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The Influence of Marketing Automation on Customer Service

Ly Hoang

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Jyväskylän ammattikorkeakoulu
JAMK University of Applied Sciences

jamk.fi

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Abstract

Marketing has changed immensely since the rise of digitalisation. Direct marketing is not as effective as it was before. The core of digital marketing is now to create personalised and customised contents for the customers. Digital marketing also increases the demand for higher attention for customer service.

Marketing automation serves the needs of the marketer in understanding their customer better to creating customer-personalised contents and approaches. Although marketing automation is being used by companies more and more nowadays, it has not reached a high level of academic attention. Therefore, the research existed with a sole purpose to figure out how marketing automation works and how it affects customer service. The research would hopefully act as a base for the company's application to their own context.

The research was carried out with qualitative method, using semi-structured interviews. Interviewees were experienced specialists in marketing and were working in companies that utilized marketing automation. Qualitative content analysis was implemented to conclude the findings.

The study reveals the benefits and threats of marketing automation regarding its influence to customer service. It considered the customer's perspective of automation. Main findings revolved around the implementation of the software in companies, its impact on their customer service, customer's perception of marketing automation and competency advantages. Contrary opinions were raised, however, it was resulted from each company's marketing automation strategy.

Keywords/tags (subjects)
Marketing, marketing automation, digital marketing, customer service, customer insight

Miscellaneous

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1 Introduction

From holistic view to the focus of this thesis

The term Digital Marketing was initially introduced among the 1990s. The computerized age started with the advance invention of the Web 1.0 platform, which enables users to search for the data they needed, yet did not permit them to share this data over the web. Up until then, advertisers worldwide were uncertain of the digital era. They didn't know whether their strategies would work since the web had not yet observed far reaching arrangement. (Monnappa, 2015.)

Google was founded in 1998 and rapidly started to grow, introducing products like AdWords, allowing promotions to appear at the top or to one side of user's search results, and AdSense - which is a cost-per-click advertising plan. (Our history in details, Google archive.) Google realized the benefit of the content they receive and they analyse it to create target advertisement based on the search of the users, which soon make them the leading marketing platform in the world.

Social networks started to rise. Facebook was one of the pioneers and soon dominated. It changed the way people communicate. Many businesses realized the new potential marketing platform to promote their products and services. (Monnappa, 2015.) Since then, it is becoming more and more obvious that companies must digitalize themselves and be up-front in social media platforms that their customers use.

However, the customers now exist everywhere and digital channels make it more challenging to serve their needs. Instead of coming to the company office asking for support, the customer started to bring their problem online, and they look forward to quick and helpful response. Giving clients quality experiences turned out to be an economical, competitive advantages with financial benefit for businesses. With the advancement in digital communication, the service

providers have to strategies they service around the customers. (Fornell, Mithas, Morgeson, & Krishnan 2006; Gustafsson & Johnson 2003)

The worldwide change in customer service and marketing strategy provoked marketing automation to emerge. Marketing automation is a so-called artificial intelligence with the ability to process high-speed decision making at any time during an interaction. It enables marketer to track their customer behavior to collect customer insight and other customer-related data. It performs automated actions on various different communication platforms such as emails, social media. In addition, it provides insights to search engine search trend to give the marketer a base to optimize their marketing strategy. (Grossberg 2016, 20-26.)

Apparently, marketing automation seems to be related a great deal to the understanding of the customer. They provide the marketer with intelligence about their customers. Consequently, the marketer is able to provide their customers with quality service. There are a lot of blog posts and articles whose contents revolve around how marketing automation can improve the quality of customer service. However, the majority of which are written from a subjective view or for sale purpose. Surprisingly, there is not any valid analytical research done on this topic. In fact, there are some case studies on the phenomenon, yet it only analyzed from the perspective of one particular company. For example, Mohammad (2011) conduct a research about a similar topic within the banking context in the United Arab Emirates, in which he wrote: “Most of the automated factors have no direct relationship with customer commitment, but an indirect one through customer trust and delight. “However, he did not directly address customer service in this research.

Given the realization, the researcher was provoked a curiosity towards the topic of how marketing automation affects customer service. As one of the pioneers, the researcher would like to address as many aspects as possible of its influence. Therefore, the thesis will be focusing on figuring out how market-

ing automation helps the marketers to understand and serve the customer better, how the customers perceive marketing automation and does marketing automation actually help the business in creating competitive advantages with their competitors.

Motivation for this research

Personal motivation

As mentioned above, the motivation of this thesis came from the fact that there has not been any in-depth research about the influence of marketing automation on a company's level of customer service. This thesis is expected to open the scope of the subject, providing more understanding on the algorism, effectiveness and drawbacks of the trending marketing tool.

Moreover, this research will hopefully provide the author with solid knowledge and practical studies about digital marketing, marketing automation and different aspects of customer service, customer satisfaction and customer experience. The learnings will become a valid base for the author to develop further into the marketing career.

Reader-oriented motivation

The study is expected to serve as a theoretical base for future companies who seeks to apply Automation Marketing in their own context. As the research is done in an international scope, it is not imposed to any individual type of business and can be adjusted according to the aim of marketing automation implementation of the company.

As for companies that have already been implementing marketing automation, the research would provide meaningful view from different sides affected by the use of this software. Consequently, it may deliver comparable perspectives for the companies to examine.

Research objectives and questions

The study is put in an international context as the author would like to gain an overall knowledge of how the customer view Marketing Automation. The goal of the thesis is to inspect the influence of marketing automation on customer service. However, the performance of Marketing, in general, affects the customers as well as the operation of the company. As a result, the study wishes to deliver the perspectives of both sides. The research objective is raised, and two research questions, whose answers would support the achievement of the research objectives, are set, based on the initial aim.

The research objective:

- To find out in which way marketing automation affects customer services.

The research questions:

1. In which way does marketing automation affect the customers, from the point of view of a marketer?
2. How do the customers perceive marketing automation?
3. How does marketing automation benefit the business in serving their customer, in compare with their competitor?

Structure of the thesis

This thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 is the introduction to the thesis with background, motivation to the research and to set the objective that guide the flow of the thesis. Chapter 2 is literature review, in other words, theoretical review. This chapter is where the author presents all the findings of theoretical knowledge about the subject. It includes definition to various terms used in digital marketing, the concepts of digital marketing, marketing automation, customer insight and customer service. Finally, previous research

about the relationship between marketing automation and customer service is presented. The aim of the second chapter is to form a base of what is known about the subject, providing the author the knowledge to develop in the next chapters. Chapter 3 discussed about the methodology of this research, in which the author covers the validity and credibility of the method chosen to investigate the matter, research procedure, analysis process of the data collected and information about the informants participated in the research. The analyzed data and material are then display and explained in chapter 4. Interviews were carried out with 7 marketers and entrepreneurs whose companies utilizes marketing automation. Their opinions and perspectives are systematically presented in this chapter. Finally, chapter 5 includes critical discussion of the author about the result in relation with the previous theoretical knowledge. This chapter is also the answers to the research questions and a reflection on the achievement of research objectives. Limitation is also mentioned, followed by suggestions for similar research in the future.

2 Literature Review

Kim (2015) stated that literature review is an essential part in a dissertation, which is conducted with the aim to sharpen the focus of the topic being research as well as it introduces to the reader about the topic and all the research that has been done in similar field. In addition, literature review provides a base knowledge for the author to compare and contrast previous knowledge and the learnings that are further found.

The scope of this research is around the influence of marketing automation to customer service and brand loyalty, therefore, several definition and previous findings on this particular topic will be summarised.

Marketing automation is a part of digital marketing whose aim is to automate online marketing action, thus it is crucial to firstly understand what digital marketing means in a holistic view. The definition of customer service, customer loyalty, and marketing automation and how they are linked are then reviewed. There are several articles written by experienced marketers and journalists concerning its influence and its imperative role in building the brands nowadays. Many case studies have also been conducted by marketing agencies such as HubSpot and Marketo in order to validate the importance of it and to demonstrate its practice. In general, however, surprisingly few professional in-depth research has been done in regards of marketing automation or its influence on any aspect of marketing strategy as well as the performance of business. Therefore, the researcher adapted a sense that marketing automation is a relatively new topic in the field of Marketing, rising during the shift from offline marketing to online and digital marketing.

2.1 Digital Marketing

Marketing, the term itself is wide enough to make researches out of it, to actually gain deeper understanding of how it is done to effectively influence the

sales of a product and targeted customer. According to Kotler (2009) Marketing is defined, in a simple rephrase, as the method of learning humans' needs in order to profitably creating the value that overlaps their desires. Therefore, marketing is either about making people want things or making things people want, which can be processed using various methods, such as offline/online, direct/indirect. (6.)

However, the traditional marketing methods such as interruptive ads, cold calling are becoming old-school when businesses are seeking for new methods that are more focused on the customers' needs and wants; in order to improve their experience with the product and service. Digital Marketing concerns the core values of marketing in digital-based platforms, with focal point on digitally empowering customers, be parts of the conversations of creating what the people love. (Chaffrey. D et al, 2012.)

The whole concept of marketing is broad, containing great amount of practices, Digital Marketing management is a part of the field focused on customer-centric online based designs, methods and strategies of doing effective marketing.

Main concepts

It's agreed that a wide subject as Digital Marketing is challenging to actually gain a dimensional concept. There are many concepts suggested by different researchers and each of them contains different highlights that should take part in what conceptionalise Digital Marketing.

However, Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick (2012) are probably the authors that have managed to conduct the most overall and solidly related to other marketing terms, specifically the Marketing Mix. In the book Digital Marketing strategy, implementation and practice, the authors mentioned and relate between marketing mix and digital marketing, as in what way they support and rely on one another theoretically. (258-260.)

The first reference to the 4Ps elements of marketing dates back to 1960 by Jerome McCarthy and it created an evolution in how marketers defined and categorized marketing strategy and implementation. The 4Ps had been the based concepts until 1981 when Booms and Bitner proposed three more additional elements that might have finalized the main key concepts of marketing mix. (ibid.)

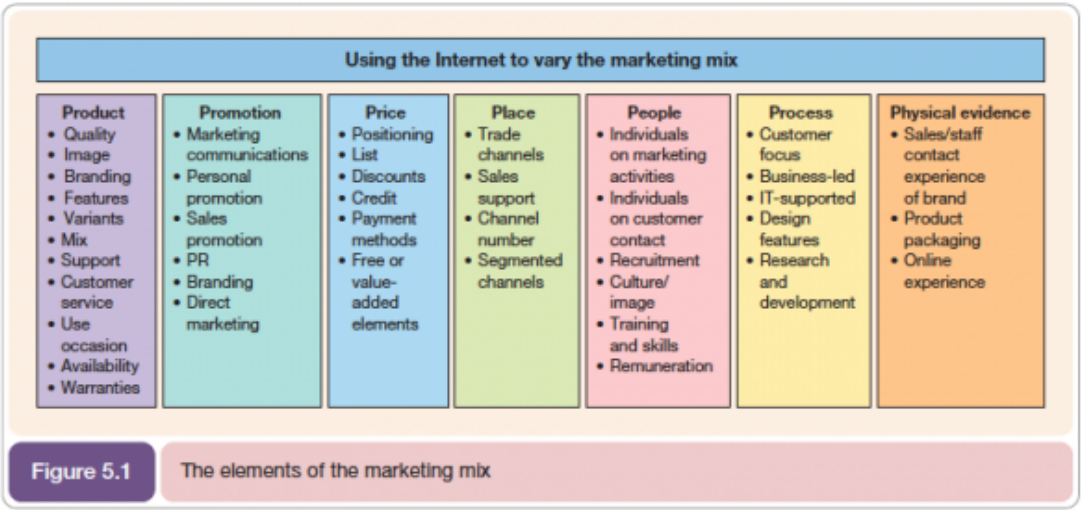

Figure 1. The elements of Marketing Mix (Chaffrey. D et al., 2012)

Overall, the 7Ps have concluded all the aspects recommended the marketers to consider when launching a new product/service or innovation. Moreover, not only before launching a product but even after that, the producers can also apply these elements to keep track of the performance of the product to examine changes should it is needed. (ibid.)

In 1990, Lautenborn suggested the 4Cs based on 4Ps, but from the perspective of the buyers. Once again the marketing mix got improved, in a way that it integrates the customers in the work flow, auditing the product from their point of view. First of all is *Customer needs and wants:* a product is sold only when the customer has desire for it, in other words, the company should understand thoroughly the fascination of their clients in order to offer accordingly. Secondly is *Cost*: many things could interfere the decision of a customer when considering whether to purchase a product. However, cost is either an opportunity or a burden, which prevents the customer from getting the product.

Therefore, it is important for the company to set up strategy to lower the cost as reasonable as possible as to increase the selling. Thirdly, *Convenience*: it is not only about the ease of use of the product, but it's also about how simple it can be to access in order to buy the product. Convenience comes into the process of searching for the information of the product, the availability in choice, in suggestions, and the simplicity in purchase steps. Finally came *Communication*: if traditional marketing is about one-sided communication, the new era of marketing requires a dialog. It is all about the customer's satisfaction when they can actually speak to the producer, which gains bonus points to the company as well as it builds a trust worthy relationship between the company and the clients. (Chaffrey. D et al, 2012.)

It can easily be noticed that the new era of marketing involves great amount of digitalization and customer-centred design. That how customer positively views a company enhances its reputation and availability in the market. Therefore, it was not a surprise when Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2012) linked tightly the concepts of Marketing Mix with Digital Marketing. The marketing mix is a theoretical structure that marketing strategy was build based on it; since it facilitates burdens between communication and actions, it supports marketer and provide them the common tongue to speak. Moreover, should the complication arise, the marketing department would know where to rely on in order to make changes and apply innovations. Though it has been around for a certain amount of time, Digital Marketing is still dealing with the people's new ways of utilizing digital materials. The way we use social media is not the same with just 5 years ago. As a result, given the solid based which have been accurately applied practiced for decades, Digital Marketing can be able to stand as a part of Marketing in general, when also be a crucial new fields to work on.

In conclusion, Marketing Mix and Digital Marketing have close relation to one another. All of the definitions of Marketing Mix are used to apply on Digital Marketing, with major adjustments so that it is appropriately implemented on digital platforms and performances.

Content marketing

As self-explanatory as it is, content marketing is the content used to create a marketing campaign. The aim of it is to promoting brand awareness, creating or enhancing customer engagement to increase the demand of the product or service and in the end, to make sales (Holliman & Rowley, 2014).

Even though content marketing is used in both offline and online promotion, digital marketing actually popularized the term and up until now, it is associated solely with digital marketing. Content marketing includes photos, video, animation, online books or guide, webinars, infographics, blog or social media posts. Social media marketing relies heavily on content marketing as it is the platform for the company to communicate and enhance brand awareness with their customers. (Järvinen & Taiminen 2015, 165.)

Sales funnel framework

The way toward assessing a potential customer begins with separating people or businesses into various segments in view of their level of probability to be changed into deal. Haen & Poel (2013) have made a sales funnel dedicated to the customer obtaining process.

Figure 2. Sales funnel framework (Järvinen & Taiminen 2015, 166).

Haen & Poel (2013) suggested a framework that every person will go through before becoming a customer of a company, which means they go from suspects to deals. The framework makes it easier for the marketer to divide and aim their strategy accordingly. Clearly, each of the phase in the funnel requires different type of approach and communicate. This is highly related to the production of content marketing and other types of marketing. From this point onwards, these terms will be use to define different group of customers.

2.2 Customer service – Definition and importance

Definitions

Customer satisfaction is defined by Hansemark & Albinsson (2004) as a customer's overall emotion towards a product or service they receive, which is influenced by the gap between what they expect to get and what they are given (40). Kotler (2012) believed that this emotion could be either delight or disappointment, however, in order to indicate the successful performance of the product or service, it should always be the former (32). As a result, the fulfilment of a customer's certain expectations is known as the achievement of customer satisfaction. Some elements that affect customer satisfaction are the quality of the service, the quality of the product and the environment where the interaction between the company and the customer occurs; for example, the positive attitude and helpfulness of the staff, accurate and punctual billing, affordable and competitive pricing and quick response to customer's reactions (Hokanson 1995, 16).

Brand loyalty or customer loyalty is the long-term committed relationship between the customer and the company developed mainly from continuous customer satisfaction (Hoyer & MacInnis 2008, 258-259). Though it is difficult to be measured, Anderson & Jacobsen (2000) stated that a customer's loyalty can be indicated by their either maintain or increase in product or service purchase from the company (55). Delighted and repeating customers is one of the

most important asset to the development of the company. Therefore, to satisfy the customer as well as to provoke them to come back and build the loyalty is no longer a choice but it is the company's inevitable responsibility. As the company develops their customers in numbers, the customer involves in building the company's reputation and support them in sustaining and enhancing their competitiveness in the market. (Bansal & Gupta 2001, 3-5.)

Customer retention, according to Business Dictionary, is an assessment conducted by business to evaluate the effectiveness of its service or the quality of its product. High customer retention indicates that the customer is satisfying with the product and service provided and has the tendency to repeat their purchase. High customer retention also leads to the decrease the time spend on customer acquisition, since it is easier to sell the product to someone whom the marketer already knows. It is imperative to note that customer retention starts from the first interaction between the customer and the company and lasts until the end of the relationship between two parties. (Galetto 2017.)

Customer service, overall, is the leading reason that influences the level of a customer's satisfaction, besides the product or service itself. According to Investopedia's definition, it is the process of making sure that the customer is satisfied with their purchasing experience. Therefore, the company should be certain that the customer's problems and queries are all well resolved by the coherent system as well as friendly and helpful staff. The aim of customer service is to make sure that the customer is delighted and likely to consider maintaining or coming back for more purchase. Customer service occurs any time there is interaction between the customer and the company regardless of forms, such as through phone call, online service or self-service. Thus, pre-purchase, during purchase and post-purchase all include it. Similar to customer satisfaction, customer service is hard to quantify but easy to indicate level of success based on the reaction of the customer throughout the purchase. It is the most important asset that decides if the company succeeds or fails because it is the key leading factor for the customer's repeating purchase. If the customer is delighted by the customer service, they are likely to consider

returning even if the product is average. (Customer service, Investopedia & Doyle 2016.)

There is a tight relationship between customer service and customer satisfaction, and in the end, customer satisfaction is what strongly affects customer retention or brand loyalty. Thus, in marketing and sales, customer service is the priority in every individual transaction.

Customer service has been changing rapidly since the digital era. Customer starts to have access to the service 24/7 and they are increasingly demanding for more attention. Domestic business has customer throughout the country and international business has customer from all over the world. Consequently, the customer is not able to present at the company's office desk whenever they are in need. Technology has changed the way they get in touch with the company and they expect business to also emerge actively on the Internet. At the same time, business is also expected to provide their customer with full and simple digital support. Customer service nowadays should also revolve around the customer, enhancing their feeling of being in the center of the attention and that their opinion and problem matter. (Solomon 2016.)

Experienced marketer Morgan (2016) realized that modern customers desire to be kept up to date only with an appropriate amount of information; in addition, they would like to be able to help themselves first before reaching for support and even in such cases, the interaction between them and the business must be quick and personalized. According to Dixon, Ponomareff, Turner & DeLisi (2016), with the help of the Internet, customer is able to solve simple problem on their own using the Internet or any supportive platform provided by the business. This improvement is saving the customer service plenty of time. However, it, in fact, is bringing in some significant challenge: the customer contacts the business with difficult issues and they highly expect it to be solved quickly and efficiently. Business sometimes can no longer decide on the type of interaction or channel of communication they are comfortable with.

Taylor (2014) quoted Zonozi saying that the problem communicated and solved using the channel that the customer prefers and the switch of channel is not recommended in usual case. Business needs to convince their customer that they are capable of solving the problem and they have full knowledge of their product, service, industry and they are willing to share it. In order to prove such will, business utilizes platform where they can share a large amount of information, such as Frequently Asked Questions platform or create a blog to share various type of content that are helpful to their customer. (Taylor, 2014.)

The past	The future
Technology makes experience worse	Technology makes experience better
Open 9-5 x5	Open 24/7
Company is in control of where the interaction happens	Customer is in control of where the interaction happens
Customer repeats information on every channel	Company knows information from every channel
Call center volume is high	Mobile messaging volume is high
Customer finds content	Content finds customer
Customer fixes product	Product fixes product
Agent works in ten systems	Agent works through one system
Customer service has no budget	Customer service gets marketing's budget

Figure 3. Morgan's prediction of the evolution of Customer Service. (2016)

Bailey, Baines, Wilson & Clark (2009) suggested that the performance of customer service is much likely depend on the marketing before it goes to sales. In fact, Beatty, Mayer, Coleman, Reynolds & Lee (1996) reported that marketing is the initial team that analyses the profile of their customers as for who

they are, what they do, what their preference is and passes the information to the sales and customer service team. The sales and customer service team then decide on their approach or reaction with the customers. Consequently, the base of quality customer service lies in how the customer insight is investigated by the marketing team. Bitner, Brown & Meuter (2000) demonstrated that in the pass, conducting customer insight was a time-consuming task and it involves risks that the data might not have been correct. However, with the advancement of technology nowadays and especially the creation of marketing automation, it has become easier and more accurate when gathering the data of the customer. Customer insight simplifies the process of customer segmentation.

Quality customer service demands high intelligence of customer insight. It is imperative, thus, to know and understand the customer in advance before getting into contact with them. Customer insight also helps businesses to be well-prepared and comprehend their customer if they approach them.

Identifying customer behaviors

The shift from push marketing to pull marketing has created great improvement in identifying the customers' behaviour.

Push marketing is the art of introducing the product and the company in a way that hopefully would attract the potential customers. Push marketing requires deep knowledge about the customer, such as their cultural background, social classes, spending and life style, so that the marketer can narrow down the customer segmentation in order to track down correctly how they think, what they do and when they do it. Therefore, identifying customer behavior is a crucial part of effective marketing, however, it takes a lot of time and might end up bringing the wrong product to the wrong customer. (Dowling 2004, 266.)

When push marketing is becoming more and more challenging as well as cost-ineffective, a new concept known as pull marketing, an indirect marketing approach to the customers, started to rise as it brings tremendous advantages for both the marketer and the customer. The new concept of marketing suggests a whole new way of identifying the customer behavior, which relatively based on the rules of that applied in push marketing. The idea of the concept is no longer to make the customer want the product, but more to make the right product to the customer who wants it. (ibid.)

In the Inbound Methodology created by HubSpot Academy, it was proved that only the customer segmentation is not enough, it only provides a narrow look at the group of the customer that the company should focus on marketing to; however, it's still too wide to actually know what that customer group would likely to act. Therefore, HubSpot built a new concept called buyer persona, which helps the marketer draw a specific customer with name, age, characteristics which base on the common points in the customer segmentation. According to the new buyer persona, the company would be more confident in reaching this exact customer. As a result, the needs, wants, motivations and desires of the customer are set crystal clear, which simplify the next steps in the marketing strategy since they already know what is likely to attract this customer.

Marketing strategy are no longer to push the customer to buy a product, but more to raise the motivational needs inside them that bring them into purchasing a product. The new generation understands that nowadays, knowledge is what important and the customer appreciates being given educational information upon their needs. Understanding this thought, educational approach to introduce the product are being implemented in the customer buying journey, teaching them about the product before actually give them an opportunity to take a closer look at it. (Prescott, 2012.)

In conclusion, the inbound marketing offered the marketer to identify the customer behaviour in a different way. The buyer persona, research on their needs,

motivations and desires strongly narrow down to the suitable customers so that the marketer are able to predict the thoughts and actions of their potential clients.

Conception of customer insight

"*Before you can change customers' minds, you have to uncover what they're thinking"*

- Naomi R. Henderson –

According to Nottingham Insight (2016), customer insight is the in-depth truth about the customer resulted from their experience, actions towards the related tasks, it's the most direct, high in personal level of marketing. Customer insight is more than just a simple research, it's focused on the big picture of the customer, get to know them personally and interpret the "why" that leads them to buy a product and the "what" as in what they would like and eager to purchase, therefore it provides a multi-dimensional view on the customer.

There are two main reasons why a customer insight is conducted. First of all, obtaining better understanding about the customer would enable the marketer to act according to their expectation. It's always crucial that the company clearly interprets the customer's wishes so that they can make product adjustments to meet their customer needs. In addition, these actions which focus on the customers would give the company positive reputation among the people. A successful customer insight should be able to figure out the issues that can be tackled by the company, in order to increase the customer satisfaction, to even both the needs and the provider and to know where the customer is likely to communicate with the company. Secondly, getting access to the customer insight would support the company in learning the customer far better that the company can create strategic approach to change the mind of the customer, talk them into buying a product. (Klepic, 2014.)

An remarkable example of how a customer insight can bring success to a company is the case of Pamper. They soon found out, earlier than all other same industry companies, that what the parents would desire to have, is the ability to sleep through the night without being woken up by the crying of their children, and the worry-free about their children infection resulting from a moist diaper. Though many companies had been aware of it, Pamper was the pioneering company to concentrate all of its time and research on the innovation of a leak-free and extra dry-layer diaper, which all moms' desire to have. (Edwards, 2013.)

Customer insight framework

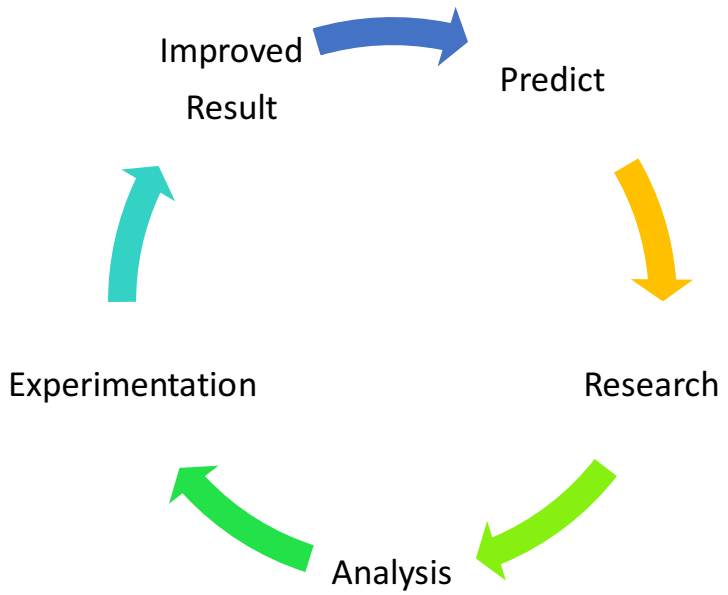

Figure 4. Framework of Customer Insight (Pilkenton, 2009)

There is no official framework of how an effective customer framework should be proceeded, however, based on the common view of how to create strategic customer insight strategy, a general framework has been carried out by the author, with values and reasons for the existence of each step. The very first step is to plan a thorough research on the customer, mostly about their behaviours, thought, tendency towards the product. The research plan should be

able to demonstrate the customer both from the past and the present, in order for the smooth flow in the whole process, especially it simplify the second step, making the result more valuable and trust worthy. Analysis comes second, when the analysts interpret the trend of behaviours and actions of the customers as in finding the answer for the two questions ”What are our customers doing?” and ”Why are they doing it?” A strong analysis contains all the information that would be handed over to the marketer with clear presentation about the customer, with their strengths/weaknesses, wishes, desires or any new discovery which has never been tested out in the past. The marketer would then look at the analysis, build a coherently structured marketing strategy, which then will be experimented among the customers, whose reactions will be observed for future predictions. (Ozeritskaya, 2015.)

The value of the results lies in its being actionable for the marketer since it provides deeper and more thorough understanding about not only the current customers but also the ones that have to come. In addition, not only the outcome is focused on high profit marketing campaign, but it also supports the company in building improvements in strategy of other departments, not just narrow down in marketing. In the end, the customer insight maintains the sustainable relation between the company and the customers, it informs the company when and how to act in order to keep the customer satisfaction at high level, shaping confident reputation and financial benefits.

In conclusion, numbers and statistics are important in marketing strategy, yet the customer insight is what reaches the customer’s mind-set, providing reasons for their behaviours, and support the marketer to predict the customer trend also in the near future, with the aim to help increase sales benefit and to bring innovated products to the hands of the customer.

2.3 Marketing Automation

Automation provides the technology that supports businesses to plan, execute and gauge the performance of their marketing strategies. It helps them to increase productivity and improve efficiency in marketing tasks. (Rogerson, 2016.) According to Lunk (2015), marketing automation was originally used by enterprise or technological business. However, in the last years, marketing agencies started to implementing it into their marketing strategies. Up until today, Rogerson reported that there was an increase of 11 times in the number of companies using marketing automation compared to 2011. 1 out of 2 companies is using automation technology in their marketing tasks. Marketing automation was the biggest trend in 2016, followed by content marketing, which is also supported by marketing automation (Chaffey, 2016).

Definition and implementation

Marketing automation was introduced and gained popularity the first time by Little in his presentation in 2001. He defined marketing automation as the process of analysing a customer or a potential customer based on their activities on a company's digital platforms. This process would create a personalised profile of each customer and segment them into different categories. The results are then showed to the marketer for further marketing decision. Sometimes, the marketing automation system is fully automated that it can make its own marketing decision then analyses the trend and consequences resulted from it and improves itself. However, all of the data and actions carried out by the system is reported to the marketer. Marketing automation is also utilised in daily marketing actions that are repetitive and time consuming such as sending emails or managing current campaign (Imhoff & Loftis 2012). Therefore, marketing automation can be categorised into two major functions: when it is used to personally investigate the customer and when it is used to automate repetitive tasks.

The core of marketing automation lies in the ability to personalise and customise. It provides a customer's personalised information so that the marketer can customise their strategy. (Järvinen & Taiminen, 2015.) This function is crucial to a marketer as it supports in the differentiation process of the company.

In fact, marketing automation corresponds with the daily marketing tasks but entails automation in order to optimise the accuracy and productivity (Sandell, 2016). Marketing insights and data analyzed manually risk of unnoticeable mistakes. These mistakes may result in the loss of customer or the decrease of service quality. Marketing automation is a technology that produces stringent set of procedure, increasing accuracy of the result. Consequently, it terminates human error in the process. One advantages of automation, suggested by Onuonga (2016), being the reduce in limitation of productivity caused by sick leaves, forgetfulness, stress and other mistakes potentially made by human. In addition, marketing automation brings simplicity into the workflow and helps marketer to optimize the marketing strategy base on precisely calculated data.

Some examples of marketing automation implementation are provided by Irina Heimbach, Kostyra & Hinz (2014) for further understanding of the term:

- A restaurant franchise's mobile application would automatically change its content based on the location, weather and time of the day. If it is a sunny morning in London, the application users in the city may receive different offers or coupons for tea or ice-cream. On the other hand, if it is a rainy afternoon in Helsinki, the users may be informed of offers for coffee or hot chocolate since it is likely to be a more appropriate choice from the perspective of the customers in such situation.

- A customer creates an account in a cinema's website. Based on the profile she creates and the recent movies she watches, the system can then analyse her hobby, favourite actors or genres of movies and send her an automated email when an upcoming movie is out which might fit her preference. (129-130.)

- Newsletters are sent to more than 300.000 categorised customers about a retail brand's latest designs and offers. These categories are based on the customer's purchase history, activities on the site and subscription type.

Framework of marketing automation

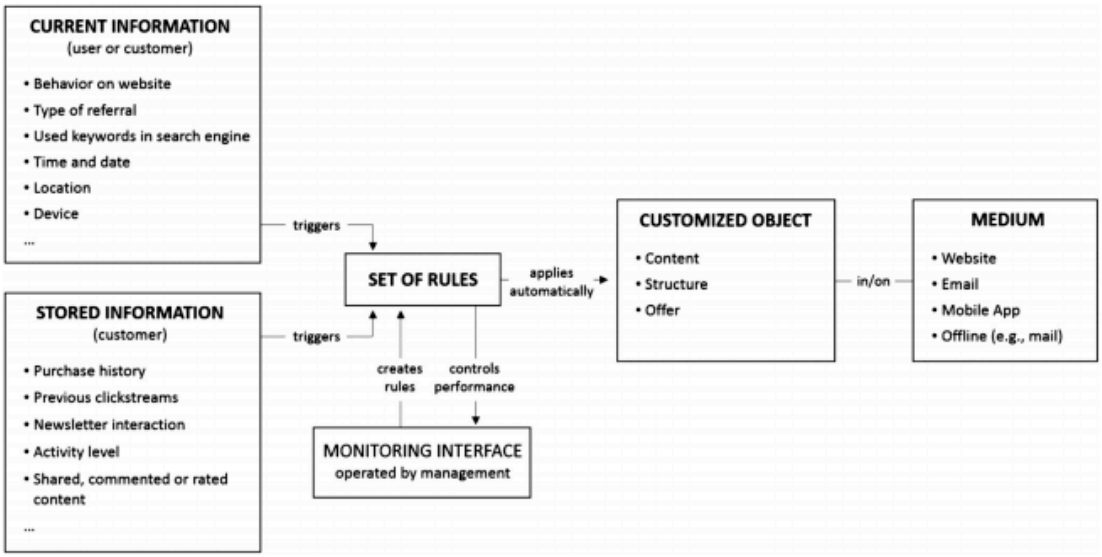

Figure 5. Framework of marketing automation (Heimbach et al. 2014, 131)

Marketing automation software

Marketing automation is suggested to be involved in customer relationship management (hereafter CRM). In fact, it is one of the most important elements that decides how the marketer should approach and communicate with their potential customer as well as maintain their current ones. (Imhoff & Loftis 2012.) CRM refers to a company's management system whose aim is to develop better interaction between the company and their customers to improve customer retention rate and increase sale revenue. Marketing automation provides a solid base of the customer's history with the company so that the marketer can

be able to draw strategic marketing campaign to enhance the relationship. (Bain & Company guide, Customer relationship management.)

Marketing departments used to struggle with not only a large amount of work and information about the product and their customers they have to take in everyday but also the repetitive tasks that are time-consuming yet very important to be well processed. However, marketing automation was introduced and since then, it has been the solution for all these issues. The term refers to a software platform that comes with functions to handle multiple tasks in one platform, automatically. The technology enables the platform to schedule the events, segments among different subjects, manage the database, tracking the workflows and analyses the data input into it. As a result, the existence of the marketing automation software helps the marketer to release heavy or repeated work, giving them spare time to develop new idea, innovation and strategy.

In general, marketing automation supports marketers in performing the following actions:

- Email/mobile marketing: the software enables the marketer to set up where and when should an email or a message be sent to the consumers, which closely according to their stage on the buyer's journey, so that the customer is reached and communicate in time for their needs. More importantly, email marketing softwares are able to track the mail opening rate as well as the number of people who decide to click through the URL link provided in the email.
- Landing page: whose purpose is to capture the personal information of the potential customers. (What is a Landing Page?, Unbounce)
- Thank you page: a site appears after the landing page to show appreciation to the information that the customer has provided and to suggest further information on the service. (What Is A Thank You Page?, AWeBer, 2015)

- A/B testing, also known as split testing: evaluate the effectiveness of two versions of webpages or emails by comparing their performance. (The Complete Guide to A/B Testing, vwo)
- CRM integration: marketing automation software enables business to store and categorize all the information of their customer. (Waid, 2013)
- Social media marketing: for example, automated posts on certain dates and times on social media and present the performance of each publish.
- Data analysis: This is probably the largest, most sophisticated and important function that a marketing automation software offers. It interprets all the data of different fields and performance and analyse it to create a combined data according to the user's command, which saves time and human resource for both the company and the researcher.

In the modern and customer centric marketing era, marketing automation is becoming an imperative assistant tool that possesses the ability to record, manage and create a rich profile of their targeted purchasers. With these essential knowledge and learning, marketer can capture vital opportunities to provide the right information to the right person at the right time. The way that marketing automation frameworks can connect into CRM frameworks likewise permits marketers to communicate transparently with sales and to provide them with thorough intelligence about a prospects to turn them into a customer. Since the platform where all information and campaigns are made and managed, marketing automations enables marketers to examine the performance and customer reaction. Once the marketing automation framework is associated with the CRM framework, marketers are then ready to perceive how their promotion is influencing the whole sale funnel. (Moth, 2013.)

2.4 The relationship between (marketing) automation and customer service

There are a lot of research on how technology or information technology involve in creating a quality customer service. Marketing automation is a type of technology that enhances customer relationship management, yet there is not

any research done specifically on marketing automation. Therefore, it should be noted that the following information only looks holistically on how customer service benefits or damaged by technology. The researcher has taken the most related information concerning the topic of this thesis.

Recently, notwithstanding the amount of investment, encouragement and future planning on customer service, many companies have not possessed the capacity to upgrade their customer satisfaction rate (Karimi, Somers & Gupta, 2001). There are a lot of things that comprise customer service, entailing personal interaction, the quality and cost of the product/service – and technology is not always a solution. Automation only takes part in as a supporting or data collecting technology. In addition, it performs repetitive tasks to reduce time waste for marketer. (Sweat & Hibbard, 1999.)

Many firms use technology to create a unique selling point for their product/service or to make sure it matches the targeted customers (Cash, McFarlan, McKenney & Applegate, 1992). Previous research found out that automation takes a role in beneficially changing the customer service. These changes, if managed correctly, enhance customer satisfaction, improve the quality of the product/service, increase productivity and company interface. (Krishnan, Ramaswamy, Meyers & Damien, 1999.) According to Furey (1991), automation brings in convenience for both the marketer and their customers. It also provides service performance information and tactics to increase the integration between business and customers.

Onuonga (2016) predicted that in the next decade, more advancing technology apart from automation will be adopted, which would create different approaches and dedications to the customer in order to encourage sales and financial benefits. Automation has been the focus for the last two decades with the aim to enhance customer relationship management and open more integration between two sides (Chan, 2015).

Now, with the support of automation, marketers can perform better online marketing with analytical and collaborative functions. Consequently, automation enables marketers to provide value-added services to improve customer relationship management. They can create online community for their customers, experience exchanges and personalized service, which is what marketing automation is all about. (Karimi, Somers & Gupta, 2001.)

These technologies are often customizable and they have either direct or indirect influence to customer service. Chan (2015) believes that a customer's experience can be immensely impacted by the fact that the business whether or not has the ability to reach them in time or not. Marketing automation gathers real-time information for the marketer to quickly implement on their customer to prevent deter of customer service or customer relationship later on.

Interaction between customers and the business is the key element resulting in the difference between a satisfactory or poor customer service (Onuonga, 2016). Farheen & Saxena (2016) believe that the only obstacle that prevents marketing automation from performing its best is the inability of the business to integrate sales and marketing with customer service.

3 Methodology

3.1 Overview of research method

The topic of the research is relatively new and there has not been any similar research as far as the author concerns. Thus, it is imperative that the research is conducted coherently and the data and information gathered are thorough enough for further discussion.

The research approach is decided to be a qualitative method done under a semi-structured type of interview. Qualitative research is proved to open up the research topic as it allows the interviewees to flexibly show their attitude and their opinions towards the subject. The goal of this method is to understand the topic more thoroughly from the view of the interviewees, provided their knowledge, experience and personal thoughts. (Kvale 1996 & Laws 2003, 271-287.) Therefore, marketing, more specifically digital marketing is the chosen interviewees' expertise. They will be able to provide valuable and reliable response to the topic.

A semi-structured method is the most suitable for this research. The researcher wanted the interviewees to show their knowledge and opinion towards the topic, however, it would be too broad a result if the interview is conducted without a guideline. On the contrary, if the interview follows a fixed set of questions then the researcher would not have the opportunity to follow up or clarify the answers. Meanwhile, a semi-structured interview is shaped around a set of themes whose questions can be adjusted based on the situation of the interview. In addition, follow up questions are allowed to a certain extend as long as no new topic is raised. (Cassell & Symon 2004, 11-16.)

Closely committed to the research method, the interview revolved around five main themes that looked into the topic of how marketing automation influence customer service in various dimensions, from its impact to the marketers themselves to its impact to their customers and their competitors. Consequently,

the interview reveals a great deal of valuable information which has not been acknowledged, without generating any off-topic opinion.

Informants

The informants are marketers and entrepreneurs working for two main types of companies: companies that have been using marketing automation since it was founded and companies that, at one point, decided to shift from traditional marketing to marketing automation. Consequently, the informants will be able to provide the researcher with a holistic view of how marketing automation affects their business as well as its advantages and disadvantages.

Christophe Gagin is one out of the 3 co-founders of the French start-up Azendoo and today he is the CTO & Customer Success of the company. Christophe has nearly 10 years of experience in various professions such as Marketing, Sales, Customer Success, Customer Care, Software Design and Data Analytics. Azendoo is a mobile and desktop teamwork application whose aim is to provide better and faster collaboration and communication within teams. Azendoo has always been actively using Marketing Automation since the application was launched in 2012.

Noelle Ghanem is currently the Digital Marketing Specialist at the UK's Local Data Company and she has been working for the company for around 2 years. She has a Master’s Degree in Advertising & Design from University of Leeds and used to work as Digital Strategist at Google. Local Data Company was founded in 2003 and is a retail and leisure company. They analyze location and its surrounding environment across the UK in order to provide its clients with the most dimensionally strategic overview of the neighborhood. Local Data Company has been utilizing marketing automation software to support their marketing decisions since 2013.

Lorna Kean has 4 years of experience in Marketing, Communication and Journalism. She had worked for different start-ups before becoming the Editorial Marketing Manager at GlobalWebIndex. GlobalWebIndex is a London-based market research and advertising company specializes in creating their client's customer's profile, digital consumers and other data. GlobalWebIndex has been implementing Marketing Automation in their marketing strategies since it was founded in 2009.

Emma Harris has been working for Triaster since 2000 and currently she is the Operation Director of the company. She was a tax consultant before shifting to sales and marketing. Having been with the company for 17 years, Emma plays an important role in building the Triaster community, thus, she understands thoroughly the operation and marketing strategy of the company. Triaster is a 20 years old business started in London and is a software development company whose responsibility is to optimize business process management (BPM). The company had been relying on traditional marketing when Emma decided to put Marketing Automation into use in early 2016.

Achan Bedi is a Digital Marketing & Marketing Automation Specialist and is now the Marketing Consultant at Concentrate Limited. He has 7 years of experience in sales and marketing and he had executed several marketing plans for both start-ups and large organizations like IBM. Concentrate is the largest marketing agency in New Zealand and Australia, founded in 2004. Their clients are mostly in the technology sector, including top technology brands, start-ups, universities and research organizations. Concentrate replaced their traditional marketing strategies by implementing Marketing Automation software in 2013.

Noora Salminen has been in the Marketing profession for 4 years and currently she is the Inbound Strategist and Content Creator for Aaltonen & Yrjölä Sales Communications Oy. Noora described herself as "Inbound Native" as she has spent her career to learn about digital marketing, specifically inbound marketing. Her strength includes turning business's traditional marketing into inbound

marketing. Aaltonen & Yrjölä Sales Communications Oy is a Finnish start-up marketing agency and it is also one of the first agencies in Finland that specializes in inbound marketing. Therefore, the company has been implementing marketing automation since it was founded in 2012.

Apoorvi Patodia is the Marketing Lead at Impact Hub Singapore. She is in charge of the company's digital marketing activities and she has also been working in Marketing profession for more than 4 years. Impact Hub started in London and has been providing collaboration and innovation for corporates, start-ups and job seekers. Today, Impact Hub has 80 branches all over the world and **Patodia** provided the researcher with Impact Hub Singapore's insights as she is working there.

Contents of the interviews

The semi-structured interview was divided into five themes. The five themes acted as a guide to led the whole interview.

The first theme includes five questions. One general question for the interviewees to introduce themselves and their companies. Four remaining questions aimed to figure out the marketing automation software that they used, how they use it and the background to that decision. The purpose of the questions is for the interviewees to revise the role and responsibilities of marketing automation in their company's marketing strategies.

The second theme discussed how marketing automation influence to the company's customer service. The interviewees were asked to compare and contrast the difference between before and after the implementation of marketing automation. In addition, they were also asked to explain how it helped them clearly shaping their customer insight.

The third theme focused on the customer's attitude and behavior towards marketing automation. The researcher wanted to know if the customer is aware of

marketing automation and if they are, how significantly it will affect them as in the way they view the company. Automation is not always in favor of, therefore, it is crucial to know whether marketing automation positively or negatively impact on the customer and how to avoid negativity.

The fourth theme discussed how marketing automation generally improves a company's competencies with their competitors. The theme looked into the ways that marketing automation supports the company in understanding the customer, in order to deliver the service or product personalized to them as quickly as possible.

The fifth theme concentrated on the drawbacks of marketing automation, in terms of customer service. The researcher would like to find out if there is any disadvantages or limitation to using marketing automation.

Interview procedure

Companies that implementing Marketing Automation were found by the researcher using customer success list published by two largest marketing automation software companies: HubSpot and Marketo. An email is sent to the companies waiting for response. In the email, the researcher introduced herself and her studies, the purpose of the email and overview of the content of the interview, which is to discuss the impact of marketing automation on the contacted company's customer service. The email form can be found in Appendix 1. Approximately 100 emails were successfully sent, however, only 7 marketers decided to be interviewed.

Prior to the interview date, the informants were sent the interview questions via email, and they were also informed that there would be follow-up questions to discuss their answers further. The aim of providing the informants the interview questions in advance is so that they acknowledge the details of the interview and have some time to prepare the answers.

As the informants live all over the world, all of the interviews were conducted using Skype or Google Hangouts. The whole interviews were in an informal and friendly environment and were recorded to their consent for further analysis. The data and information provided by the informants were promised to be used for the research purpose of this thesis only. During the interview, the prepared questions were asked and answers, with occasionally additional follow-up questions if the questions or answers needed to be clarified. All interview sessions were in English, lasted approximately from 25-35 minutes depending on the number of follow-up questions and the length of each informant's answers. It is also noted that no new issue was raised by the follow-up questions, it was only used to clarify the idea of the answer given to the corresponding question.

3.2 Analysis of data

The data collected was analyzed using qualitative content analysis, in particularly based on Schreier's 2012 method. Qualitative content analysis is method that guide the researcher to systematically demonstrate and analyze the meaning of qualitative materials. The method requires the researcher to concentrate on chosen perspective of meaning which identify the general research objectives.

The subject firstly needs to be divided into different coding frames, each of which discusses an aspect of the topic and as a whole they demonstrate the whole idea of it. The data will then be assigned to the frames based on their relation and correspondence with the frames. This step will help reduce the amount of data and reveal the mutuality amongst materials as there are data whose meanings are similar. In addition, it will help shaping an interpretation and description of the whole frame. Thirdly, repeat the second step several times to examine the data making sure they match the frame and no data is left unsorted. (Schreier 2012, 170-181.)

In this thesis, the five themes represent five different frames that contribute to the research of this topic. The first theme is “Why and how marketing automation is used in businesses’ marketing and sales?”, it is to create a background information of the company’s digital marketing strategy and situation. The second theme is “The influence of marketing automation on customer service”, which shapes the general view of the impact and importance of the subject to the interviewees. The next two themes “The improvement of customer insight” and “Customer’s attitude towards marketing automation” are actually subtheme of the second one. However, as the data collected was relative large and focused on two variant of customer service, the researcher decided to keep them apart. The last theme is “Competencies”, the aim of which is to see whether marketing automation contributes to competitive advantages of the company with their competitors. All interviews were transcribed into word document and categorized into pre-defined themes depending on their relation and similarity with the theme. Another similar sequel was carried out in order to make sure the material was fully scanned and the data was segmented corresponding to their meanings.

Consequently, the data has provided the researcher with further perspectives to the topic and has been systematically analyzed to finally conclude an objective overview of the issue. The results are demonstrated by the themes categorized.

4 Result

4.1 Why and how Marketing Automation is used in businesses’ marketing and sales?

All of the interviewees agreed that the main reason their business to put Marketing Automation into use is because the software facilitates the workflow of their digital marketing strategies. One noted that the company saw that tradi-

tional marketing did not work in the era of digitalization and marketing automation is the future of the company. Another mentioned that for some time, the company wanted to adopt inbound marketing principle, but the concept requires a lot of insight to their customers and manually proceeding it would take a lot of time, therefore, they needed a software platform. Marketing Automation is confirmed to have the ability to optimize data collected from different interface between the company and its customer. The data is used to build their customer profile, including their preference, behavior, interests, what they know and what their problem is. The most important thing making Marketing Automation a great toll is the ability to keep all of this information in one place. "We have a lot of data and Marketing Automation helps us to put things in place. We want to get rid of making assumptions, know for a fact where my audience is to create the content or campaign that interests them, their perceptions, lifestyles. Automation helps us implement the knowledge and make sure we continue doing it the right way." Said Keane.

In terms of the company's operation, Aproovi emphasized on how Marketing Automation has created a more transparent workflow and customer intelligence between Sales and Marketing.
In addition, Marketing Automation also gives the Marketing team more freedom with less dependency on other software in testing and implementing new ideas with results carried out in a short period of time.

Marketing Automation software is divided into two different types: one task purpose and multi task purpose. One task purpose soft-wares include software that can perform one kind of marketing automation, such as MailChimp can send automated emails, HootSuite can manage social media performance and Intercom can send automated messages. All of the software come with data analytics. Meanwhile, multi task purpose soft-wares includes software that can perform all tasks regarding marketing automation, including website visitor tracking, email marketing, social media management, data analytics such as HubSpot. All of this information is linked to each other for data analysis. The

interviewees stated that the company usually start with several one task purpose marketing automation soft-wares first before utilizing more complex software like HubSpot. One revealed that in the first phases of marketing automation, there were not much data and information, therefore, it is more simple to use one task purpose software. However, as the business grows, they have more customers and more actions to be taken, "it is really difficult to connect the data to see what happen. Software like HubSpot has everything integrated in one, we have more insight, we know the ROI (return on investment) of our campaign, all in one dashboard, and we can measure the success of it in one place."

Marketing Automation is used in the majority of marketing aspect in a company, provided that it is not one on one interaction or content marketing. Emma Harris said that Triaster uses Marketing Automation to attract the customer to their websites and to retrieve information on keywords to perform better search engine optimization. Others noted that Marketing Automation is also the main tool for social media, email and mobile marketing, for tracking visitor's activities on the company's website, collecting the information by landing pages and call to action. The software develops the company's customer information based on the data collected, analyzing the result of a campaign and provide the marketers return on investment for them to gauge the success. All the phases of marketing strategy is linked together in Marketing Automation software, it informs the marketers constantly about the performance in each phase so that they can adjust the next one.

The informants also emphasized on avoiding sounding like the content or the action is automated. Therefore, for one on one interaction such as customer support or creating content to grab customer's attention, the usage of Marketing Automation should be reduced as much as possible.

4.2 The influence of Marketing Automation on Customer Service

While most of the interviewees strongly agreed that Marketing Automation has significant impact on their customer service, Achan Bedi and Emma Harris were opposed to the idea. At some point, they were relative confused how Marketing Automation is related to how the company manage their Customer Service.

For most, Marketing Automation and Customer Service has a strong link and that link is mandatory. Christophe Gagin viewed that his company could not have done great customer service if it was not for the support of Marketing Automation. Interestingly, he also revealed that Azendoo uses Marketing Automation also to try to “win back the customer we already lost”. Marketing Automation helps the marketers to focus on their target market and create a correct new one based on the data along the process, as it provides in time data of the customer for the marketer to serve their needs. Apoorvi Patodia added that due to Marketing Automation, her company sales team can be able to response to their customer needs as quickly as possible, within five hours. Lorna Keane puts it "It (Marketing Automation) definitely impacts on our Customer Service. It gives us visibility into knowing what our customer is doing and want, we can optimize our approach, without that you can be blind in some aspect, a lot of guess work.”

On the other hand, Emma Harris and Achan Bedi showed irrelevance between marketing automaton and customer service. Emma’s Triaster only used marketing automation to attract the customer as she stated “(they are) not really related. Marketing automation enables us to get a lot of information from our customer, keep us up to date. We can create appealing customer oriented content but mostly we use it to attracting new clients rather, which comes way earlier than customer service”.

Lorna Keane, at one point, also mentioned that even though marketing automation has a huge impact on her company customer service, quoted "it is not

really the specific job of Marketing to deal with customer service, we just focus on Marketing. Customer success team use other type of Automation software but not specifically related to marketing, it makes a huge impact for them but not really for us. We have platform for them to gain the data they need; in the end, the customer success is responsible for monitoring that." Similarly, "Marketing automation does not make a huge impact. If the person is the customer, then marketing automation does not play an important role. We use less to no marketing automation in nurturing them."

The informants were then asked to compare their customer service before and after the implementation of marketing automation.

Before Marketing Automation

As mentioned in chapter 3, some of the companies being interviewed were using Marketing Automation since they were founded. Therefore, they were not totally in a position to compare the difference between the two periods. Regardless, Christophe Gagin noted " Even though we have been using marketing automation since the beginning, we've changed marketing automation tools. We touched new floor as we grow, we changed targets and ways to do things. We just do the basics in the beginning, just find the customers, once we found it, we do more of marketing automation to attract new people and keep current customer."

Others have the same view of how their company customer service was before the implementation of marketing automation. It was a long process with the majority of actions based on guessing or manually sorting the data of previous campaign. Overall, all informants noted that every marketing actions before was proceeded manually, which is time-consuming and some times might not be correct. As there were not customer tracking system, "the customer had to send general emails to sales. The team then looked at it and wondered who was going to respond to that and have to give the customer a call to ask them what their problem specifically was". In one related note, another explained "In

the past to get that kind of information about our customers we had to send out surveys or get in touch with our customer individually. It took really long time.”

Now, with Marketing Automation

Generally, all interviewees mentioned that the ability to personalize each interaction between the company and its customer is considered the most valuable feature that marketing automation can provide to the marketer. Lorna Keane stated that her company can be consistent in their approach to the customers, which helps them in shaping the company’s brand.

"We now can help our customer with prepared content, Frequently Asked Questions, get better everyday, contact the customer initiatively, follow along, provide, track what they do and do not do.” noted Christophe Gagin. He confirmed that marketing automation creates an opportunity for his company to talk to more people at the same time, which reduces a lot of work. The software also enables him to create various reactive trials that can be changed easily.

“We’ve been able to send more messages out, tailored and customized information and get as much data on how people are acting and we can adapt to that as soon as possible.” said Noelle Ghanem. She added that marketing automation creates strong availability of the company with the customers, she can always show her customer that “we are here whenever they need. It shows that we care and the customers think that we are great at what we do.”

“If the customer fill in the automated form, we know what he/she wants to address and can delegate the work to the responsible sales.” quick and personalized response to customer is one of the most important elements that brings quality customer service, according to Apoorvi Patodia. Noora Salminen also showed acknowledgement towards the features. She is aware that the no customer wants mass emails, they want email that is just for them and they also

want quick response to their action. Marketing automation offers her real time alert and messaging to reach the customers anytime they want.

Lorna Keane showed appreciation to the fact that marketing automation makes the work flow a lot more logical. It improves efficiency, bring more transparency between the company and its customer as well as visibility to the company. With automation, marketers are able to see real time statistics, and it is one of main elements that shift marketing strategies massively in a positive way.

However, Achan Bedi and Emma Harris still noted that their customer service has not changed much since the usage of marketing automation. In fact, marketing is more efficient, but customer service is very much the same.

The improvement of Customer Insight

Interviewees agreed with the fact that customer insight plays an important part in deciding how to approach and respond to their customer. According to Apoorvi Patodia, quality customer insight data is immensely challenging to conduct. Since the implementation of marketing automation, the company understands their customer more coherently, the data about the customer is shown in the software in a way that even a non-marketer can easily access and understand. Consequently, the transition (of position) is more simple and the new comer can manage the data quicker and easier.

One emphasized that marketing automation improves customer insight in a lot of ways and it has also improved a great deal how much they know about their customer. The software enables the marketer to see the customer' response to their marketing actions, which gives insight to what is working with their customer and what is not. “We know immediately what to focus, work on or to eliminate just by looking at the statistic conducted by the software.” said Lorna Keane. Moreover, the marketer can adjust the actions as it goes on to fit their customer’s preference.

In terms of customer data, Noora Salminen revealed that the company now has much more quality contact data base than they had before. Notably, these contacts are not just numbers but they are deep information that would help the marketing team to create valuable content based on that. Nowadays, with marketing automation, Noora explained that she knows not only the customer's name or job title, but also their background, interesets, what they have done in the past, whether or not they have read this kind of blog post or if they have clicked in the email or not and probably their ways of doing things. This information will be segmented and passed on to sales to adjust their presentation accordingly.

The intelligence about a customer results in significant advantages when it comes to communicating to them. Achan, at some point, stated that "Marketing automation makes the process of sales more efficient, which is a big highlight. Also, we spend less time building the relationship with our customer because we already know them."

However, Emma was actually surprised when coming across the question. She stated "(Marketing automation helps) not so much. We know about prospects rather than our customers. We know where they look on the website and some information about them. We also know when they return to the website so that we can follow up. With customer though, we have other ways to communicate, in which marketing automation is not involved". Answering a related question, Emma also mentioned that her company achieved really high customer service score, which they evaluate regularly, but it was not mostly because of marketing automation.

Customer's attitude towards Marketing Automation

The researcher and the informants discussed the customer general awareness of marketing automation and its influence to their attitude and behaviors.

The interviewees all agreed that their customers are more and more aware that some of the contents or interactions between them and the company is automated because according to Christophe Gagin, there has been a wave of companies that adopt marketing automation. The marketers try to personalized it, yet at some point it is noticeable. Emma Harris said that even though the customers know that the company is utilizing marketing automation, “they probably don’t know how much we know about them and their actions”.

However, the interviewees asserted that this is not necessarily the problem because automated content usually arrives to the customer faster and the fact that it is personalized for them actually increases customer satisfaction. Noora Salminen was confident that “They are happy because nobody wants to wait. They feel like the company pays attention to them”. In addition, “With this year’s volume of emails that the customers get, it becomes the norm. In the past that was something annoying, but now people love getting content they are interested and is relevant to them. They look forward to getting it. They know it is automated but it is what they need and it adds value to their work or interests as it speaks directly to them.” said Lorna Keane “Only does it become a problem when it’s completely unrelated and you know it is automated and you know that they are doing it wrong, that is when it affects their attitude.” She also stated that it is important to proceed the marketing actions to the customer consent and respect their choice.

Noora Salminen and Achan Bedi suggested a method to avoid sounding automated. Achan Bedi noted “The more designed, fancy the email is, the more it makes people think it is advertising. If the email is plain, it gets more engagement because they think it looks like someone has sent them the email or some one spent time responding to them.” He also mentioned that he tested this idea in one of his email marketing campaigns and the less decorative emails got higher engagements. Applying the same method, Noora Salminen added “We can choose and decide if the emails should look like they are automated. If the email look fancy and decorated, it is probably automated, but if it looks normal, plain then maybe not.”

Competencies

In general, the interviewees acknowledged that marketing automation supports them momentously in proving the company value, position and it also helps them deliver the service or product faster than their competitors. However, some of them said that they rarely checked their competitors' activities.

Noora Salminen stated that her company can get the hold of their prospects a lot earlier than their competitors, which creates competitive advantages. Marketing automation also helps the company to monitor social media reaction quicker. It takes less time to answering queries and it satisfy the customer who "may not even buy yet". In addition, she also mentioned that marketing automation provides insights about their position ranking on search engine. With this information, the company can optimize their content to get more visibility to their targeted customers. Similarly, Emma Harris said that marketing automation support her in attracting more customer to the website, even though her company's competitors are more well known.

Marketing automation also provide the marketer with data, helping them understand their customer better to create unique content that differentiates them from their competitors. Lorna Keane noticed that her company's competitors do not provide their customer with personalized content, which makes her company standout. Noelle Ghanem put it "It (marketing automation) keeps us on top of the game" and "maintain our reputation" as Apoorvi Patodia mentioned.

4.3 Threats of Marketing Automation

This theme was originally focused on the disadvantages of marketing automation. However, all of the informants revealed that there was little to no advantages. Explaining the idea, Lorna Keane stated "(it is) less of disadvantage,

more of danger. It comes back to a whole idea of a company getting it wrong, you can abuse automation, it something that has happened in the past and it is still happening, really. If you re not monitoring the right way, making sure that everything works correctly, it can be a little bit disastrous". All of the other interviewees also showed the similar view, thus, the whole theme shifted to discussing the threats of marketing automation.

Apoorvi Patodia said that it is dangerous that a marketer does not understanding how to use marketing automation software but take it for granted for success. Most of the interviewees agreed that marketing automation softwares are challenging to use. She agreed that monitoring marketing automation software requires a lot of work, setting up and knowledge on digital marketing as well as inbound marketing. Noelle Ghanem noted that each mistake will be a mass mistake because marketing automation reaches a lot of valuable customers of the company. Therefore, Christophe Gagin emphasized "make sure that you know what you are doing".

Regarding the solution to avoid failure when using marketing automation, Lorna Keane put stress on the importance of not letting marketing automation do all the work as she said "You cannot use marketing automation from start to finish when it comes to customer journey. There has to be a point where personal contact comes in to place. After marketing automation, has to be a person involves." On the same note, Achan Bedi said to not expect the automation to work it self. Marketing automation only works best if there are solid marketing strategy in place, therefore, companies need to have their work prepare in advance before using Marketing Automation. Finally, he strongly emphasized on doing a lot of testing before launching any campaign or marketing action.

4.4 Summary

In summary, the interview provided the researcher a great deal of insights on the topic. The main reason for the companies to use marketing automation is

because of the worldwide shift from traditional marketing to digital marketing. They saw that marketing automation brings a lot of benefits for them in terms of getting more familiar with their customer. Marketing automation is utilized in the majority of marketing actions as it is fast and it is able to create data after each action or phase of the marketing campaign. However, some companies only use marketing automation in the beginning phase only to attract new prospects.

Marketing automation is strongly agreed to have immense influence on customer service. It is a link to understanding the customer and the company will face a lot of challenges without the software. Marketing automation enables marketers to response to customer's reaction quicker and more personalized, in addition, marketers can base on the data provided by the software to create interesting and helpful content for each of their customers. Comparing the company marketing strategies before and after the implementation of marketing automation, interviewees revealed a lot of difference and advancement brought by marketing automation, which makes their work flow easier and more transparent.

On the other hand, there were some ideas against the relation between marketing automation and customer service as they viewed customer service not a responsibility of marketing department. Another opinion stated that the level of customer service is resulted from other types of automation.

Contrary ideas also raised when discussing about the improvement of customer insight by using marketing automation. Most of the informants agreed that they understand their customer better rather than just their name and job title, approach their customer more appropriately based on the profile built in marketing automation software. However, some said that marketing automation only brings them the data of their prospect rather than their customers. With their customer, they have other ways to communicate and marketing automation is not involved in the process.

Generally, customers are more and more aware that marketing automation is now commonly used by the marketer. Yet it is confidently confirmed not to be a problem because even though the content and interaction are automated, the customer is still interested in them because the marketer has personalized it to their interests. Consequently, instead of being annoyed, the customer actually looks forward to receiving it.

Marketing automation is believed to upgrade the competencies of the company with their competitors as it provides insights of the performance of the company which shows them a way to keep themselves on top. On the other hand, marketing automation can be dangerous if the marketer is unsure how to use it to optimize their marketing strategy. One way to avoid it is to always prepared carefully in advance and test a campaign constantly to make sure there is no problem.

5 Discussion

5.1 Answering the research questions

In which way does marketing automation affect the customers, from the point of view of a marketer?

There has been different definition of whose responsibility customer service is. It results in a hypothetical that involves the operation of the business. With arguments stating that marketing is not responsible for customer service or that the job of marketing manager ends when a prospect becomes a customer, it is suggested that these marketing and sales teams in these companies work separately, each has their own duty (sometimes platforms) to work on. On the other hand, opinions that showed high relation between marketing automation and customer service tend to come from companies in which marketing and sales departments work rather close together. They all take part in finding, attracting and nurturing their customers. The information conducted by marketing automation is shared throughout and analyzed throughout the customer journey.

Consequently, it depends a lot on how the company choose to use marketing automation. If the company utilizes the software from beginning to the end of a customer's purchase, then it definitely has a significant impact on the level of customer service. On the contrary, if the company only uses marketing automation in certain phases of the process, then it rather has a slighter impact.

In the end, the researcher suggests that even though some companies confirmed that the performance of marketing automation has little to do with customer service, the information gathered by the software may still influences their customers and how they are treated, one way or another.

It all comes to the question, which led to the existence of this research, how does marketing automation influence the customer or customer service? Based on the theoretical review and the results, there are three most significant functions of the software that impact on how the customer is treated.

Personalization is the most important asset. The informants and previous research all agreed that marketing automation provides the ability to personalize the majority of interactions between two sides. In the past, the customer received a mass amount of promotion that they feared to provide their personal

information to any marketer or advertiser, because they did not want to receive repetitive emails or cold calls asking for products or service that they were not interested in. Nowadays, they receive emails with their names on it, with the content that they choose to subscribe to. If they feel like the information is no longer appropriate for them, they can always choose to unsubscribe. This situation is believed to influence a lot on the quality of the service that customer receive, and also provides customer with freedom of choice.

Then comes the ability to response quickly and to many customers at the same time. The interviewees all stated nobody wants to wait and this function also acts as a confirmation to the action done by the customer. Sometimes, it shows the business's immediate gratefulness to the customer purchase. As a result, the customer is put in the center of the business and they always feel like someone is always available for their demand, which increases customer satisfaction.

Marketers are now able to understand the customer more in order to deliver the correct service at the right time, providing added values to the customers. Marketing automation provides valuable data of the prospects, showing their profile, what they have already known about the company and their preference. This data helps the marketer to know their customer long before a phone call is made, and when approaching the customer, they have prepared to provide them with what they need. Same thing happens when the customer encounters an issue with the product. They fill in a form which ask for the detail of their problem, and the right person in charge will be assigned to solve their problem in a short time.

How do the customers perceive marketing automation?

In the beginning, the author developed a thought being that the awareness of a customer about marketing automation might damage the relationship be-

tween them and the business, which also negatively influences customer service. However, the research has shown that marketing automation is more likely to increase customer satisfaction rather than deter it.

The customer had been familiar with the traditional marketing, or push marketing, in which they received spamming items and the content was forced to come to them. It was productive in a way, but it was irritating to the customers. Marketing automation is confirmed to provide the marketer with the intelligence to deliver the most suitable content for the most suitable prospect or customer. By respecting and nurturing them, the right customer will be convinced that this is for them and they will choose to purchase the product.

In fact, marketing automation gives the marketer a picture about the customer, which mainly influences to a business's content marketing strategy. Instead of just straightly introducing the product and constantly ask the prospect to buy it, company are able to create content that would drag the attention of their targeted customers. These contents are not majorly about the product or service, they are about how the company understand the needs of their customers and from that convincing them to purchase. The whole thing gives the customer an idea of the brand and the company as it shows how much the company care about them and their demands. They can perceive the information personalized to them before deciding to make further purchase.

How does marketing automation benefit the business in serving their customer, in compare with their competitor?

Marketing automation have real time alert function that enables the marketer to act faster when there is a reaction, for example a response on social media, from the customer. The marketer can act quicker than their competitor in delivering answer to their queries or solution to their problem. Consequently, they can get a hold of their prospect a lot earlier than their competitors. With content marketing, they are able to know what have been written or addressed in order

to create new and creative content to differentiate themselves from their competitors.

5.2 Research critique

Interview

A semi-structured interview was conducted to open up the knowledge of the research. There were 7 interviewees participating in the interviews but given the content of the interview, there were some limitations to the validity of this thesis.

Even though the objective was set to look at the marketer's side and the customer's sides about marketing automation, but due to the lack of time, the researcher has only interviewed the marketer. The customer's perception towards the subject was therefore presented from the point of view of the interviewed marketer.

The set of questions for the interview was commented by an interviewee to be looking too deep into the company's strategy. This resulted in hesitation in the answers for the research.

However, the questions for the interview were repeatable and act as the key tool for the research which has produced reliable information, notwithstanding the afore-mentioned minors. In addition, the interviewees have years of experience, from various background related to marketing and are based across the world. Consequently, the result managed to gather international perspectives and is believed to be professional, valid and corresponds to modern day's context.

Research purpose

Even though it is said that the thesis has a large scope, to this point it is still too broad.
The content of the thesis does not examine a certain company or industry, which will probably cause confusion for the reader to reflect to their own context. Moreover, the author understands that 7 interviewees may be considered too small of a number with an aim to shape an international view.

However, customer service is not a new subject for research. Marketing automation is becoming a trend in digital marketing and there have been some studies done on it. However, the scope of this thesis is relatively new as it associated the relationship between the two, which has not yet carried out before.

Future research

As mentioned above about the limitation, this research of how marketing automation influences customer service was only conducted from the view of the marketer. The subject would be more thorough if in the future a research on the similar topic will be done from the customer's perspective.

In addition, it would be interesting to figure out the impact of marketing automation on a particular industry or a company's customer service. This thesis would hopefully play an important role to create a base to support those research.

Marketing automation is still a relatively new academic literature subject, which means there has not been a lot of research done in order to measure its effectiveness on other matters. The author strongly suggests similar research regarding marketing automation should be done to create a framework of how it works, since there has been a trend in implementing digital marketing in businesses.

Marketing automation collects a great deal of customer's data for the marketer to make use of. At one point, possible exploit or invasion of personal information could be an intriguing topic to explore. Business may need to investigate to what extend a customer allows personalization and customization.

Personal reflection

I found this research project to be immensely worthwhile. I have had the chance to meet and interview actual marketer and entrepreneurs who were absolutely clever and helpful. At some point, I was unsure about the topic that I was working on, but my thesis tutor has been really supportive and I appreciate her for that. The project also gave me a chance to investigate on a new matter and create something original based on my knowledge and findings.

This project is probably the largest self-study I have ever encountered with. I had time to find my own resources to understand the subject, which have enlarged my knowledge about marketing a whole lot more. The research taught me consistency, systematically thinking and collecting data.

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Appendices

Appendice 1. Interview invitation email form

Dear Sir/Madame,

My name is Ly Hoang - a sophomore pursuing a Bachelor's Degree in International Business, majoring in Marketing at JAMK University of Applied Sciences, Republic of Finland. I am writing my undergraduate dissertation on the topic of "The Influence of Marketing Automation on Customer Service" and for the enhancement of the research's validity and reliability, I attempt to interview a marketing department's representative of a business that implements marketing automation as a marketing tool.

I happened to know that (name of the company) has achieved successful marketing outcomes by putting marketing automation software in use. Therefore, I would hugely appreciate if I were given an opportunity to set up a 45-minute maximum interview via Skype with one of your company's marketers. The interview will discuss the impact of marketing automation on (name of the company)'s customer service. I will also be more than delighted to send you a copy of my dissertation once it is done.

I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Best Regards,
Ly Hoang

Appendice 2. Pre-defined interview questions

1. Your position, professional background information, your company's industry?
2. Which Marketing Automation software is your company using?
3. How long has your company been utilizing Marketing Automation (hereby MA)? Why did your company choose to put MA into use?
4. Which marketing aspects does your company use MA for? Why?
5. Which marketing aspects do you personally recommend NOT to use MA for? Why?
6. How significant is the impact of MA on your company's Customer Service (hereby CS)?
7. How would you compare your company's customer service before and after the implementation of MA?
8. In which way did MA improve/worsen your company's CS?
9. In which way did MA improve/worsen your company's competencies with your competitors?
10. Which feature(s) of MA in your opinion is the most important factor that influences CS? Why?
11. In which way has your company's customer insight improved since the usage of MA?
12. In your opinion, do you think your customers ever realize that the marketing content or action is automated? How is this likely to affect their behaviours and attitude?
13. Any disadvantages of marketing automation implementation?