</u>
-Increases reach and visibility in SERPs	-Incremental profit/sales are limited
-Generate awareness of brand	-Affiliates could exploit the brand name
-Target different audience through affiliates	-Affiliate commission fee
-Responds well to marketplace changes	-Risk of damaged brand reputation
-Enables target generic phrases in SERPs	-Difficult to manage time
-Reduces risks in SEM management	-Affiliates may use unethical techniques

Affiliate marketing is not appropriate for business products or lower priced consumer products because affiliates cannot make enough profit out of the business arrangement.

Some key advantages and disadvantages of affiliate marketing are mentioned in table 4. (Chaffey & Ellis, 2019, pp.427-430)

#### 4. Interactive display advertising

Display advertising is also sometimes called banner advertising. The very first banner ad on the web was initially appeared in 1994 on the first version of wired.com for AT&T but since then the basics and principles of display advertising have not changed and. Display ads can be in the shape of simple static images and animations to videos and interactive applications and their main task is to lead the viewer to the company's website upon clicking. Display advertising plays an important role in any company's digital marketing or online strategy. It is a tool which helps in creating or enhancing brand awareness by showcasing the brand on the internet and to potential customers innovatively and a company can reach the customers across the internet on different devices and formats without any restrictions, for example, Google Display network is able to reach 92% of all internet users and that could be a great asset for any business organization. Display advertising also assists in creating relevant ads with personalized targeting, meaning targeting potential customers using demographics, language, interests, geographic location et cetera for example HTML5 banner ads can be coded in such a way which is relevant for audiences, their devices, and any website. Resulting in an increased return on investment (ROI) with retargeting because retargeted advertisements perform much better than standard display ads. With the advances in latest technologies, display advertising could reach the right audience with the best suitable ad, at an appropriate time. (Bannerflow, 2021)

#### 5. Opt-in email marketing

According to (Digital Marketer, 2016) the ultimate goal of email marketing is not just the outcome, which is profit and growth, but also to move a company's customers during the value journey from one stage to the next. In most cases, there are three different types of emails, a marketer could use to reach the customers, such as transactional, relational, and promotional. Each email type provides a unique way of interaction with the customers. Table 5 below identifies different interaction options provided by such email types.

Table 5. Different engaging options of email types. (Digital Marketer, 2016)

	Customer service	Brand awareness	Lead generation	Retention & Loyalty	Engagement & Nurturing	Sales & upsells
Transactional	X	X	X	X	X	X
Relational		X	X	X	X	X
Promotional			X	X	X	X

Key advantages of email marketing are that its physical cost is much lower than that of direct mail. It raises the chances of an immediate and impulsive response which aides in attracting existing customers to return. Its campaign deployment is much faster than traditional media and it is easier and cheaper to personalize. Email marketing can also be easily integrated with other media such as direct mail, mobile messaging, and web personalization. Drawbacks of email marketing are its deliverability and renderability because it could be difficult for email marketer to deliver the message across different internet service providers (ISPs) and displaying the creative side of it as intended and also keeping the email recipients/subscribers engaged. (Chaffey & Ellis, 2019, pp.441-442)

## 6. Social media marketing

The central idea of social media marketing is interacting with, attracting, meeting, and sustaining potential or existing customers. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary for a company to choose the best social networks for shaping up the overall strategy. Few social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Snapchat, YouTube, Pinterest et cetera are best for brand awareness, advertising, public relations, customer service, B2B or B2C relationships, and so on. With the help of such platforms, a company must create a social media marketing strategy following the steps as properly researching the audience and buyer personas to gain information about their needs and interests. Cautiously choosing the social platform which best serves the marketer in targeting the audience. Another important step is creating appealing and unique social media content that attracts potential customers, so they interact with the brand offered. Assuring an organized schedule for posts could play a vital role in monitoring all the post interactions and engagements for the marketer. And lastly but yet most importantly a social media marketer must analyze the impacts and

results of the social media marketing campaign in order to determine how successful it was in achieving the goals. (Baker, 2020)

The main advantage of social media marketing is that it can connect with a large audience in a cost-effective manner, because so many consumers and business organizations use social media nowadays. Social media marketing is effective for advertising as it provides different formats such as video which could be essential in retargeting following a company's website visits. A downside of social or viral media marketing is that it is a high-risk marketing communications technique because it requires substantial preliminary investment without the guarantee of campaign going viral, which could mean wasted investment. (Chaffey & Ellis, 2019, p.449)

## 6 METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The methodology part of the study provides a clear guide how to undertake research as well as highlights the realities of undertaking research, including the more common difficulties. Different research orientations are also discussed in this part to illustrate the influence of the researcher's background and basic beliefs surrounding research purpose, methods, strategy, reliability, and validity.

### 6.1 Purpose of the research

Ghuri and Gronhaug (2005, p.11) state that the purposes of conducting research are multiple, such as to describe, explain, understand, foresee, criticize and/or analyze already existing knowledge or phenomena in social sciences. The (very) first need is to clearly define the research objectives before starting to collect information. Therefore, describing (descriptive) the research is necessary. Many phenomena are explained (explanatory) by conducting research which requires an identification of factors and processes. Explaining the research also helps in answering the questions concerned with the objective. Foreseeing (exploratory) research seeks for patterns, ideas, or hypotheses. (Ghuri & Gronhaug, 2005, pp.49-52)

This study is descriptive in nature because the purpose of the research is well ascertained and aims to deliver suitable measures to enhance current customer relations and strategic marketing activities. The focus of this study is on expanding the knowledge about how customers could be satisfied and stay with the company for a long time. Current marketing activities of Upgraded ry, which is the healthcare and wellbeing association in question, regarding customers have been examined, and suggestions have been presented in the empirical section of this study.

### 6.2 Research methods

Qualitative and quantitative methods are the two main modes of research. These methods refer to systematic, focused, and orderly collection of data for the purpose of

obtaining information and to solve or answer a particular research problem. Both methods include historical review and analysis, surveys, field experiments and case studies. The major difference between qualitative and quantitative research is not of quality or quantity but of procedure and it is also a reflection of different perspectives on knowledge and research objectives. Another key dissimilarity is that qualitative methods emphasize understanding and are process-oriented whereas quantitative methods support testing and verification and are result-oriented. (Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2005, pp.109-110)

Qualitative methods are most useful for inductive and exploratory research as they can lead to hypothesis building and explanations. Qualitative methods are often focused on social process and not on social structures, which is frequently the focus in quantitative research. The three main components of qualitative research are data; which is often collected through interviews and observations, interpretative or analytical procedure; involves the techniques to conceptualize and analyze the data to arrive at findings or theories and the third component is the report which could be in written or verbal form. (Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2005, pp.110-111)

Quantitative method refers to all such data of a research that involves some numerical data or contain data that could usefully be quantified to help answer the research questions and to meet the objectives. It can range from simple calculations such as frequency of occurrence to more compound data such as test scores or prices (Saunders et al., 2019, p.564). Quantitative data are usually associated with numbers as the numbers possess specific characteristics that make them very useful for analytical purposes and are an efficient way to represent information and meanings.

The objective of this study is to analyze and provide improvement for developing customer relationships through effective traditional/digital marketing and integrated marketing communications. Therefore, a qualitative research approach has been selected for this study because the qualitative approach provides a well-detailed understanding of the phenomenon in question.

### 6.3 Research strategy

Research strategy is a general plan about answering the research questions. It contains clear objectives, derived from the research questions, specifies the sources of collecting data and considers the limitations of the research. Significantly a strategy should reflect the fact that why it has been chosen to conduct a research. According to Saunders et al. (2019, pp.189-190) there are several research strategies that could be adopted for a particular type of research. These possible research strategies are as follows:

- ✚ The first type of research strategy is experiment, which is a classical form of research that engages with natural science research but also features strongly in much social science research. It basically involves a theoretical hypothesis definition, selection of samples of individuals from known populations, allocation of samples to different experimental conditions, introduction of planned change on one or more of the variables, measurement for a small number of the variables and control of other variables which is why it is quantitative in nature. (Saunders et al., 2019, pp.190-193)
  
- ✚ Survey strategy is another common strategy that belongs to the quantitative nature of business and management research as survey strategy allow the collection of a large amount of data from a sizeable population in a highly economical way. It is often used to clarify and answer questions such as what, where, who, how much, and how many. Different styles can be used to obtain the information required such as questionnaires, structured observation and interviews. However, it requires much time as designing the survey styles and analysing the results can be time consuming. (Saunders et al., 2019, pp.193-194)
  
- ✚ The latest developments in the field of digitalization of data and the creation of online archives have triggered the use of archival or documentary research strategy as availability of different sources online made it possible to conduct such kind of research strategy. It is important for researchers to understand that

using archival and documentary research strategy means that the acquired documents used for the research are considered secondary sources and were originally designed and created for a different research or purpose. Using existent documents for research provide a rich source of data and could be analyzed quantitatively, qualitatively, or both. This type of research strategy also has some drawbacks as sometimes gaining access to documents or records are restricted for confidential reasons and documents could also vary in quality. (Saunders et al., 2019, pp.195-196)

- ✚ According to Robson (2002, p.178) the case study is “a strategy for doing a research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context using multiple sources of evidence”. In this strategy various techniques can be utilized for collecting data. Questionnaires, interviews, observation and documentary analysis can be the best possible examples. According to Saunders et al (2019, p.196), the case in case study research may possibly refer to an organization, a person, a group, an association, an event, and many other types of case subjects.
- ✚ Ethnography is another research strategy that is used to study the culture or social world of a group. Its purpose is to interpret the social world, the research subjects exist in the way in which they interpret it. Even though it is not a dominant research strategy as it is very time-consuming, ethnography may be appropriate in particular research studies. (Saunders et al., 2019, pp.199-201)
- ✚ Action research strategy is different from other research strategy because of its clear focus on action, in particular promoting change within the organization. As Coghlan & Brannick (2014, p.6) state that there are several broad characteristics of action research such as its focus on research in action, rather than research about action because the objective is to get that action more effective while simultaneously developing up a structure of scientific knowledge. Another characteristic of action research is that it is a collaborative, democratic partnership where studied members of the system participate actively in processes such as planning, taking action, evaluating action, further planning, and so on. Thirdly, action research is a sequence of events and also

an approach to problem solving that involves precise methods of fact finding and experimentation to practical issues.

- ✚ Grounded theory strategy refers to a methodology and could be used lightly to incorporate methodology and methods but more precisely it refers to a theory that is grounded in or developed inductively from a set of data. Grounded theory is a procedure in which data is collected without the formation of an initial theoretical framework. Theory is developed from the data generated by a series of observations. This type of research is time consuming, intensive, and reflective. Therefore, researchers need to consider the time, level of competence, access to data, and logistical implications. (Saunders et al., 2019, pp.205-208)
  
- ✚ Narrative Inquiry research strategy refers to a more specific meaning and purpose that involves a story, a personal account, an event, or sequence of events where the researcher considers that the experiences and encounters of the participants could be best collected and assessed as complete stories. This type of research strategy is intensive and time consuming in nature, therefore, it is generally associated with small and purposive samples. The main purpose of narrative inquiry research strategy is to derive theoretical explanations from narrative accounts while maintaining their integrity. (Saunders et al., 2019, pp.209-211)

From the above-mentioned eight research strategies, experiment, survey, and case study strategy are three most important strategies. This research is qualitative in nature and intends to obtain specific information about the subject. Therefore, the experiment and survey strategy were not adopted, due to the fact that both strategies are quantitative in nature and demand an extensive collection of data. Thus, a strategy which can only be applied to this research is the case study strategy because the case study strategy provides a detailed understanding of the context of the research.

## 6.4 Data collection method

Various data collection methods can be used as part of the research strategies described earlier. The questions: what data are going to be collected, where and when the data are going to be collected and by whom it will be collected, are the main focus of the data collection method. The collected data must be systematically analysed to arrive at an answer to the research question. There could be several approaches throughout the research project which can be used as frameworks to obtain the desired information. Within these main approaches, documents, interviews, observation and questionnaires are the four main techniques or methods for producing data. (Blaxter et al., 2010, p.184)

Research studies which are based on documents may make considerable use of secondary data; that is, data which has already been collected, and possibly also analysed. Document secondary data refers to data that can be endured physically as evidence and can be used in research projects that gather primary data as well. It can be used on its own, for instance, for research on business history within an archival research strategy. Documentation which is a secondary data include text, audio, and visual media. Generally, text media include minutes of meetings, administrative and public records, notices, correspondence (emails), transcripts of speeches and conversations, books, journals, articles, newspapers et cetera. Audio media includes archival recordings of speeches, radio programs, audio blogs and podcasts that can be analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Document visual data is classified as two-dimensional static media (pictures, maps, graphs, cartoons, logos), two dimensional moving media (videos, films, web pages, multimedia), and three dimensional lived media (architecture, clothing). (Saunders et al., 2019, pp.345-347)

According to Ghauri & Gronhaug (2005, p.102) when secondary data is no longer sufficient to answer the research questions, a researcher must collect the data that is relevant enough to help solve the research problem. These data are called primary data which include interviews, observations and questionnaires. In a case study research approach both primary and secondary data collecting methods can be used. Interview is a tool that supports data collecting and it is a method that involves questioning or

discussing issues. An interview is a purposeful discussion between two or more people that could be used to gather valid and reliable data that is relevant to the research objective. One of the most important decisions that had to be made while conducting an interview is whether to tape the interview or to take notes. Both means have advantages and disadvantages as recording the interview helps building an effective communication with the interviewee, but it can also make respondents anxious, and less likely to reveal confidential information. Note-taking gives an instant record of the key points of an interview. However, note taking can also be distracting.

Velde et al. (2004, p.104) stated that there are two main types of interviews, structured and unstructured. A structured interview is suitable for research that is analytical in nature and if it is important that all questions and choices are presented. An unstructured interview is relevant when the research is more explorative in nature and where the aim is to generate a hypothesis. According to Ghauri & Gronhaug (2005, p.132) in literature there is some discussion on semi-structured interviews, which differ from both an unstructured and structured interview. A semi-structured interview is an interview where the researcher will have a list of themes and questions to be considered, although this may vary from interview to interview. This type of interview is useful when it is necessary to assure the cooperation of the respondents by providing the impression of complete contribution of the interviewer to the interview.

Ghauri & Gronhaug (2005, pp.120-122) define collecting data by listening and watching other people's behaviour in a way that allows some type of learning and analytical interpretation as observation. It focuses on the concrete behaviour of an individual, group or organization. When collecting the data through observation there are two choices, participatory and non-participatory (structured) observations. In participant observation, the observer is a natural part of the situation or event. And in non-participant (structured) observation, the observer or researcher observes a natural setting but is not a part of the situation her/himself.

A questionnaire is the most appropriate research technique if large groups of companies or individuals have to be studied in a short period of time. With the use of a questionnaire, it is relatively simple to collect and process the data since there is no need to categorize the answers afterwards. An advantage that a researcher can acquire

from a questionnaire is that it is comparatively low cost in contrast to the oral interview. This is primarily because fewer people are involved in conducting the research. A disadvantage of a questionnaire is that it requires a great deal of time in constructing (Velde et al., 2004, pp.106-107). The two types of questionnaires are self-completed, and researcher completed questionnaires. Self-completed questionnaires include internet questionnaire, SMS (text) questionnaire, postal (mail) questionnaire, and delivery and collection questionnaire. Researcher completed questionnaires conducted through telephone questionnaires and a structured interview (refers to those questionnaires where an interviewer physically meets the respondents and ask the questions face to face). (Saunders et al., 2019, pp.505-506)

In this research, the case study approach has been chosen. Yin (2018, pp.113-125) states that the case study approach includes six different data (source of evidence) collecting techniques, documentation, archival records, direct observation, participant observation, physical artefacts and interviews. These techniques have strengths as well as weaknesses (see Table 6) but when used simultaneously the techniques are highly complementary. Hence a high-quality case study should include as many sources as possible.

TABLE 6. Six sources of evidence (data collecting techniques): Strengths and weaknesses. (Yin, 2018, p.114)

Source of Evidence	Strengths	Weaknesses
<u>Documentation</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stable- can be reviewed repeatedly</li> <li>• Unobtrusive- not created as a result of the case study</li> <li>• Specific- contains exact names, references and details of an event</li> <li>• Broad coverage- long span of time, many events and many settings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retrievability- can be low</li> <li>• Biased selectivity: if collection is incomplete</li> <li>• Reporting bias- reflects (unknown) bias of author</li> <li>• Access- may be deliberately blocked.</li> </ul>
<u>Archival Records</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (same as above for documentation)</li> <li>• Precise and quantitative</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (same as above for documentation)</li> <li>• Accessibility due to privacy reasons</li> </ul>
<u>Interviews</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Targeted- focuses directly on case study topics.</li> <li>• Insightful- provides perceived casual inferences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bias due to poorly articulated questions</li> <li>• Response bias</li> <li>• Inaccuracies due to poor recall</li> <li>• Reflexivity- interviewee gives what interviewer wants to hear</li> </ul>
<u>Direct Observation</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immediacy- covers events in real time</li> <li>• Contextual- covers context of the case</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time- consuming</li> <li>• Selectivity-unless broad coverage</li> <li>• Reflexivity- event or actions may proceed differently because it is being observed</li> <li>• Cost- hours needed by human observation</li> </ul>
<u>Participant Observation</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (same as above for direct observation)</li> <li>• Insightful into interpersonal behaviour and motives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (same as above for direct observation)</li> <li>• Bias due to investigator's manipulation of events</li> </ul>
<u>Physical Observation</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insightful into cultural features</li> <li>• Insightful into technical operations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selectivity</li> <li>• Availability</li> </ul>

The primary source of data collection method for this research is interviews as several customers and members of Upgraded ry were interviewed mostly by telephone and

also email, and also direct observation to some extent as observation of meetings, marketing activities, and condition of the immediate environment and culture of the organization in question Upgraded ry was observed by the author of this study. The secondary data were collected by means of documentation which was acquired from Upgraded ry website and contact information of members and partners was provided by the marketing team members. Marketing manager and Director of Upgraded ry were also interviewed during online meetings. Main findings and recommendation could be found in the empirical section. Therefore, the data collecting methods recommended by Yin were applied to some extent.

### 6.5 Data analysis

Ghuri & Gronhaug (2005, p.157) define that the purpose of analysis is to obtain meaning from the collected data. The data collected can either be quantitative or qualitative data and the analysis process is according to the nature of the data. Quantitative (i.e., numbers) and qualitative (i.e., words) data is possible to occur in both analysis types.

Quantitative data refers to all numerical data or contained data that could usefully be quantified, to answer the research question(s) and objectives. The two distinctive groups of quantitative data are categorical and numerical. Categorical data is the data that cannot be measured numerically but can be either classified into sets (categories) or placed in rank order. Numerical data is the data that can be measured numerically as quantities. Meaning that numerical data is more precise data than categorical data. (Saunders et al., 2019, pp.567-569)

Qualitative data are based on meanings expressed through words that is referred to as verbal data, written, typed or printed words that is referred to as textual data, and still or moving visual images that is referred to as visual data. Qualitative data could be obtained through several means such as interviews, observations, conversations, documents, images, audio and video recordings and so on. Within qualitative research, data collection and data analysis are an interrelated and interactive set of processes that allows analysis to be undertaken during or even after the collection of data. Ways of

analyzing data and choices in qualitative analysis are different to those of quantitative analysis as the quantitative approach necessitates specified statistical techniques dependent on the data type, whereas choices in qualitative approach are not necessarily between right and wrong and the researcher might have to choose two or more complementary ways to analyze the data. (Saunders et al., 2019, pp.638-641)

As the case study approach has been selected for this research, it emphasizes that data analysis should consist of examining, categorizing, tabulating, or otherwise recombining the evidence to address the initial propositions of a study. A case study analysis needs to have a general analytic strategy. According to Yin (2018, pp.168-174) there are four general strategies which underline the specific analytic procedures to conduct research. The first strategy is relying on theoretical propositions that lead to the case study. The second general strategy is working the data from the “ground up”. The third general analytic strategy is developing a case description that describes the framework for organizing the case study. The fourth one is examining plausible rival explanations that includes defining and testing credible rival justifications and generally works in combination with the other three research conducting strategies mentioned earlier.

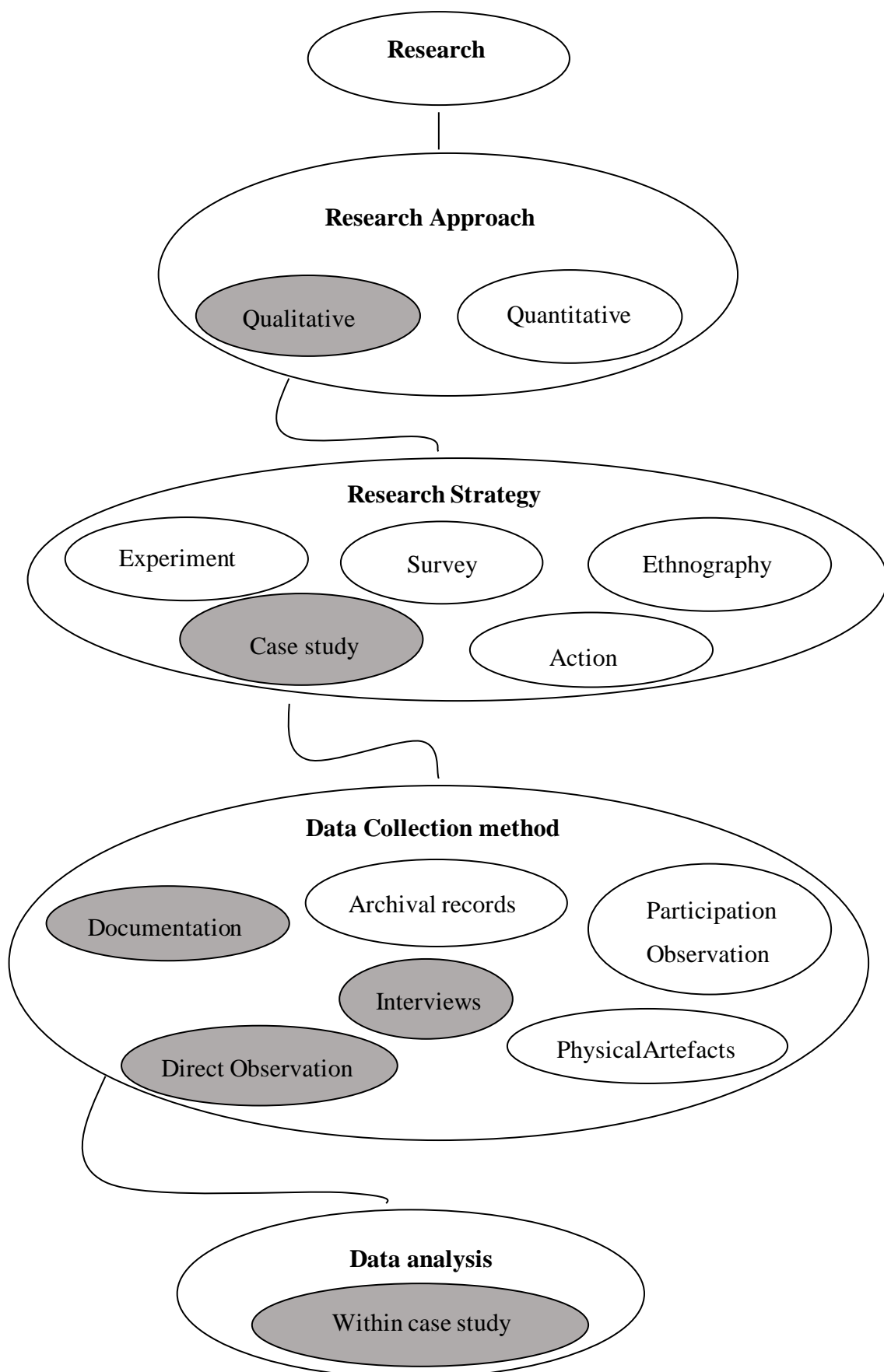


Figure 8. The methodology of the study.

Empirical section of this research study is focused on maintaining the reliability and validity of the data collected through relevant theory, documents, observations, and interviews to support quality and accuracy, as well as comparing if there is a relationship between the research objective and the outcome.

Since this particular research is qualitative in nature with a case study strategy, the original objective and design of the case study is based on such propositions, which in turn reflected a set of research objectives, review of the literature and new insights. The methodology of this study is visualized in figure 8 above. Another important aspect for any research's collected data is that it should be reliable and valid in order to reveal quality and accuracy. This research was conducted in co-operation with the case company (Upgraded ry) which means that the subject is approved in the case company because of the need of such research and the concepts were defined to confirm the reliability and validity of the research. Reliability can be defined as the extent to which a measure will produce consistent results, while validity highlights whether the research measured what it intended to and is it the strength of conclusions, inferences, or propositions. The case company welcomed the research and findings and pledged to learn from the findings and improve.

## 7 EMPIRICAL STUDY

This section includes analysis of the current customer relations, marketing activities, and suggestions to improve for a healthcare and wellbeing association called Upgraded ry with whom the author was directly connected and worked as a marketing intern. Therefore, the selection of such case organization is justified because the author worked on improving the marketing strategy and building customer relationships of the chosen case company, and getting familiar with the case organization's current mission, business, services and so on.

### 7.1 Main findings

This section highlights the main findings from the study and provides recommendations and suggestions to the case organization Upgraded ry on how to improve current customers relations in the light of proper marketing. The findings have been based on qualitative data gathering methods such as customers/members interviews (telephone, email), and internal data from in house company interviews (marketing manager, director). Interviews of the customers/members provided more depth to the topic of this research study and complimented the findings that includes direct quotes from the customers/members replies from open ended questionnaire and interviews.

The number of customers and members which were contacted to answer the questionnaire was eighty-two (82), and out of 82, forty-six (46) responded. The intention of the questionnaire was to gather information on current relations with the customers and what could be done to improve. The customers/members were mainly contacted by telephone and some through email. The percentage of response is therefore fifty-six (56) percent and could be considered an appropriate figure to base a study and recommendations from the responses. The responses were read and analyzed together with the director and marketing manager of Upgraded ry and analysis was based on customer needs and wants that was gained by interviewing them. The author of this research study asked for permission from the customers/members

to publish the responses as appendices. Few of them declined, but few permissions granted responses could be found as appendices of this thesis. The author also designed a detailed and thorough questionnaire for interviews but was only allowed to showcase questions and answers (qualitative) found in as appendices by the director of Upgraded ry.

### 7.1.1 Current state and development needs

Upgraded ry is a small B2B healthcare and well-being association that has limited resources when it comes to proper customer relationship management, marketing, communication activities and strategic growth. It was realized by the author of this research study that CRM, selling, marketing and communication actions were highly cohesive and were mostly centered on self-directed efforts by staff. The primary marketing means, or tools were largely consisted of personal sales work and almost no advertising with occasional digital marketing. Another serious issue was the absence of clearer objectives and lack of measuring CRM and marketing efforts which resulted in non-consistent marketing and digital marketing efforts.

Due to inconsistent marketing and CRM efforts, Upgraded ry lacked awareness in its B-to-B customer target group. Customer and members information could be found in company's records, but there is no proper CRM system in place which proved to be difficult in automatic nurturing paths for leads and also customer information not being updated. At the time of the author's internship, Upgraded ry wanted to develop its marketing and communication activities with existing clients and eventually increase sales. These objectives however need more strategic approach to marketing, CRM, and marketing communication. There are quite a few competitors of Upgraded in the field of health and well-being such as Terkko Health Club, Health Incubator Helsinki, Health Capital Helsinki, Healthtech Finland and so on. Most of the competitors also aim to promote health and well-being startups. Therefore, it would be a challenging job to stand out from the crowd, unless something unique is offered. Swot analysis in figure 9 below highlights the current situation of Upgraded ry and was created after analyzing the current state and interviewing marketing manager and the director.

<b><u>STRENGTHS</u></b>	<b><u>WEAKNESSES</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Independent</li> <li>-Non-profit</li> <li>-Good number of memberships (80+)</li> <li>-Ability to arrange quality events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Limited resources and funds</li> <li>-Inactive community</li> <li>-Weak membership offerings</li> <li>-Not publicly known</li> </ul>
<b><u>OPPORTUNITIES</u></b>	<b><u>THREATS</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Become a great platform for startups</li> <li>-Become a leader in health &amp; well-being scene</li> <li>-Source for entrepreneurs to get active</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Losing memberships</li> <li>-Losing partners</li> <li>-Bigger names in healthcare-competitors</li> </ul>

Figure 9. SWOT analysis of Upgraded ry.

The sector of healthcare and well-being in Finland and internationally involves serious competition. Therefore, more efficient marketing and communication efforts would support Upgraded ry's further growth along with better customer relations.

#### 7.1.2 Research outcome for the case company: Upgraded ry

This research study would provide the case company a suggested strategic approach to better its current marketing, CRM, and marketing communication activities based on the current state analysis, SWOT analysis, literature review, outcome from interviewing customers/members and marketing manager, and committed observation from daily development efforts. Consent to publish interviews are attached as appendices.

#### 7.1.3 Recommendations/Suggestions

In the opinion of the author and after interviewing many of the Upgraded ry members (Customers) and relevant literature review, proper and precise CRM through integrated marketing communications (IMC) could be a move forward for a start-up such as Upgraded ry, IMC is a concept under which a company or an association (Upgraded ry) carefully incorporates most of its communication channels to produce

a clearer, reliable, and convincing point about itself and its brands (Kotler & Armstrong, 2021, p. 414). The concept of integrated marketing communications includes several components such as the *foundation*; which consists of detailed analysis of the product/service and also the target market, *corporate culture*; includes features of product/services that are in accordance and relevant to the work culture of an organization, *brand focus*; concentrates on commercial distinctiveness of the brand, *consumer experience*; involves the actual feelings and thoughts of the end users about the product/service, *communication tools*; includes ways to promote a product/services such as advertising, direct selling, social media and so on, *promotion tools*; includes modes such as personal selling, trade promotion et cetera, and *integration tools*; such as tracking on customer feedbacks and reviews. (MSG, 2022)

It is very important to understand that marketing communications environment is shifting and so as the roles of marketing communicators. Initially, the consumers are changing because of the current digital/mobile age, moreover, marketing strategies are changing in terms of developing more focused marketing programs, and ultimately, the digital technology have triggered astonishing changes in the communication process (Kotler & Armstrong, 2021, pp. 411-412). Therefore, it is crucial to not only understand the traditional promotional tools but also digital communication channels and forms of media such as paid media, which incorporates traditional forms of advertising as well as online counterparts such as display ads, pay per click advertising et cetera. Earned media is another form that consists of a third-party endorsement of the brand and examples of it are press coverage, influencer relations, backlinks and so on. Owned media on the contrary, refers to all the assets a company or an organization own such as company website, video content, social media pages et cetera. Shared media is a relatively new addition to the digital media model and is about creating a positive image about the brand by content and social media interactions such as on Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and so on.

## 7.2 Implementing Marketing Communications

Marketing manager (Dung Hanh Nguyen) at Upgraded ry is directly responsible for marketing communications activities and is interviewed by the author to gain

information and knowledge regarding marketing communications activities and methods such as for instance, the main tools used by Upgraded ry are Mailchimp, which is the main communication tool to store contacts and get leads, also having a regular newsletter for the community and having a current status of the newsletter audience. Upgraded ry also uses social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn to share the updates and connect with the public as well. The main target audience of Upgraded ry are other startups operating in health, wellbeing, and MedTech industry. Additionally, larger companies, who (would like to) work with (health) startups (pharma, medical devices manufacturers), and service providers who are interested in selling products for startups and regular companies.

Upgraded ry relies heavily on mostly unpaid digital forms of marketing communications as mentioned earlier. Going to relevant and related events was also another form of communications activity but not recently due to Covid 19 restrictions. Traditional unpaid media is also used to publish various articles sometimes but not on a larger scale. Social media has played a somewhat important role in having public appearances and sharing news publicly. Upgraded ry wants to be recognized in the field of healthcare and wellbeing but branding does not seem to hold importance than usual traditional companies. The organization is question does not measure effectiveness of marketing communications activities regularly and do not have particular set of KPI's (key performance indicators) but has used Uber suggest and Google analytics in the past to track and measure but not anymore.

The author of this report has worked with Upgraded ry for 4 months and after interviewing the marketing manager, come up with conclusion that there is a serious lack of regular customer/members knowhow and marketing communications activities and aspects, especially the ones mentioned in the paragraph above. Hence, Upgraded ry integrated marketing communications plan should include:

- Service & customer knowhow: After being in contact with some of the members/partners of Upgraded ry, the author found out that most of them were never contacted personally before and lacks the knowledge about the services provided by Upgraded ry. Hence, CRM is another key area where Upgraded ry should focus (perhaps having some CRM software depending on the budget –

even free ones such as EngageBay, Zoho CRM, HubSpot, Capsule etc) and spread information about their services and build stronger relationships with their customers or members. There is a need to create a framework with the focus more on customers and hence, the customer mix framework of ‘6Ws’ presented as figure 10 below is an option for Upgraded ry. (Newman & McDonald, 2018, p.192)



Figure 10. Customer mix framework of 6Ws for Upgraded ry.

- Plan to promote/summary: It has found that Upgraded ry has no concrete and consistent plans to promote their services among the end users such as other start-ups and larger companies. Therefore, a concrete plan about all the integrated marketing activities should be designed and followed on a regular basis. Perhaps more paid, earned, and owned media in digital or traditional forms to gain awareness.
- Background/Vision: Upgraded ry has been in the business since 2012, and yet to have make a mark in the Finnish healthcare and wellbeing industry. Thus, a

clearer vision and background review of the services and actions are in need, especially, a thorough marketing activities review is seen as a must by the author.

- Target market: Upgraded ry is mostly operating in greater Helsinki region but have customers from different parts of Finland. It is essential to know customers perceptions and needs to plan how the services of Upgraded ry can meet and exceed customer expectations. Therefore, Upgraded ry should firstly describe the target market need well in advance and then plan for actions.
- Competitors/SWOT/Tools: Terkko Health Club, Health Incubator Helsinki, Health Capital Helsinki, Healthtech Finland are few of the competitors on which Upgraded ry should have a close eye to better have a best possible SWOT analysis about current situation and for moving forward. Several marketing communications tools could be adopted such as CRM, KPI's, clients registers, services process management (sales work), monitoring the competitors, marketing planning, feedback compilation, and constant revitalization.

According to HubSpot, it is estimated that there are over 2.6 billion users within social media platforms globally. And YouTube alone has over 1.3 billion users, therefore having an attractive YouTube channel and content could also be beneficial for Upgraded. Meaning that there is already an enthusiastic audience ready and willing to look at your content and engage with you based on quality indeed, and then there is Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, and Instagram. So, these mediums could promote content and find the right balance between self-promotion, sharing helpful information and entertainment.

Since Upgraded ry mainly focus on the digital side of marketing and more than 3 billion people use online services to look for different products, entertainment, friends, networks, food, travel, etc. Therefore, the digital marketing aspect of this business should focus on 5Ds of digital marketing, which could help this business assess consumer behavior and how the company could manage them to support its marketing goal. 5Ds are digital devices; audiences' usage of smart devices like phones, tablets,

laptops, and so on could be assessed to target. Digital platforms: online services like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn could be analyzed for the latest trends. Digital media: advertising, emailing, and messaging, search engines and social networks could be acquired for reaching and engaging target audiences. Digital data: customers profiles and interactions with the business could be protected by law. Digital technology: the company could create interactive experiences from relevant websites, mobile apps, in-store kiosks, and email campaigns.

The following figure 11 suggestion of SOSTAC (Chaffey & Ellis, 2019, p.147.) seems relevant at this stage that was modified and suggested to Upgraded ry by the author of this study because it reflects the current position of the business and all the questions needed to be answered to develop CRM and the business’s digital marketing strategy. It will help Upgraded ry solve price, place, promotion, product, people, process, and physical evidence: the 7Ps of marketing.



Figure 11. SOSTAC planning framework for CRM and digital marketing strategy development of Upgraded ry.

SOSTAC planning framework would be suitable for Upgraded ry as it would help in clearing the current situation and where Upgraded ry stands at the moment, what are the goals, what customers think about, determining current or future capabilities and resources. It would help in monitoring the current position by having relevant set of KPIs (suggested below), plus how to get where Upgraded ry would like to get, for instance by suitable positioning strategy, segmentation, and tools. 5Ss objectives would also clear what actually Upgraded ry is selling, how it is served, saving options, and making a change. Setting clear responsibilities and functions also is important and implementation such as proper integrated marketing tools, digital and also traditional. Customers or members seemed far away from in contact with Upgraded ry at the moment and also even suggested that Upgraded ry should focus on personalization of services for members and not just general services provided, (gained info after interviewing members) so engaging customers, having a one-on-one meeting with them once every month or two, and bring them in the decision-making process to some extent would also help.

Another important aspect which Upgraded ry should be focusing on is its marketing implementation and practice. Developing and planning an appealing website that could deliver digital customers a great experience starts with domain name selection, uniform resource locators (URLs), selecting a hosting provider, website performance optimisation, and the accessibility of the website. The site directly is in sequence with SEM (search engine marketing), which is essential for this business for its promotion and visibility in search engines result in pages (SERPs) which could be done by paid advertising depending on the budget. SEM could be incorporated with search engine optimisation (SEO), which could help this business adjust and arrange the website content for better ranking in search engine results pages. It also improves pay per click (PPC) listings with the direct focus on design and visuals, quality of the videography and photography, editing, project management and above all content creating ideation. Another possible tactic within traditional marketing could be attending and participating in start-up fairs and tech events such as Slush (Helsinki) and also paid advertising as suggested earlier, which could facilitate this business to be more visible to venture capitalists and aides gain knowledge about the possible target audience and competition.

Upgraded should also need to constantly review, evaluate, and adjust its current marketing plans in accordance with its own needs and also the wants of consumers. Following metrics (KPIs) would provide insights on performance and provide Upgraded with ideas on how to improve:

- Customer response and reactions: Feedback from Upgraded customers could be a great way of determining what kind of reactions its marketing creates. Surveys and interviews online and in person, online commentary and overall customer service feedback could help Upgraded reveal the actual situation considering the customers and the impacts of its marketing campaigns. It could also help in reaching out to customers and determining the healthier market segments.
- Return on investment (ROI): This could help Upgraded in determining the amount of income it gained in comparison to the marketing cost (Decker, 2022). Upgraded would just simply have to apply the following formula:  

$$\text{Sales growth} - \text{Marketing expenses} / \text{Marketing cost} = \text{ROI}$$
- Reviewing sales numbers: It is a basic way of determining whether the overall plan is working or not, but sales number could help Upgraded in reviewing its current situation and position in the market no matter of any rise in prices such as membership fee and other services or expansion of business.
- Return on Ad spend (ROAS): According to Decker (2021), ROAS could aid in determining the success of ad campaigns, as paid advertising is suggested, this metric would measure the revenue that is generated compared to every Euro Upgraded spent on an advertising campaign.
- Website + Social Media engagement: Website visit analysis could help Upgraded in tracking the success of several different campaigns. The main goal of Upgraded should be to attract potential customers to the organization, and this could also be achieved by attracting website visitors. Social media

engagement is also important because it could help in tracking comments, likes, shares, messages, tags et cetera on different platforms.

- Seminar/Event Attendance: Upgraded usually arranges seminars and events online and also in person. A great way of analyzing the campaigns is to track the attendance of every seminar and event. This kind of KPI would help in developing marketing efforts in future for attracting people.
- Competitors actions: Upgraded has quite a few competitors mentioned earlier in this report, therefore, Upgraded needs to keep an eye on the actions of its competitors to determine the success or failure of its marketing plan or activities. If the competitors try to imitate the campaigns and promotion activities of Upgraded, it means the marketing plan or activities are successful, otherwise Upgraded might need some more work and attention on marketing strategies.

It is important for Upgraded ry to keep focus on CRM and on the marketing mix to grow in the current market, as it is relatively a small start-up association established in 2012. Product/service, price, place, promotion are important factors of marketing mix that could help Upgraded to be present in the right market at the right time and attract consumers attention. There are some matters regarding marketing mix that Upgraded should consider when putting marketing in practice. Suggestions in the following figure 12 were presented to Upgraded ry by the author of this study:

Marketing Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marketing Communications (display advertising, direct advertising, information)</li> <li>• The service environment (members/partners, facilities, functionality, comfort)</li> <li>• Service process (customer appreciation, service success, service quality, expertise, speed)</li> <li>• Internal and external marketing</li> </ul>



Marketing Tools
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CRM (loyal/existing customer, new customer base)</li> <li>• Sales work (customer service process management)</li> <li>• Clients registers</li> <li>• Monitoring the competitors</li> <li>• Marketing planning</li> <li>• Feedback compilations</li> <li>• Constant revitalization</li> </ul>



Marketing/Advertising Budget			
UPGRADED			
	<u>January - 2022</u>	<u>February - 2022</u>	<u>March - 2022</u>
Market research	200€	150€	100€
Owned media	50€	50€	50€
Video-Advertising (YouTube)	300€	250€	250€
Social-media advertising (Facebook)	100€	100€	100€
Website remodeling/design	50€	40€	40€
Events (furniture, equipment, rent, other)	600€	600€	600€
Promotion (tv, radio, giveaways, offers)	2000€	1800€	1600€
Content (press releases, newsletters, reports)	300€	250€	250€
Media relations (dinners, free pass, gifts)	300€	250€	250€
Miscellaneous (prints, stationary, other)	200€	150€	100€
<u>Total</u>	<u>4100€</u>	<u>3640€</u>	<u>3390€</u>

Figure 12. Marketing tactics/budget examples for Upgraded ry.

The above-mentioned tactics and budget suggestions were presented to Upgraded ry by the author of this research report/study but had no direct connection with the then marketing budget and tactics. Additionally, the author realized the lack of awareness of the company in question and its services, even the members of Upgraded, which are their main customers, are not involved and interested. The author gained this insight by contacting few of the members (customers). Thus, **CRM** is also an important issue for Upgraded to look into and discover the real needs and wants of the customers. There could be different types of CRM that could be useful for Upgraded OY such as collaborative, operational, and analytical CRM. Some software could also be used and for instance with collaborative CRM, it is easy to have features such as interaction management, channel management and document management that aides in getting the latest and accurate information to everyone through the same platform, across departments and also the easier availability of information to all the involved parties of the organization. CRM would help Upgraded in providing insights on its customers, prospects and so on, that could improve and expand customer life cycle by boosting relationships, adapting customer retention strategies, and driving sales growth. Some suggestions could be:

- Monitoring customer behavior
- Identify and deal with customer issues quickly and efficiently
- Customer data
- Tailor marketing campaigns and email campaigns
- Tracking sales and purchases
- Improve communications with own members and healthcare and well-being society
- Reduce overhead costs
- Discounts and offers

As suggested in the budget above, paid advertising could be an option for Upgraded to gain awareness. It has been in business since 2012, but still has not gained the awareness it should have, and that is why it needs to change its promotion strategies and perhaps invest in it to secure a name in the field of healthcare and well-being. The

budget above is sorted in realization of the fact that Upgraded is a non-profit organization and perhaps have very limited financial means, therefore, the investment on all the suggested points in the budget are kept on the lower side. The three months constant promotion with a minimal budget could boost Upgraded awareness in the industry and attract existing and potential members and partners, perhaps big investors that could help Upgraded in their future projects. Paid advertising is expensive in a country like Finland, especially advertising on tv, radio or even social media, but at the same time it is one of the most stable and reliable countries to open and do business. Sanoma Media Finland should have all the answers relating to effecting advertising and related costs and so on. Upgraded should also pay attention to their pricing strategies in terms of membership fee for instance. Upgraded is a non-profit organization, therefore, it should develop a non-profit pricing model that includes:

- Current spending
- Current expenses
- Number of their operations
- Best profit margin
- Optimization of processes

The abovementioned pricing model would help Upgraded in maintaining their business, additionally, as penetrating growth strategy seems suitable for the company in question, it could also seek penetration pricing strategy, which could help in entering or reentering the market with an exceptionally low price that could effectively draw attention and revenue away from competitors that offer similar services at a much higher price. Although, penetration pricing strategy is not sustainable in the long run but could definitely help organizations like Upgraded to enter in an existing, competitive market with a hope of sustaining existing members/customers as it eventually raises prices, for instance, membership fee and other services. Another important issue that the author of this draft noticed is the website of Upgraded. It seriously lacks information for a new visitor and potential member or customer. Therefore, building up the website could be a very beneficial element of a healthcare and well-being marketing plan. Backlinks and search engine optimization (SEO) are also great way of keeping the website on top search results and according to (healthcare

weekly, 2021), it could be achieved by clever writing and having more incoming links from another site and giving your website authority on the subject. In this manner, the more backlinks the website have, the higher it will be in the search results.

The issues and points raised in this draft need further attention and suggestions on different tools, activities, promotion, advertising, budget and so on that could help Upgrade ry in developing a CRM and marketing plan that could be put into practice.

## 8 CONCLUSION, SUMMARY AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upgraded ry has great potential and by using correct marketing tools, activities, and budget, it could develop its customer relationships and create its mark in current healthcare and well-being industry of Finland. As this research was presented to Upgraded ry, its findings were much appreciated because it highlighted the current customer relations situation and the overall marketing flaws and needs along with suggestions and recommendations to improve. However, it is recommended that this paradigm should be further debated, explored, examined, and improved over time in future research studies. This thesis study was narrowed down to the marketing team and only for Finland, it could be relevant to research marketing communications that an integrated alliance between the corporate B2B customers and the marketing department could have positive prospects and synergies in the future and prompting customers' acumens could inform the case organization of its current modus operandi in that field. The author of this study made sure that confidentiality and data security is practiced, and methods employed are consistent with set standards of integrity and quality. Therefore, expects the same from future research about the same phenomena.

To accomplish the research goals, customer relationship management was studied from a marketing standpoint. Throughout the literature review, theories from CRM, strategic marketing, integrated marketing communication, and digital marketing were analyzed to identify aspects critical to improved customer relations by proper marketing. The literature was utilized also when conducting in-depth interviews or developing questionnaire and therefore helped in creating a traditional plan for implementing client gaining and retention tactics by effective marketing in healthcare and wellbeing sector.

Both the organization in question and the researcher learnt a lot during the research and development process. This particular case study highlighted the current customer relations situation and current marketing activities that triggered the need to map the current actions that could enable marketing communications and other departments to work in a more integrated manner than before, which was an important step because customer relationships and marketing activities were partly perceived in a narrow

fashion before. This thesis study most certainly has given customer relationship management and marketing (case company) more importance, and more importantly, presented the current situation and detailed improvement suggestions and ideas regarding the topics in question.

The author/researcher of this case study has a previous bachelor's degree in the field of business management and marketing with several years of work experience in the same discipline. However, this thesis project together with CRM, marketing, and strategy studies during the whole study program helped the researcher to understand the big picture even better and enabled to transfer ideas from literature to everyday work and selling new ideas in the working environment.

## REFERENCES

- Baker, K. (2022). Social media marketing: the ultimate guide. HubSpot. Retrieved 5<sup>th</sup> May 2022 from <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/social-media-marketing>
- Baran, R. J. & Galka, R. J. (2017). Customer relationship management: The foundation of contemporary marketing strategy. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Routledge.
- Basic information and details about Upgraded ry. (n.a). Retrieved 12<sup>th</sup> August 2022 from <https://www.upgraded.fi/>
- Bennett, R. & Blythe, J. (2002). International Marketing. Strategy Planning, Market Entry & Implementation 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Glasgow: Bell & Bain Ltd.
- Blaxter, L., Hughes, C. & Tight, M. (2010). How to Research. (4<sup>th</sup> ed). McGraw-Hill Education
- Blythe, J. (2005). Essentials of marketing communications. (3<sup>rd</sup> ed). Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Blythe, J. (2012). Essentials of marketing. (5<sup>th</sup> ed). Pearson education limited.
- Chaffey, D. & Ellis, C. F. (2019). Digital marketing: Strategy, implementation and practice. (7<sup>th</sup> ed.). Pearson.
- Chai, W. Ehrens, T. & Kiwak, K. (2023). CRM (customer relationship management). TechTarget. <https://www.techtarget.com/searchcustomerexperience/definition/CRM-customer-relationship-management>
- Coghlan, D. & Brannick, T. (2014). Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization. (4<sup>th</sup> ed). Sage Publications.
- Decker, A. (2022). Ultimate guide to pricing strategies. HubSpot. Retrieved 4<sup>th</sup> April 2022 from <https://blog.hubspot.com/sales/pricing-strategy>
- Details about members of Upgraded ry. (2018). Retrieved 13<sup>th</sup> August 2022 from <https://www.upgraded.fi/members-gallery/>
- Email marketing best practices. (2016). Digital Marketer. Retrieved 4<sup>th</sup> May 2022 from <https://www.digitalmarketer.com/digital-marketing/email-marketing-strategy/>
- Forcey, C. (2022). What is marketing and what's its purpose? HubSpot. <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/what-is-marketing>
- Ghuri, P. & Gronhaug, K. (2005). Research Methods in Business Studies. (3<sup>rd</sup> ed). Henry Ling Ltd

Integrated marketing communications. (2022). MSG. Retrieved 10<sup>th</sup> April 2022 from <https://www.managementstudyguide.com/creating-integrated-marketing-communication-plan.htm>

Jobber, D. & Fahy, J. (2003). Foundations of Marketing. UK: McGraw-Hill Education.

Juneja, P. (2022). Integrated marketing communications. MSG. Retrieved 6<sup>th</sup> June 2022 from <https://www.managementstudyguide.com/integrated-marketing-communications.htm>

Kotler, P. & Armstrong, G. (2021). Principles of marketing. (18<sup>th</sup> ed). Pearson education limited.

Kotler, P. et al. (2019). Marketing management. (4<sup>th</sup> ed). Pearson

Newman, M. & McDonald, M. (2018). 100 Practical ways to improve customer experience. Kogan Page.

Patel, N. (2023). What is digital marketing? NB Digital. <https://neilpatel.com/what-is-digital-marketing/>

Pecanek, M. (2022). What is IMC? Integrated marketing communications explained. Ahrefs. [https://ahrefs.com/blog/imc/#:~:text=Integrated%20marketing%20communications%20\(IMC\)%20is,used%20across%20all%20marketing%20channels.](https://ahrefs.com/blog/imc/#:~:text=Integrated%20marketing%20communications%20(IMC)%20is,used%20across%20all%20marketing%20channels.)

Pepper, D. & Rogers, M. (2004). Managing customer relationships: A strategic framework. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Percy, L. (2008). Strategic integrated marketing communication. Elsevier Inc.

Robson, C. (2002). Real world research. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). Blackwell.

Saunders, M. Lewis, P. & Thornhill, A. (2019). Research methods for business students. (8<sup>th</sup> ed). Pearson education.

Timson, E. (2018). Understanding paid, owned, earned, and shared media. Business West. Retrieved 7th June 2022 from <https://www.businesswest.co.uk/blog/understanding-paid-owned-earned-and-shared-media>

Ultimate guide to display advertising, Bannerflow, 2021. Retrieved 27<sup>th</sup> May 2022 from <https://www.bannerflow.com/inspiration/ultimate-guides/display-advertising/>

Velde, M., Jansen, P & Anderson, N. (2004). Guide to Management Research Methods. Blackwell Publishing.

Yin, R. (2018). Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods. (6<sup>th</sup> ed). Sage Publications.

**Marketing communications implementation questions:** Marketing manager (Dung Hanh Nguyen) at Upgraded ry

1. What are the main marketing communications tools in the company? Why?

- Mailchimp. We have regular newsletters to our community. This is our main communication tool to store contacts and get leads. The picture shows current status of our Newsletter audiences.

## Audiences

Sort by		Custom order ▾	
⋮	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Upgraded Life Festival</b> Created Sep 03, 2018 3:31 pm	174 Contacts 49.5% Opens	174 Subscribers 17.5% Clicks
⋮	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Upgraded Community</b> <span>GDPR</span> Created Jun 12, 2018 10:49 am	719 Contacts 28.1% Opens	662 Subscribers 5.5% Clicks
⋮	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Health100</b> Created Jun 08, 2018 10:32 am	340 Contacts 58.3% Opens	337 Subscribers 30.8% Clicks

- We also use Social Medias (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn) to share our news and connect with the publics.

## LinkedIn

1,494 Total followers	10 ▲25% New followers in the last 30 days Dec 25, 2021 - Jan 24, 2022
--------------------------	--

FB: Total Page followers: 1,976

Twitter:

## Upgraded

@UpgradedFi

Health Startup Association of Finland. No good health innovation should be lost due to the lack of knowledge about it!

 Non-Governmental & Nonprofit Organization  Finland  [upgraded.fi](https://upgraded.fi)

 Joined November 2014

**1,628** Following **3,159** Followers

2. Who is the target audience?

- Start-ups operating in health/wellness/MedTech.
- Larger companies, who (would like to) work with (health) start-ups (pharma, medical devices manufacturers).
- Service providers who are interested in selling products for start-ups.

3. Do you mainly use conventional (one-to-many), digital (one-to-one and many-to-many) or other personalized forms of marketing communication?

- Newsletter (mailchimp)
- Go to event (not anymore since COVID)
- Traditional media (articles got published)

4. What kind of role has social media in your marketing communications?

- To have public appearance and to share news publicly

5. How important is branding for the organization? Why?

- Less important than a traditional company, however we want to be recognized in the field.

6. Does the company measure the effectiveness of marketing communications? How?

- <https://app.neilpatel.com/en/dashboard>

## APPENDIX 2

### **Upgraded ry Members Questionnaire + Answers:** (Customer/Member satisfaction)

- 1) What do you like the best about Upgraded (customer) service?
- 2) Do you contact or in contact with Upgraded often?
- 3) What is the most valuable thing for you in the membership of Upgraded?
- 4) Will you recommend Upgraded as a stake holder to others?
- 5) What can Upgraded do to make your membership even more beneficial?  
Suggestions?

### **Huoleti Oy/Kindfull.io – Carita Savin (Consent to publish)**

- What do you like the best about Upgraded (customer) service?  
-I'm not using Upgraded services at all at the moment. Focusing on the market in USA.
- Do you contact or in contact with Upgraded often?  
-No
- What is the most valuable thing for you in the membership of Upgraded?  
-Cannot say or think of anything now.
- Will you recommend Upgraded as a stake holder to others?  
-Yes.
- What can Upgraded do to make your membership even more beneficial?  
Suggestions?  
-To find more innovation competition, to gain more visibility, SOTE is making a mess right now so Upgraded should tie the districts with national guidelines and provide assistance and bring ICT systems together and also help different start-ups more.

### **Popit – Teemu Piirainen (Consent to publish)**

- What do you like the best about Upgraded (customer) service?  
-Web seminars, press release sharing

- Do you contact or in contact with Upgraded often?  
-Very seldom, maybe once in 6 months.
- What is the most valuable thing for you in the membership of Upgraded?  
-Not sure.
- Will you recommend Upgraded as a stake holder to others?  
-Yes, and not sure.
- What can Upgraded do to make your membership even more beneficial?  
-Share more info – contact more often – listen to members needs more often.  
Because not sure why Upgraded exists in a first place, what is the role of Upgraded when there are so many of start-ups. That is why I'm not too sure about recommending it to others.

**Smart Break – Johan Boholm (Consent to publish)**

- What do you like the best about Upgraded (customer) service?  
-I do not use any of Upgraded's services and I can't say anything about their customer service also because I was never contacted by them before. It was nice that you contacted me.
- Do you contact or in contact with Upgraded often?  
-No contact with Upgraded.
- What is the most valuable thing for you in the membership of Upgraded?  
-Sometimes the web seminars they arrange. Otherwise, I can't think of anything.
- Will you recommend Upgraded as a stake holder to others?  
-Yes
- What can Upgraded do to make your membership even more beneficial?  
Suggestions?  
-They should provide and focus also on wellness aspect more. And provide some sort of arrangements and services for people and businesses like me to get in front of right people.

**RangunKorpi Oy – Sampo Pohjola (Consent to publish)**

- What do you like the best about Upgraded (customer) service?

-No special customer service I could think of

- Do you contact or in contact with Upgraded often?

Not much. I tried to contact 6-8 months ago, but nobody answered.

- What is the most valuable thing for you in the membership of Upgraded?

-Member calls and online events

- Will you recommend Upgraded as a stake holder to others?

-Yes, and maybe (Depends on the situation)

- What can Upgraded do to make your membership even more beneficial?

-Upgrade should be more active and provide more info and be engaged for example through Slack.

This kind of reaching out to customers (calling, emails) are good in order to get feedback and should be done more often.

#### **Kamu Health Oy – Seppo Salorinne (Consent to publish)**

- What do you like the best about Upgraded (customer) service?

-Networking is easy through Upgraded

- Do you contact or in contact with Upgraded often?

-Not personally, but usually meet on events and webinars etc.

- What is the most valuable thing for you in the membership of Upgraded?

-Arranged events and exposure

- Will you recommend Upgraded as a stake holder to others?

-Yes, I would recommend

- What can Upgraded do to make your membership even more beneficial?

-Upgraded should provide introduction possibilities to new potential customers and exposure to more clients such as hospitals and other health related organizations and departments. Also, provide more services to start-ups. This kind of customer reaching is good, for both the member and Upgraded.

#### **Joyhaptics Oy – Jussi Tuovinen (Consent to publish)**

- What do you like the best about Upgraded (customer) service?

-Activeness maybe – Pushing things to users – events etc.

- Do you contact or in contact with Upgraded often?

-Not very often

- What is the most valuable thing for you in the membership of Upgraded?  
-Seminars, etc.
- Will you recommend Upgraded as a stake holder to others?  
-No, I'm still trying to understand what Upgraded actually does
- What can Upgraded do to make your membership even more beneficial?  
-Networking events more – new contacts

### **Ninchat – Ville Mujunen (Consent to publish)**

- What do you like the best about Upgraded (customer) service?  
-Connections
- Do you contact or in contact with Upgraded often?  
-Not very often
- What is the most valuable thing for you in the membership of Upgraded?  
-Networking – event discounts
- Will you recommend Upgraded as a stake holder to others?  
-Yes, I would recommend
- What can Upgraded do to make your membership even more beneficial?  
-More understanding of customers and needs to develop services for customers.

### **Time space cloud – Sam Engström (Consent to publish)**

- What do you like the best about Upgraded (customer) service?  
-Not relevant anymore for us personally
- Do you contact or in contact with Upgraded often?  
-Not very often
- What is the most valuable thing for you in the membership of Upgraded?  
-Services regarding healthcare
- Will you recommend Upgraded as a stake holder to others?  
-Yes
- What can Upgraded do to make your membership even more beneficial?  
-More services towards wellbeing - more specialised services.

**Finnadvance – Prateek Singh (Consent to publish)**

- What do you like the best about Upgraded (customer) service?  
-Thoughts relevant to start-ups – events - meetings
- Do you contact or in contact with Upgraded often?  
-Not anymore
- What is the most valuable thing for you in the membership of Upgraded?  
-Platform for contacts
- Will you recommend Upgraded as a stake holder to others?  
-Yes
- What can Upgraded do to make your membership even more beneficial?  
-Personal touch is missing – Competitor like Health Incubator is doing rather well with contacts, so maybe more work is needed towards customer satisfaction.

**Sonant Oy – Laura Styrman (Consent to publish)**

- What do you like the best about Upgraded (customer) service?  
-Member emails – events - Updates
- Do you contact or in contact with Upgraded often?  
-No
- What is the most valuable thing for you in the membership of Upgraded?  
-Chance to get updated about the field of healthcare
- Will you recommend Upgraded as a stake holder to others?  
-Yes
- What can Upgraded do to make your membership even more beneficial?  
-More personal connections and something more for start-ups, services and connections.

**Henkaus Oy – Abhishek Jayaprakash (Consent to publish)**

- What do you like the best about Upgraded (customer) service?  
-Availability.
- Do you contact or in contact with Upgraded often?  
-No

- What is the most valuable thing for you in the membership of Upgraded?  
-Some programs they offer – connections - networks
- Will you recommend Upgraded as a stake holder to others?  
-Yes, I would recommend
- What can Upgraded do to make your membership even more beneficial?  
-Have someone more experienced in the field of healthcare and MedTech. And maybe more international opportunities because it is very difficult in Finland and Europe.

**Compliance Pal – Vlad Stirbu (Consent to publish only in thesis)**

- What do you like the best about Upgraded (customer) service?  
-Low activity lately but sometimes online services and events
- Do you contact or in contact with Upgraded often?  
-Not really
- What is the most valuable thing for you in the membership of Upgraded?  
-Only general info and nothing else at the moment
- Will you recommend Upgraded as a stake holder to others?  
-Yes, and it depends on the situation
- What can Upgraded do to make your membership even more beneficial?  
-No recommendations but maybe more marketing of products and services.

**Kotie Health Oy – Sakari Nikinmaa (Consent to publish)**

- What do you like the best about Upgraded (customer) service?  
-Community in general but not participated much
- Do you contact or in contact with Upgraded often?  
-Not really
- What is the most valuable thing for you in the membership of Upgraded?  
-Events is a key for being a member
- Will you recommend Upgraded as a stake holder to others?  
-Yes, I would recommend
- What can Upgraded do to make your membership even more beneficial?

-Newsletter already – more info availability – good to have focus content – more according to member’s needs – special speakers on specific topics – more personal engagement – more successful companies involved, which could be beneficial for the whole community.

**Patient Sky – Joanna Asikainen (Consent to publish)**

- What do you like the best about Upgraded (customer) service?  
-Not using a lot of their services, only checking newsletter sometimes
- Do you contact or in contact with Upgraded often?  
-No
- What is the most valuable thing for you in the membership of Upgraded?  
-I’m not being active so no usage
- Will you recommend Upgraded as a stake holder to others?  
-Yes
- What can Upgraded do to make your membership even more beneficial?  
-More networking – more contacts – more personal interactions with members and partners to know about their needs and wants.

**Cerenion/Metavisual – Jukka Kotelainen (Consent to publish)**

- What do you like the best about Upgraded (customer) service?  
-Solutions - responsiveness
- Do you contact or in contact with Upgraded often?  
-Once in a while
- What is the most valuable thing for you in the membership of Upgraded?  
-Issues solutions – suggestions for healthcare members
- Will you recommend Upgraded as a stake holder to others?  
-Yes, I would recommend
- What can Upgraded do to make your membership even more beneficial?  
-More events and projects, looking forward to that.

**Velbi – Stefan Cave (Consent to publish)**

- What do you like the best about Upgraded (customer) service?

-Community – events - networks

- Do you contact or in contact with Upgraded often?  
-Only on Slack sometimes, otherwise no.
- What is the most valuable thing for you in the membership of Upgraded?  
-Visibility options
- Will you recommend Upgraded as a stake holder to others?  
-Yes, I would recommend
- What can Upgraded do to make your membership even more beneficial?  
-More events and focus on specific areas – Newsletter is too long and it should be more focused – Value added services – more personal sessions with the members – more engagement of community, therefore, proper community.

**(Anonymous publish)**

- What do you like the best about Upgraded (customer) service?  
-Not using Upgraded services at the moment
- Do you contact or in contact with Upgraded often?  
-Not yet
- What is the most valuable thing for you in the membership of Upgraded?  
-Looking for more contacts - investors
- Will you recommend Upgraded as a stake holder to others?  
-Maybe yes
- What can Upgraded do to make your membership even more beneficial?  
-Investor visibility – more personal interaction once in a while to know about Upgraded members and partners.