

We hear you – towards more customer-centric and dialogic marketing communications

Case: Brother Finland

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<p>Printing industry has been quite a traditional industry with distributors and dealers i.e. resellers, alongside a common speculation of a paperless office since the 1980s. Brother as a vendor and importer focuses on dealing with its B2B customers being distributors and dealers, and does not sell machines directly to end-users. The question is, how to adapt to changes and how to develop Brother Finland's marketing communications across the company towards distributors and dealers for optimal results. To be able to develop, Brother Finland's current communications needed to be assessed by its B2B customers to obtain actual feedback.</p> <p>This thesis aims to develop Brother Finland's marketing communications towards more interaction and dialogue both internally and externally with its distributors and dealers. This customer-centric and dialogic approach is meant to invite Brother Finland's B2B customers into a dialogue and interaction. Another objective was to elicit Brother Finland's distributors' and dealers' insights into the future of the printing industry in Finland to better understand silent signals from the market from their point of views.</p> <p>The research literature section presents relevant theories on corporate communication, stakeholder communication, integrated marketing communication, change management, and change communication. The chosen theories outline an integrated view on corporate communication, and provide a theoretical framework to support the creation and implementation of the intended outcome of the research, a more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications.</p> <p>The thesis study was conducted as a single case study, and the data was gathered using qualitative methods. A questionnaire was sent out to Brother Finland's B2B customers in April 2017. Semi-structured customer interviews were conducted in May to triangulate the data. An internal workshop was held early September. Focus group interviews were conducted in the end of September 2017. The thesis report was finalised in January 2018.</p> <p>Although Brother Finland's B2B customers were in general content with the communications, certain areas of improvement were indicated. The empirical data showed that according to customers, there is clearly a need for product trainings, followed by customers visits and phone calls by Brother representatives after a send-out of an important campaign newsletter. Some customers expressed their wish to receive more marketing support, such as images, brochures and posters.</p> <p>The communicational outcome of the study, the more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications entails two key elements, such as internal marketing and systematic feedback process, which increase internal and external dialogue and interaction. Moreover, this approach facilitates in assessing and adjusting marketing communication outputs, such as newsletters and marketing collaterals, to meet the needs of the customers. It enables the development of Brother Finland's marketing communications based on actual customer feedback. The approach includes a higher level of engagement and involvement from the team members and thus advances collaboration across teams and departments.</p>	
Keywords Change communication, integrated marketing communication, corporate communication, B2B communication, change management, printing industry, case study	

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1 Introduction

Printing industry has been quite a traditional industry with distributors and dealers i.e. resellers, alongside a common speculation of a paperless office since the 1980s. Today's operating environments are concerned with digitalisation, transactional business models shifting to contractual ones, and increasing customer-centricity. End-users have their say where and how to do the purchases: at the dealers, in retail or online. Brother as a vendor and importer focuses on dealing with its B2B customers being distributors and dealers, and does not sell machines directly to end-users. The question is, how to adapt to changes and how to develop Brother Finland's marketing communications across the company towards distributors and dealers for optimal results.

One of the key triggers to this thesis study was the question how to develop Brother Finland's and its B2B customers' relationship towards more interaction and dialogue, and to create a higher intertwined engagement and involvement across marketing communications and channel sales teams. "We are not numerous, but we can do things in a cleverer way" was the leading thought at the outset of this thesis study. The will and need to improve communications and specifically marketing communications towards distributors and dealers initiated the research and development project. This thesis study offered the case company a chance to assess its current communications and to find out how it was perceived by its B2B customers. It opened an arena for internal self-reflection and a chance to develop marketing communications continuously based on actual customer feedback.

The main objective was to develop Brother Finland's B2B marketing communications towards more interaction and dialogue, and hence to increase customer-centricity. The more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications will be more interactive and include more engagement and involvement across marketing communications and channel sales team to support its B2B customers best. Another objective was to elicit Brother Finland's distributors' and dealers' insights into the future of the printing industry in Finland to better understand silent signals from the market from their point of views.

This thesis investigates the insights and opinions of Brother Finland's B2B customers in relation to Brother's communications, especially marketing communications. The main findings were analysed and discussed at the case company. Then, the more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications was finetuned and implemented. Engagement and involvement throughout the research and development project

played a key role to ensure the approach was internalised and welcomed by the respective departments of the case company.

The thesis begins with an introduction of the case company, Brother Finland, and its operating environments. Furthermore, the needs and objectives of the research as well the research questions are covered. Then, the research literature section presents relevant theories on corporate communication, stakeholder communication, integrated marketing communication, and change management. The chosen theories outline an integrated view on corporate communications, and provide a theoretical framework to support the creation and implementation of the intended outcome of the research, a more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications at the case company. This is followed by the introduction of the research methodology, case study approach as well as data collection and analysis. Thereafter, the main findings of the research are gone into in relation to the literature and the research questions. Finally, the conclusions and the more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications are presented followed by chapters discussing learning outcomes and the limitations of the study.

2 Topic introduction

The case company, its operating environment and the background situation as well as the current communications in the company will be discussed in the following section. Also, the objectives, as well as the research problem and research questions will be outlined.

2.1 Brother Finland and the operating environment

Brother Finland, Brother Nordic A/S Tanska, sivuliike Suomessa (henceforth: Brother Finland) is a subsidiary of Brother Nordic A/S which is located in Copenhagen and which has around 80 employees (Brother Finland 2017a). Brother Industries Ltd concern operates internationally in 40 countries and has nearly 37.000 employees, of which 9.0% in Europe (Brother Industries, Ltd. 2017a, b). Brother Finland's product ranges contain e.g. printers, scanners, labelling machines, web conferencing programme and other business solutions (Brother Finland 2017b).

The researcher started to work at Brother Finland as a Digital Marketing Manager roughly two years ago and is keen to develop our operations further in the field of communications, marketing and web analytics, and help generate leads and ultimately sales. As Brother Finland is quite a small office employing around 15 in Finland, it is paramount to allocate resources wisely. Brother Finland aims to develop its communications and marketing towards customer-centricity instead of the traditional product-driven way. This follows our corporate strategy with the motto "Transform for the future" (Brother Industries, Ltd. 2017c). Brother does not sell machines directly to end-users (consumer customers) but co-operates both with distributors and dealers meaning resellers. It must be taken into consideration that our target group is not a homogenous group but consists of a few greater distributors, some focusing on hardware (printers, multifunction printers, labelling machines) and some on supplies. Dealers' sizes and focuses vary too as some of them belong to different chains or groupings whereas most of them operate independently. (Forssell 2016.)

As to operating environment, printing industry has undergone major changes during the past few years. The printing industry market is shifting away from the transactional sales of machines to the sales of contractual Managed Print Services which emphasises sales of supplies and service to the customer. (Forssell 2016.)

There is another shift from corporate customers to small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs). The market has seen a drop in usage of copiers (bigger printers) as print amounts will decline even more, thus there is a need for a new approach and tactics. In

April 2016, Brother launched a new bigger mono laser range targeted to SMB business which was a new category for Brother. Afterwards, the launch of a bigger colour laser range targeted to SMB business followed. In this new, changing market situation our aims consist of identifying and reaching the following groups on the market: people/users who do not print, users who print daily, and users who possibly consider giving up printing. How do we get reliable information from the market? That is, improving our communications into a more interactive dialogue with Brother distributors and Brother dealers meaning resellers since they deal with end-users. (Forssell 2016.)

Printing industry is quite a traditional field of operation which is facing demands to change and evolve not solely with regards to digitalisation, but the way business is being run. As mentioned, during the past few years there has been a shift from transactional business model (one-shot purchase) to contractual long-term relationships with the dealers and end-users through Managed Print Services which stress business relationship with dealers and their customers (end-users) and the sales of original supplies. It is key to adapt to changes and rely further on co-operation – and to develop Brother Finland's marketing communications across the company towards distributors and dealers for optimal results.

2.2 Brother Finland and its stakeholders

Brother Finland does not sell machines directly to end-users but co-operates both with distributors and dealers. This is one aspect which distinguishes the case company positively from competitors and gives it a competitive edge in terms of communication and marketing as this appeals to emotional message style which is defined as “attempts to provoke involvement and positive reactions through a reference to positive (or negative) emotions (Cornelissen 2014, 101). ‘Brother – At your side’ ethos is communicated i.e. in the logo, templates, on the webpage, in messages to stakeholders and through our everyday actions in the workplace.

Brother Group divides its stakeholders into customers, associates (employees), business partners, shareholders, local community and environment (Brother Industries, Ltd. 2017a). According to Freeman's definition provided by Cornelissen (2014, 284), a stakeholder means “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives”. Brother Finland's main stakeholders are employees (in the meaning of associates), customers B2B (distributors, dealers), customers B2C (end-users), authorities (government, ECHA) and business partners (Simac, Grenke).

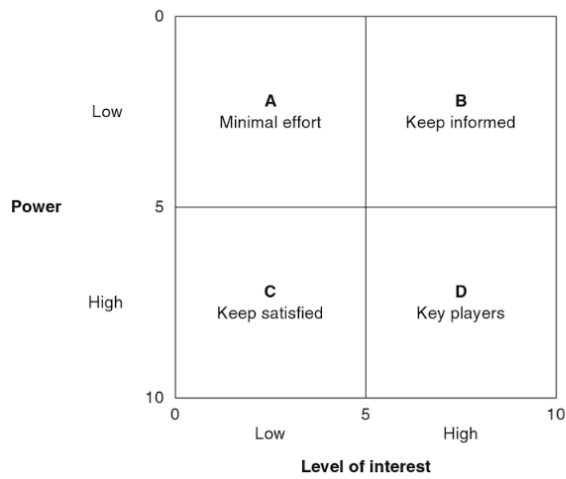


Figure 1. The power-interest matrix. (Cornelissen 2014, 50.)

When mapped in the power-interest matrix (Cornelissen 2014, 50), Brother Finland's main stakeholders can be classified as follows based on the researcher's expertise from communications and marketing and basic understanding of ISO14001 standard's requirements.

A) Authorities (compliance with legislation, ECHA)	B) Employees (associates) - B/D depending on the subject
C) Corporate customers B2C (end-users) and business partners (Simac, Grenke as examples)	D) Customers B2B (distributors, key dealers)

Figure 2. Brother Finland's stakeholders grouped into the power-interest matrix from Cornelissen. (Adapted from Cornelissen 2014, 50.)

Brother Finland has two major and a few smaller distributors, and dozens of channel reseller partners (dealers). Brother Finland's EUT (End-user team) complements the channel sales team, and customers are handled as agreed between the Brother sales teams. It is to be noted that EUT has been set up in spring 2016 and that area will require more support from marketing communications both in Finland and on Brother Nordic local level in the future. EUT deals with i.e. municipal consortiums, educational establishments and hospitals meaning that they do business with end-users in business environments but not with private end-users. According to Brother's sales strategy, sales deals go through distributors and/or dealers. This is a cornerstone of Brother's business sales model, living up to 'At your side' motto and partnership's principles. The focus of the research is narrowed down to the marketing communications and the channel partners. Channel refers to distributors, dealers and Brother channel sales representatives.

Stakeholder communication will be gone into briefly in chapter 3.1.2.

2.3 Background situation

The need to develop marketing communications and our internal and external interaction with our B2B customers i.e. distributors and dealers emerged in discussions with the sales director Forssell. It is a continuum of the researcher's keen interest to continuously develop and improve the company's modus operandi related to marketing communications and co-operation with the channel sales department. In this thesis, the focus of the corporate communication is laid on marketing communications towards Brother's B2B customers being distributors and dealers (resellers). The actors of marketing communications are marketing and channel sales departments.

The sales director and the researcher conducted a GAP analysis in February 2017 to chart the background situation before starting off with the empirical part of the research. We first defined a functioning customer relationship (excellence) between Brother Finland and its B2B customers as follows:

Brother sees a functioning customer relationship between Brother and B2B customers so that a dealer/distributor is loyal towards Brother brand, active towards Brother and its own B2B/B2C customers.

A mutually functioning customer relationship essentially includes that chemistry works between Brother and dealers/distributors. The importance of chemistry is emphasised: mutual trust, mutual loyalty, Brother brand is close to a dealer's/distributor's heart. Brother enables that a dealer/distributor can earn a living with Brother brand in collaboration.

We analysed our course of action and defined that a functioning customer relationship (excellence) calls for the following attributes from Brother towards a dealer/distributor:

Loyalty. Brother is loyal towards a dealer/distributor.

Resources, such as liquidity, personnel, and functioning operational environments to run business.

Commitment. Brother is committed to a dealer/distributor. Brother does not presume that a dealer/distributor solely sells Brother products. Brother cannot grant exclusive

sales rights to a dealer/distributor and does not thus require it from its B2B customers. Brother products bear comparison to competitors' products.

Chemistry. Functioning chemistry is appreciated.

It was further contemplated what Brother requires from itself to realise a functioning customer relationship (excellence). These elements are simultaneously the company's key messages i.e. brand elements which help Brother distinguish from the competitors.

Brother Finland sets itself the following standards to guide its modus operandi:

Promises are kept. This applies to pricing and quality in a set of our operations covering products, contact with dealers/distributors, customer service, service, and trainings.

We meet the objectives and requirements set by the Japanese parent company Brother International, Limited and operate according the 'At your side' motto putting the customer first. Objectives and requirements include i.e. that quality standards are met in the sales and service departments. For instance, we are serious about customer claims and those will be handled in a way which is beneficial for the customer, such as a product will be serviced or replaced depending on the matter in question. Additionally, environmental standards are met with regards to products and recycling.

Brother's extended warranty policy. Brother offers an exceptional warranty policy in the printing industry: up to a three-year on-site swap service for registered devices. Warranty practices vary between the different warranty options, depending on which warranty package has been opted for. All registered devices have a minimum of a three-year warranty.

Proactive and timely communications towards B2B dealers/distributors with regards to product launches, pricing, campaigns and other support to dealers/distributors.

We assessed the current state of the customer relationship between Brother Finland and dealers/distributors to be as follows, evaluated from Brother's point of view:

Brother Finland directly communicates with the dealers, not only via Brother distributors. Communication channels or methods are i.e. phone calls, customer visits, virtual and live trainings by Brother sales department, MailChimp newsletters from marketing communications and sales department in concert to cover most of marketing communications to distributors/dealers, and emails. The flow of information towards distributors and dealers is realised via Brother marketing communications

department and sales department. Each Brother sales representative takes care of his B2B customers (such as distributors, dealers, chains). The relevant entries are entered in the CRM system so that information will be shared: by phone calls, emails, live and virtual meetings, and in CRM.

Brother Finland considers that the current state of customer relationship (excellence) is functioning quite well since many customer relationships date back to several years. However, there is always room to improve marketing communications and our course of action both internally and externally, for instance regarding a systematic approach to B2B customer feedback in a dialogue. The current communications structure will be explained in more detail in chapter 2.4. A more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications will be the aspired communicational outcome of the thesis study. The new approach will be introduced in more detail in chapters 5.3 and 6.1.

We further looked into the current state of customer relationship (excellence) from the point of view of B2B customer feedback, e.g. dialogue with the B2B dealers/distributors, and found out the following areas of improvement:

A systematic dialogue/feedback process from the field should be designed and implemented, in other words how Brother gets feedback from distributors/dealers (how the feedback process would work, how we would ask for feedback, and how the information would be shared internally at Brother).

Although Brother marketing communications department receives feedback from the field from the distributors/dealers via Brother sales representatives, it often occurs occasionally. The nature of the feedback is often 'rectify something' on the web, or there is a need for Brother images to be sent out or similar enquiries. For instance, a systematic approach as to feedback from campaigns lacks at the moment.

Our mode of operation as to internal marketing could be improved. It would facilitate us to highlight the most important campaigns and create engagement internally and externally with our B2B customers. Currently, our course of action with improvement aspects reads as follows:

Launching a campaign and/or a new product. Marketing communications department creates a MailChimp newsletter based on the marketing and launch plan. The newsletter is approved by a sales/marketing team and then communicated internally to the sales distribution list via an email. Brother sales team talks with distributors and their own biggest B2B customers i.e. dealers on the phone and at customer visits. The rest of the dealers will lean on information and support via the distributors.

All parties are needed: Brother, distributors and dealers before a product grabs the attention of an end-customer/consumer.

We tend to lack systematic approach as to internal marketing and so called internal hype creation with regards to the most important campaigns and product launches. The situation is better regarding bigger campaigns as those will be planned and executed together and more people are involved and engaged. However, generic campaigns, i.e. price campaigns tend not to get the attention and internal marketing they would deserve. The same applies to most product launches: occasionally, we (sales and marketing communications departments) discuss upcoming product launches but most often there is no internal marketing prior a product launch.

However, we have recognised the need for change regarding the feedback process/dialogue, and internal marketing. This concerns Brother's internal modus operandi. For instance, marketing communications department would benefit from the input from the field via Brother representatives to improve, and vice versa. There is a need to enhance a dialogue and co-operation internally and externally towards the distributors and dealers.

Some suggestions and improvement ideas were mapped during the GAP analysis in the end of February 2017 before the empirical phase of the thesis study commenced with a questionnaire and semi-structured customer interviews. Brother marketing communications and channel sales departments should implement a systematic marketing-related feedback process with the Brother distributors and the biggest chains or some big dealers. This should be defined, designed and implemented together with the channel sales and marketing communications departments, and introduced to the customer groups in question.

The design and implementation of marketing-related feedback process to the distributors/reseller chains/dealers. Points to be considered: who is the main point of contact to chains, how to get a good response rate. What is the best format of distributing the feedback questionnaire: a URL link and/or printed forms? Could paper formatted questionnaires be part of an event to collect the feedback after the event?

Preliminary draft of a SurveyMonkey feedback questionnaire. 3–10 questions which are quick and easy to reply to. For example:

- How did the campaign work?
- What did the campaign bring in commercially?
- What changes should be implemented?
- Your additional comments to us.

The rationale behind the suggested improvement ideas is that Brother Finland would get up-to-date input from the field to improve sales and marketing communications, in short, our modus operandi. Additionally, the process would be a proof of our active and developing relationship with our distributors and dealers.

To bridge the gap from the current state of modus operandi and to be able to proceed towards an excellently functioning customer relationship (excellence), Brother Finland needs to elicit its distributors' and dealers' insights regarding the marketing communications. Based on the findings from the empirical research and the literature review, our aim is to develop our B2B marketing communications towards more customer-centricity and dialogue.

2.4 Current approach to communications

Communications concern everyone in the organisations. Although the emphasis in this thesis study is laid on analysing and developing marketing communications realised by the marketing communications department and channel team towards Brother B2B distributors and dealers, a basic structure of functions at Brother Finland is visualised. On strategic level, functional areas of communication can be outlined as follows, in no order of importance:

Functional areas of communication	Departments/persons in charge
Translations/ proofreading/ InDesign	Marketing communications, service department
Product launches: web, price lists, MailChimp newsletter communication to distributors, dealers, and internally	Marketing communications, sales department
Marketing communications – creative, brainstorming, internal communication	Marketing communications, sales department / depending on the campaigns and advertisement
Internal communication: Marketing, Web analytics	Marketing communications
Internal communication: HR	HR, supported by marketing communications (external recruitment communication)
Internal and external environmental communication	Responsible for environmental topics, marketing communications
Internal sales communication (team leading), sales meetings	Channel / EUT End-user team, managing director

Internal communication: IT, Logistics, Technical support	Service department
Internal communication: General direction, market shares, monthly meetings	Managing director. Concerns all BNF employees (in Finland and Latvia).
General internal communication – everyone participates	All departments
Web communications (adaptation/localisation) – BIE Brother International Europe/Brother Nordic	Marketing communications
Questionnaires (internal, external)	Marketing communications, EUT
Localisation/Translation of platforms (MPS, MPS CloudV2). MPS Communication to dealers/Simac.	Marketing communications
Communication to Brother service partners	Marketing communications, service department
External communication: Technical support	Service department, product manager
External communication: Sales communication to B2B customers and corporate B2C customers (phone/emails/visits)	Channel team to distributors/dealers (B2B), EUT End-user team (corporate B2C)
External communication: Web related customer queries	Marketing communications, product manager, service department (depending on the subject)
External communication: Press releases (Mynewsdesk, LinkedIn, homepage)	Marketing communications, sales director, product manager
External communication: Social media	Marketing communications – support from the sales teams (images, content ideas)
External communication: Finance, Invoicing	Finance department

Figure 3. Functional areas of communication at Brother Finland, depicted by Rankala.

In general terms, the current communications structure to B2B and B2C customers meaning private end-users and within the organisation in the realm of the marketing communications and the channel sales team can be represented as follows:

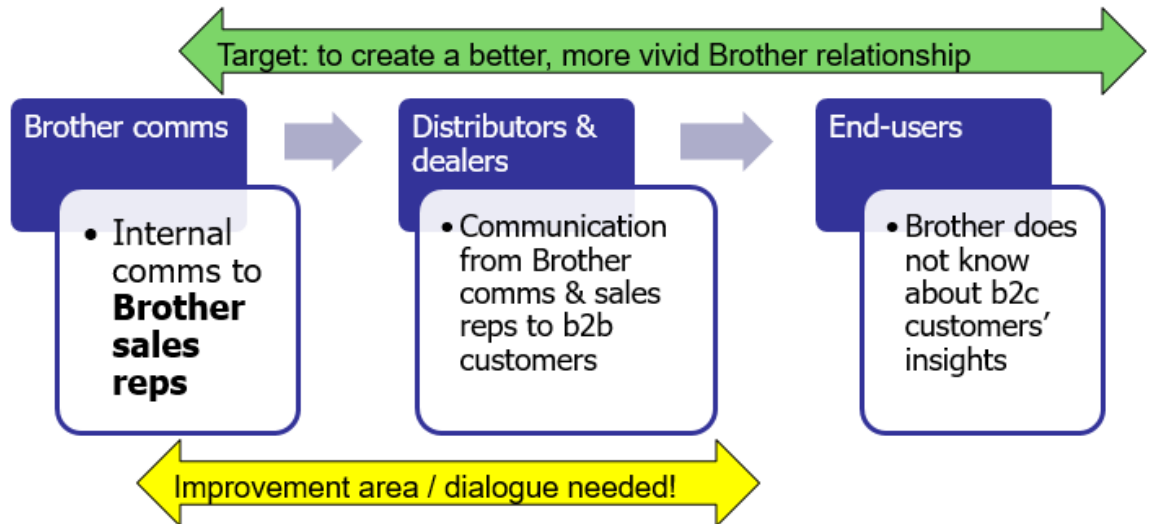


Figure 4. Current flow of B2B communications at Brother Finland, depicted by Rankala.

The current flow of B2B communications most often follows the agenda from the Nordic Marketing Launch and Campaign Plan which applies to Brother Nordic A/S. Brother Finland's marketing communications prepare MailChimp newsletters to distributors and dealers which are first approved and internalised by the sales team prior sending out. Product launches and campaigns will be informed by newsletters and the message is fortified as Brother sales representatives communicate with their respective customers. The channel sales department is the main point of contact to distributors and dealers in terms of sales and product-related topics. Distributors communicate with their B2B customers, that is dealers. Dealers i.e. reseller partners deal with B2C end-users and/or some also do B2B sales to other companies. As mentioned in chapter 2.1., dealers' sizes, types and focuses of industry vary.

Communication channels or methods are i.e. phone calls, customer visits, virtual and live trainings by Brother sales department, MailChimp newsletters from marketing communications and sales department in concert to cover most of marketing communications to distributors/dealers, and email. Thus, the flow of information towards distributors and dealers is realised via Brother marketing communications department and the channel sales department. Currently, we have not systematically enquired of our distributors and dealers how they perceive product launches and campaigns. Brother sales representatives have received/asked feedback from the distributors and dealers and sporadically given it back to the marketing communications.

Nevertheless, the current communications approach lacks systematic dialogue and feedback process from the distributors and dealers via Brother sales representatives to the

marketing communications, and the same requirement applies to marketing communications. Although, marketing communications and the channel sales teams have already improved Brother Finland's communications by executing some changes over the past two years: e.g. introduction of MailChimp newsletter system. Further, marketing communications department changed the tone of voice into more colloquial, emotional, human, friendly, and customer-centric which resonated with readers instead of purely product-driven style in communications on the webpage and newsletters, and created active LinkedIn and YouTube profiles for the company. However, this is not sufficient, therefore the current approach to communications needs overhauling into more interactive and dialogue-based internally and externally. There is room for improvement in organisational communications: how do our sales people communicate the feedback and information from customers to marketing communications and vice versa, and how can marketing communications help sales better with the same ambition: to help customers. Engagement and involvement will be key aspects in this project. Briefly, areas to be improved in a nutshell:

Communications in the current approach was more linear, one-sided.

Campaigns/product launches from marketing communications to channel sales department. Brother representatives phone and visit their B2B customers. → Low level of internal marketing.

Systematic feedback process was lacking "information from the field towards marketing communications department", and vice versa. It was not known how campaigns work at the dealers and distributors.

Brother did not know how its B2B customers like MailChimp newsletters. How do they work, what could be improved?

The background situation and the current linear communications structure justify the choice of the ultimate research question of how to develop Brother Finland's marketing communications towards distributors and dealers for optimal results by the means of a qualitative case study eliciting their insights via an e-formatted questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The data will be complemented by internal discussions with the channel sales and marketing communications teams about how they have internalised the new more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications put into practice. Finally, the interviewees will be phoned and asked whether dialogue has improved and if they perceive that Brother's support towards them has improved. These aspects will be discussed in more detail in chapters 4-6.

2.5 Aims and objectives for the research and research questions

The aim of this thesis was to find out how to develop Brother Finland's marketing communications towards distributors and dealers for optimal results. The focus of the research lays within the marketing communications and the channel partners. Channel refers to distributors, dealers and Brother channel sales representatives.

The main objective was to develop Brother Finland's B2B marketing communications towards more interaction and dialogue, and hence to increase customer-centricity. The new more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications will be more interactive and include higher intertwined engagement and involvement across marketing communications and channel sales teams to support Brother Finland's B2B customers best. This customer-centric and dialogic approach aims to invite Brother Finland's B2B customers being distributors and dealers into a dialogue and interaction. Another objective was to elicit Brother distributors' and dealers' insights into the future of the printing industry in Finland to better understand silent signals from the market from their point of view.

Based on the objectives, the main research question/problem of the study was:

How to develop Brother Finland's marketing communications towards distributors and dealers for optimal results?

The research question can be divided into three sub-questions:

RQ1: How to develop dialogue between Brother Finland, its distributors and dealers and end-users?

RQ2: B2B: How can Brother support distributors and dealers in an optimal way?

RQ3: How to engage employees to take on board the more dialogic approach?

3 Literature review

In this section, theoretical background of the research will be introduced. The section includes key concepts related to communication, corporate communication, stakeholder communication, integrated marketing communication, as well as change management and change communication.

3.1 Communication

Communication theories have its roots in ancient times. Argenti (2016, 29–30) refers to Greek philosopher Aristotle who lived in Athens from 367–347 BCE as the common denominator for most modern communications theories further developed in the United States after the World War II since Aristotle defined the three basic components of a speech in his book “The Art of Rhetoric”. Argenti adapts those basic elements to meet the needs of the modern corporation as follows:

(1) a “speaker”, or in our case, a corporation, with something to say; (2) a “subject”, or message that needs to be conveyed; and (3) a “person” or group to whom the message will be delivered (Argenti 2016, 30).

Modern communication theory first evolved in the United States where Lasswell suggested 1948 a linear communications model to suit particularly well mass communications: “who (Aristotle’s speaker) says what (Aristotle’s subject or message) in which channel (medium) to whom (Aristotle’s recipient) with what effect” (Argenti 2016, 30).

Then Braddock advanced Lasswell’s model by adding “more reflection on the intent of the message” and “the circumstances under which the message was being delivered” (Argenti 2016, 30). Another addition to the linear communication models was created by Weaver and Shannon in 1948. Their model focuses on the physical transmission of information and it follows “the creation of a signal by an information source (using a transmitter) to the reception of the signal by the recipient”. (Ibid., 30.)

In 1956, Gerbner proposed a communications model that built on the Lasswell’s and the Shannon-Weaver’s linear model. In his model, Gerbner added more emphasis on “the important role that perception plays in communication as well as the transactional nature of communications”. (Argenti 2016, 30).

Argenti (2016, 30–31) presents The Corporate Communication Strategy Framework which incorporates the key elements of the previously discussed models and other communication models “to provide a valuable framework for effectively analysing corporate communications”. It is key to note the interconnectedness of each component: how the corporation communicates to its constituencies (audiences) who then respond to the corporation. The model is circular and ongoing by nature. Additionally, the interrelationships determine partially which tools function for communicating the message. See the figure 5 below. (Ibid., 30–31.) According to Argenti (2016, 37), constituents of organisations can be classified in three groups, first primary, such as employees, customers, shareholders and communities. Secondary groups include i.e. traditional media, suppliers, creditors, government and individual bloggers and activists, whereas tertiary means primary and secondary constituents’ social media connections. Stakeholder communication will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3.1.2.

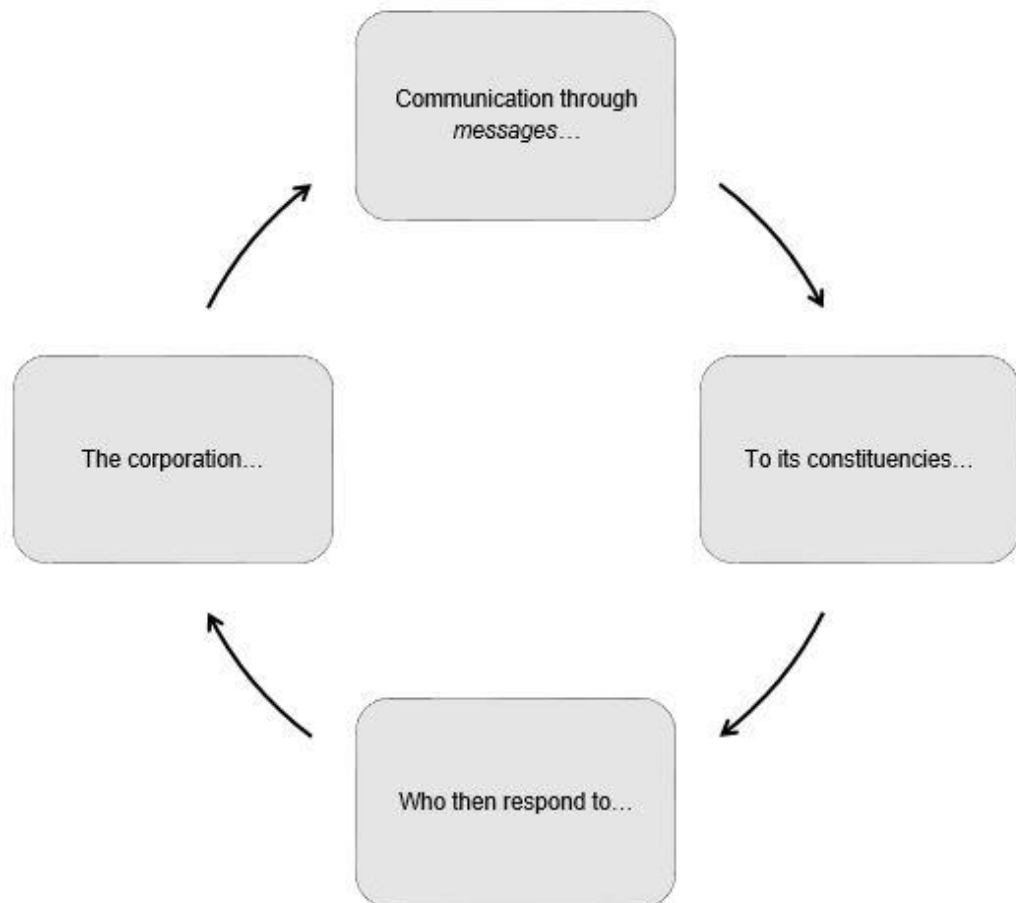


Figure 5. Consolidated Corporate Communication Strategy Framework. (Argenti 2016, 31.)

What is more, the presented model incorporates the notion of perception with “who then respond to”, which I explicated so that communication will always be interpreted by the interlocutors/audiences. Another set of arrows visualising the two-way nature of communication could be added to the presented model to highlight the interrelationships functioning yet circular but both ways: e.g. demonstrating the interaction from the constituencies of organisations, such as employees, customers, shareholders, and media towards the organisation. Figure 6 visualises the interrelationships.

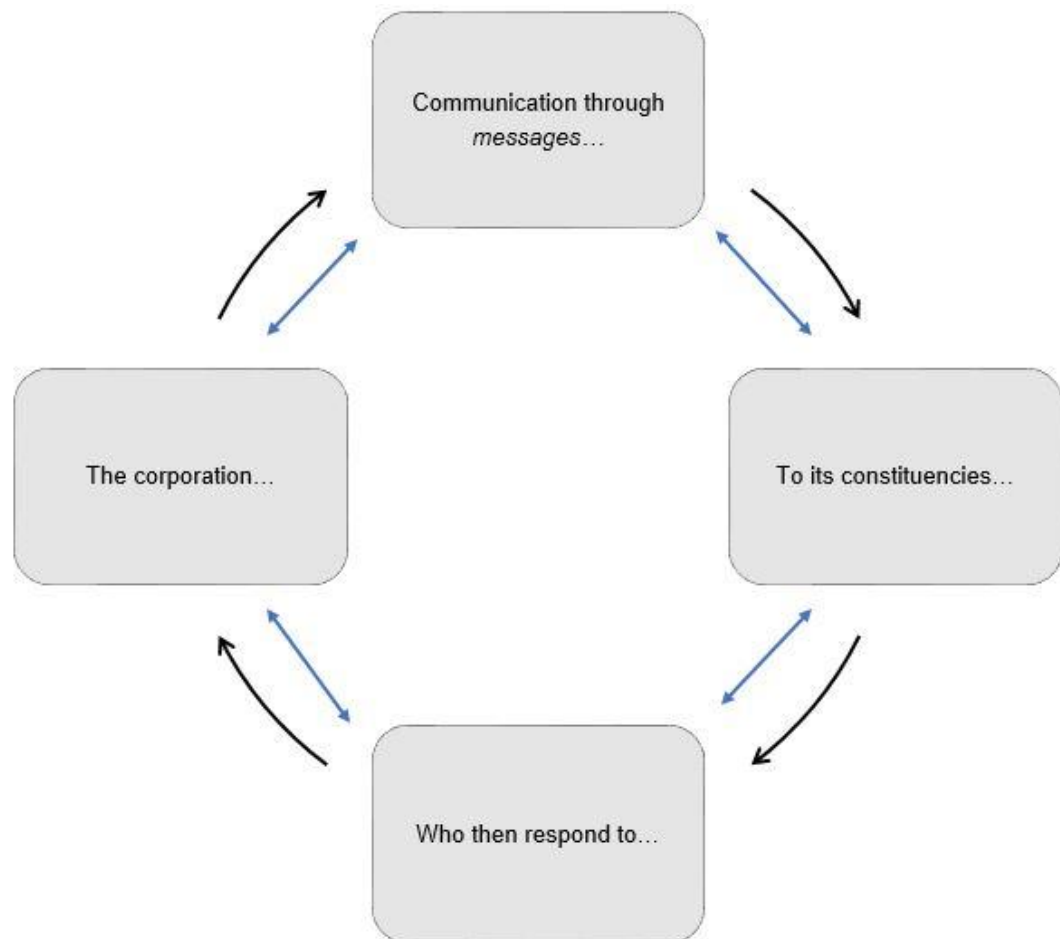


Figure 6. Consolidated Corporate Communication Strategy Framework. (Adapted from Argenti 2016, 31.)

Briefly, communication is needed for several purposes. According to Juholin’s (2013, 179) concept of the New agenda of communications in work communities, “communication is not a separate function or a series of functions but an intrinsic part of all doing and working in the work communities”. Juholin (2013, 23) sums the meaning of communication: “If there is no communication, there is no organisation”. Lastly, she summarises one key notion which influences everyone in the organisation and opens the role of communication nowadays – the role of a communicator belongs to all employees:

Communication is a strategic function but also a field of knowhow that everyone should master. Consequently, communication is not reserved solely to professionals but belongs to everyone. The task of communications professionals is to plumb organisational and environmental factors and sentiments and to engage in discussions with different groups. (Juholin 2013, 39.)

Argenti (2016, 29) also sees that communication affects everyone within an organisation and modern companies should communicate strategically at every level of the organisation. Organisational and corporate communication will be gone into in chapter 3.1.1.

3.1.1 Corporate communication

As discussed in the previous chapter, communication is an intrinsic part of all organisations, be it on a private, public or non-profit sector. Corporate communication can be defined, seen and interpreted slightly differently according to different scholars. The notions of van Riel & Fombrun (2007), Argenti (2016) and Cornelissen (2014) will be outlined in the next paragraphs. They all offer a holistic view on corporate communication: it transcends the whole organisation.

Van Riel & Fombrun (2007, 14) define the concept of corporate communication as “an integrative communication structure linking stakeholders to the organization. A corporate communication structure describes a vision of the ways in which an organization can strategically orchestrate all types of communication”. Accordingly, corporate communication incorporates three main types of communication: management communications, marketing communications, and organisational communications. (Ibid., 14–18.) It is key to understand that according to the concept of van Riel & Fombrun (2007, 22), “corporate communication adopts a ‘corporate’ point of view”. They further define that the Latin word “corpus” denotes “body” or “the whole”. Therefore, corporate communication encompasses the organisation as a whole with the aim to fulfil organisation’s objectives. The three above-mentioned types of communications will be outlined in the next paragraph.

In reference to van Riel & Fombrun (2007, 14–17) management communications include i.e. communication “to develop a shared vision of the company within the organization, to establish and maintain trust in the organization’s leadership, to initiate and manage the change process, and to strengthen the identification of employees with the organisation”. The audiences of management communications consist of the organisation’s internal and external stakeholders. Marketing communications are concerned with communication to support sales of products, services, and brands with the help of the promotional mix and the public relations mix (Rossiter & Percy 2000; Kitchen 1999 in van Riel & Fombrun

2007, 17). Organisational communications entail “public relations, public affairs, investor relations, corporate advertising, environmental communication, and internal communication”. Van Riel & Fombrun find four common characteristics to define organisational communications which are outlined briefly as follows: 1) organisational communications are aimed at corporate audiences, 2) organisational communications have a long-term perspective (with no direct interest to generate sales), 3) organisational communications’ style differs from that of marketing communications (limited exaggeration and puffery, more formalistic), and 4) organisational communications are generally initiated by external parties denoting that there is a need for organisations to communicate with stakeholders, whereas in marketing communications the organisation chooses its target audiences. (van Riel & Fombrun 2007, 20.)

Argenti’s (2016, 29) view on communication emphasises the critical link between corporate communication and the firm’s overall corporate strategy. He advocates that “an effective strategy should encourage a company to send messages that are clear and understandable, true and, communicated with passion, strategically repetitive and repeated, [and] consistent (across constituencies)”. By constituencies are meant the stakeholders of the organisation. Argenti reminds that basic communication theories can be applied to either individually to writing and speeches – which has often been the case – or to corporate communication context meaning “the way organizations communicate with various groups of people”. (Ibid., 29.)

Cornelissen (2014) offers one definition of corporate communication:

Corporate communication is a management function that offers a framework for the effective coordination of all internal and external communication with the overall purpose of establishing and maintaining favourable reputations with stakeholder groups upon which the organization is dependent. (Cornelissen 2014, 5.)

According to Cornelissen (2014, 5), corporate communication is often complex in nature and thus requires an integrated approach to managing communication since it transcends the specialities of individual communication practitioners (e.g. branding, media relations, employee communications, etc.). He contends that communication in multinational corporation with wide range of products or services is no easy task: “[...] coordination of communication is often a balancing act between corporate headquarters and the various divisions and business units involved” (Ibid., 5).

In general, communication is needed to smoothly communicate and integrate the following functions or some of the following functions as depicted by Cornelissen (2014, 28):

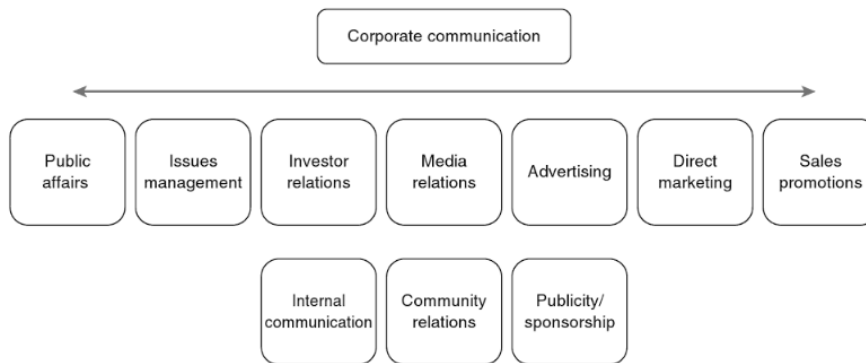


Figure 7. Corporate communication as an integrated framework for managing communication. (Cornelissen 2014, 28.)

It is essential to point out that since the 1980s marketing and public relations (communication) are no longer to be regarded as separate disciplines but should preferably be seen as integrated communication (Cornelissen 2014, 20). The concept of integrated marketing communications means that marketing, sales, communications, and in one word, the whole organisation, works closely together. One definition of the notion of integrated marketing communication reads as follows:

a concept of marketing communication planning that recognizes the 'added value' of a comprehensive plan that evaluates the strategic role of a variety of disciplines (advertising, direct marketing, sales promotions and public relations) and combines these disciplines to provide clarity, consistency and maximum communication impact. (Duncan & Caywood 1996 in Cornelissen 2014, 24.)

Integrated marketing communications are discussed in more detail in chapter 3.2.

In this thesis study, the focus of the corporate communication is laid on marketing communications towards Brother's B2B customers being distributors and dealers, or in other words, the main stakeholders in this research. The actors of marketing communications are marketing and channel sales departments. In the scope of this thesis, the researcher and the case company defined the communications for the empirical research (questionnaire, semi-structured theme interviews) as follows: Communication entails all interaction between the informants and Brother. Marketing communications denote all communications from Brother's marketing communications department, such as corporate website, newsletters, brochures and other marketing collaterals.

3.1.2 Stakeholder communication

Brother Finland's stakeholders were discussed in chapter 2.2. The key stakeholders for this thesis study are Brother's B2B customers (distributors and dealers) and Brother employees (marketing communications department and channel sales team). Some theoretical backgrounds of stakeholders and stakeholder communication will be gone into to deepen the understanding of the subject.

According to Freeman's definition provided by Cornelissen (2014, 284), a stakeholder means "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives". Cornelissen holds that contemporary organisations understand the need to communicate with their stakeholders at least for two reasons: to develop and protect their reputation. He stresses the importance of the management of relationships with stakeholders as "stakeholder management, more than any other subject in business, has profound implications for corporate communication". This is valid for managerial level including strategic thinking on how to communicate effectively with stakeholders but also on the operational level in organisations including communication strategies. (Cornelissen 2014, 41.)

According to Moriarty, Mitchell & Wells' definition (2015, 65), a brand's stakeholders denote "all the individuals and groups who have a stake in the success of the brand, including all employees, investors, the community, business partners, and customers". They define brand as "a perception, often imbued with emotion, that results from experiences with and information about a company or a line of products". Another definition of the brand puts it simply: "A name, term, design or symbol that identifies the goods, services, institution, or idea sold by a marketer". (Moriarty et al. 2015, 72, 622.)

Argenti (2016, 36–37) brings forward organisations' constituents to be categorised into three groups: primary (employees, customers, shareholders, communities), secondary (traditional media, suppliers, creditors, government, individual bloggers and activists), and tertiary (primary and secondary constituents' social media connections). This reminds of the need to analyse one's audiences and address the messages accordingly: who build up organisation's constituents, what they think about the organisation, and what each knows about the communication in question. (Ibid., 36–37.)

Cornelissen (2014, 42–43) highlights one common aspect in stakeholder management moving away from a neo-classical economic theory of organisations to a socio-economic theory. The first one suggests that "the purpose of the organizations is to make profits in

their accountability to themselves and shareholders”, and the focus is on the organisation communicating one-way towards stakeholders, such as investors, customers, employees and suppliers. According to the socio-economic theory, it is suggested “in contrast, that the question of ‘who counts’ extends to other groups besides shareholders who are considered to be important for the continuity of the organization and the welfare of the society”. That stakeholder model of strategic management places organisation in the middle of the picture but includes two-way arrows depicting all stakeholder groups (governments, investors, political groups, customers, communities, employees, trade associations, suppliers and governments) that have a legitimate stake in the organisation. (Ibid., 42–43.)

Stakes can be of different nature, such as in Freeman’s terminology equity stakes, economic or market stakes, and influencer stakes. Equity stakes are related to those who have direct ownership of the organisation like shareholders, directors and minority interest owners, whereas economic stakes concern employees, customers, suppliers and consumers, and lastly influencer stakes are held by those who have interest in the actions of the organisation but no ownership or economic interest. Examples of the last-mentioned groups are consumer advocates, environmental groups, trade organisations and government agencies. (Cornelissen 2014, 44–45.)

Before moving into models of organisation-stakeholder communication, Cornelissen (2014, 47) prompts for mapping stakeholders based on their salience (importance) to the organisation or on the power-interest matrix, as discussed in chapter 2.2 where Brother Finland’s stakeholders were mapped accordingly. According to Cornelissen (2014, 47), salience denotes “how visible or prominent a stakeholder is to an organization based upon the stakeholder possessing one or more of three attributes: power, legitimacy and urgency”. The more prominent or salient stakeholders are, the more is there a need to communicate with them. See figure 8 depicting stakeholder salience model which has originally been constructed by Mitchell, Agle & Wood (1997). However, Cornelissen notes that also the notion of corporate social responsibility (CSR) including philanthropy, community involvement, and ethical and environmentally-friendly business practices, urges organisations to communicate with their stakeholders. Stakeholder groups may move in the classification and their importance for the communication may thus change. (Cornelissen 2014, 46–47, 50.)

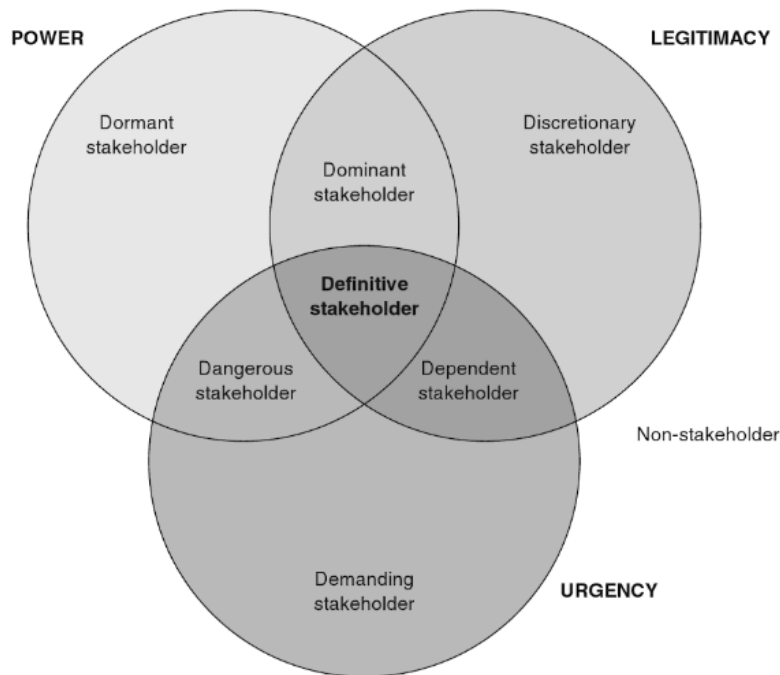


Figure 8. Stakeholder salience model. (Cornelissen 2014, 48.)

Mapping can be conducted using different models, such as the linkage model by Grunig & Hunt (cited by Rawlins 2006, 3–4) as it identifies all stakeholders and then narrows them down by their linkages towards organisation (enabling, functional, normative and diffused linkages). Rawlins (2006, 13) further presents his elaborated Stakeholder Prioritization Model which utilises stakeholder prioritisation by attributes (power, dependency, legitimacy, urgency, support), situations and communication strategies. That model could alternatively help to identify and scan latent, expectant and definitive stakeholders, and identify active, aware, aroused and inactive public. (Ibid., 13.)

Three stakeholder communication models from Cornelissen (2014) will be outlined briefly. Each model incorporates a different strategy of communication. Informational strategy means one-way symmetrical model of communication where communication is conveyed from the organisation towards stakeholders. Persuasive strategy denotes two-way asymmetrical (the interests of the organisation are emphasised) model of communication from the organisation towards stakeholders but including a feedback loop from stakeholders towards the organisation. Cornelissen remarks that “the organization does not change as a result of communicating with its stakeholders; instead it only attempts to change stakeholders’ attitudes and behaviours”. Dialogue strategy: two-way symmetrical model of communication is the most balanced strategy where communication runs in both ways: from the organisation to stakeholders, and vice versa. Cornelissen concludes that “each of these different strategies also requires different media or channels to communicate with

stakeholders” ranging from reports, adverts to face-to-face communication. (Cornelissen 2014, 52–54.)

The above-described dialogue strategy is the closest one that will be applied in the more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications being the aimed outcome of the thesis study. As mentioned in chapter 3.1.1, the main improvements and analysis are directed towards improving and developing marketing communications, whereby sales director Forssell and the researcher defined “communication to entail all interaction between the informants and Brother. Marketing communications denote all communications from Brother’s marketing communications department, such as corporate website, newsletters, brochures and other marketing collaterals.” The quoted text can be found in the ingress of the questionnaire in appendix 1.

3.2 Integrated marketing communication (IMC)

There is a wealth of discourse regarding integrated marketing communication. During recent years, integration in marketing communications has grown popularity as many companies and organisations aim to remove silos and work in a unified fashion. This corresponds well with one definition of integrated marketing communication (IMC) and its key concepts given by Moriarty et al. (2015, 85):

IMC can be described as total communication, which means that everything that sends a message is monitored for its impact on the brand image. Central to IMC is the practice of unifying all marketing communication messages and tools, as well as the marketing mix messages, to send a consistent brand image. Not only does this maximize consistency, but it also creates *synergy* such that a group of coordinated messages has more impact than marketing communications that are independent of each other. IMC recognizes a variety of *stakeholders* who contribute to the brand conversation as well as a multitude of *touch points* where messages are delivered, including marketing mix messages, as well as more formal planned marketing communication.

Moriarty et al. (2015, 64) further define marketing mix or the four Ps to denote “the design and performance of the *product*, its distribution (*place* available), its *pricing* strategies, and its *promotion*”. Marketing communication incorporates various tools and functions, such as “advertising, public relations, sales promotion, direct response, events and sponsorships, point of sale, digital media, and the communication aspects of packaging, as well as personal sales and a number of new forms of online communication”. The purpose of using marketing communication elements in a planned, strategical way is to promote a brand or

organisation. (Ibid., 64.) Brand communication then stands for “a complex system of promotional messages that include all the marketing communication messages but also the brand experiences that build and maintain a coherent brand message” (Moriarty et al. 2015, 85).

Van Riel & Fombrun (2007, 28–29) note, however, that there have been attempts to integrate communications since the 1950s. They contend that integration means integrating the marketing mix (price, product, place, promotion) and the elements of the communication mix within each of the 4-Ps. The common denominator is operation in a customer-centric fashion. The writers point out that “although integrated marketing programs were introduced in the 1950s, they have not been fully introduced by all practitioners”. (Ibid., 28–29.) I consider it is important to coordinate with teams to deliver specific messages to customers and other stakeholders, especially if communications and marketing departments work separately which might be the case in particular in bigger organisations. Van Riel & Fombrun (2007, 273) note that “the communication system in most large companies is very fragmented and specialized”. Therefore, they advocate building a coherent communication system that which all enhances a company’s ability to cohere its corporate communication (van Riel & Fombrun 280, 282). The idea is similar to Moriarty et al.’s (2015, 85) notion of unified and consistent brand messages.

Fill & Turnbull (2016, 327) remark that although many companies claim to apply IMC, “there is little practical evidence of the application of a strategic, customer-oriented IMC programme”. They further lament that “there are numerous claims of IMC practice, but these are little more than coordinated communications mix activities using themed messages (inside-out)”. In the next paragraphs, the key notions of IMC will be gone into.

Furthermore, Fill & Turnbull (2016, 323) contribute to the discussion about IMC in reminding that the value of integrated marketing communication is supported by academics and practitioners but “the subject, however, remains theoretically underdeveloped, empirically unproven and ruffled with controversy and disagreement”. They suggest that some main trends have influenced the evolution of IMC over the years. First, the trend away from traditional communications strategies based on mass communications to increased levels of interactions with customers, then the explicit incorporation of corporate communications, and lastly the shift in marketing philosophies from transaction to relationship marketing. (Fill & Turnbull 2016, 326.)

Fill & Turnbull (2016, 327) point out that the concept of IMC has been developed by different scholars, such as Shultz et al. (1993), Duncan & Everett (1993), Duncan & Moriarty

(1998), Shimp (2000), Duncan & Mulhern (2004), Keller (2001), Kliatchko (2008), Kliatchko et al. (2014), over the years diversifying the elements to be integrated within IMC from promotional tools and media to management, strategy and brand development to finally customer-centricity and relationship marketing. Fill & Turnbull note that there exist five interpretations of IMC (harmonisation, planning, perspective, portfolio and relational interpretations) emerging from own origins and theoretical groundings. They further state that there is no single unified agreed definition or view of IMC, instead there are several definitions available from different scholars. (Fill & Turnbull 2016, 326–327, 337, 350.) Nevertheless, Fill & Turnbull (2016, 337) offer a general definition which links IMC with business-level strategies and relationships:

IMC can represent both a strategic and tactical approach to the planned management of an organisation's communications. IMC requires that organisations coordinate their various strategies, resources and messages in order that they enable meaningful engagement with audiences. The main purposes are to develop a clear positioning and encourage stakeholder relationships that are of mutual value. (Fill & Turnbull 2016, 337.)

Fill & Turnbull (2016, 337) point out, however, that it is important to notice that although "IMC is necessary for the development of effective relationships [...] not all relationships need to be collaborative and fully relational". This is a valid point since there are differences amongst Brother Finland's B2B customers with regards to the level of mutual interest in building business-level strategies and relationships.

Finally, according to Fill & Turnbull (2016, 331–334), elements to be integrated include communications tools, messages, marketing mix, branding, strategy, employees, technology and agencies. The main drivers for IMC integration can be clustered into three categories, market-based drivers (i.e. reorientation from transaction-based marketing to relationship marketing), those arising from changing communications (i.e. technological advances, increased message effectiveness through consistency and reinforcement of core messages), and those emerging from opportunities within the organisations (i.e. increasing profits through improved efficiency). They conclude that "an integrated approach should attempt to provide a uniform or consistent set of messages. These should be relatively easy to interpret and assign meaning". (Fill & Turnbull 2016, 328–329.) This makes sense to me since as consumers or stakeholders attach meanings and connotations to brands regardless from which department or external agency the message is originated from.

For Brother Nordic A/S and specifically for Brother Finland integration means in practice working together within the Nordic marketing team in accordance with the Nordic Marketing Campaign Plan or with the local teams (marketing communications department and channel sales team) for local activities. Marketing communications department works closely with the channel sales team, as mentioned earlier. The challenges lie, however, in balancing with the different tasks and schedules originating from either BIE (Manchester headquarters), from Brother Nordic A/S or local levels, and adjusting these with Nordic and local activities, be it public relations (press releases), marketing campaigns, product launches or newsletters to B2B customers. The other challenge but also a great opportunity is concerned with the topic discussed in chapter 2.1: Brother aims to develop its communications and marketing towards customer-centricity instead of the traditional product-driven way. This aspect concerns all Brother activities in an integrated manner but sometimes it requires more tweaking of the core messages to comply with the B2B customers' needs and expectations. This thesis study helps us understand more of their expectations towards our marketing communications at Brother Finland.

For this thesis study, marketing communications form the core of the empirical study as the research question goes 'How to develop Brother Finland's marketing communications towards distributors and dealers for optimal results'. Brother Finland's marketing communications and channel sales teams work in close collaboration with the aim to apply IMC principles out of practical reasons: small teams need to collaborate in the most effective manner internally and externally.

3.3 Change management

Change can be defined in multiple ways. Already Greek philosopher Heraclitus is reported to have referred to change as an ongoing process: "You cannot step into the same river twice" to which his student replied with "Not even once, since there is no same river" (Jabri 2012, XV). Or, Machiavelli (1532, cited by Green 2007, 1) has written about change as follows: "There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things".

According to Jabri's (2012, XV) philosophy, which he describes to derive from the observation that change is the only constant in life, "change is not a transient event; rather it is an ongoing dynamic process that unfolds over time". Jabri contends that "change is thus a process of permanent flux" (2012, XV).

Jabri further (2012, XV) explicates that his philosophy has been developed through the following perspectives on change as a phenomenon being based on an ongoing process defined by scholars Tsoukas and Chia (2002), Gergen (1999), Weick and Quinn (1999), Taylor and Van Every (2000) and Bakhtin (1993).

In reference to Jabri (2012, XV), Tsoukas and Chia (2002) characterise change as “an ongoing process (stream of interaction) of ‘becoming’ rather than being”. Gergen (1999) considers “becoming through ‘coordinated action’ achieved through its social supplement”. Weick and Quinn (1999) see “becoming through changing and organizing”. Taylor and Van Every (2000) hold that change as a phenomenon is “organization as an emergent reality”. Bakhtin (1993) conceives “change being synonymous with moments of experience that continue to unfold”. (Jabri 2012, XV.)

Green (2007, 6) crystallises the essence, the beauty but also the challenge of a change process:

Change doesn't just start at page one but in fact countless thoughts, ideas, experiences, conversations, incidents and motivations stretching back many years. Likewise it doesn't necessarily stop once put in motion. However, we can take some snapshots of change in motion, see some action replays and make some predictions based on the lines of trajectory as to where it may lead.

This means in the context of the thesis study that the drivers for change were sowed already in the continuous will to improve, analyse and develop our daily work, from the marketing communications point of view and from the channel sales (communication) point of view, as discussed in chapter 2.3 with the sales director Forssell. Therefore, we consider it is beneficial for the implementation of the more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications that Forssell leads the channel sales team and the writer is responsible for the marketing communications at Brother Finland. We work closely together and decided upon the initial topic and defined it further together with the tutor at Haaga-Helia. The change management process already started to develop inactively after the thesis topic was agreed upon, then followed a leading change course at Haaga-Helia and familiarisation with the change presented in the literature.

Change will be dealt with in more detail in the following chapters.

3.3.1 Models

Jabri supports the notion of Tsoukas and Chia (2002) considering that “a process view of change is not a doctrine but an orientation”. Jabri himself calls upon process orientation,

social construction and dialogue while exploring the change by thinking and managing it. (Jabri 2012, XV.) This is aligned with Green's (2007, 3, 7) concept of change management incorporating both tasks and processes in change management: one needs to have orientation, organisation, mobilisation, implementation, transition and integration, as presented in figure 9.



Figure 9. Tasks and processes in change management. (Green 2007, 7.)

In Green's (2007, 7) model of change, orientation stands for "orientation, position and preferences for change". Concretely it means that a need for change needs to be scanned by analysing the external environments (i.e. via a PESTLE analysis), internal circumstances (i.e. via McKinsey's 7S model: staff, skills, systems, style, shared value, strategy, structure; SWOT analysis), and mapping stakeholders (i.e. via power and interest matrix, SWOT analysis). The organisation needs to become oriented towards change and a thorough mapping facilitates the process. (Green 2007, 34-46.)

Organisation denotes "the more formal arrangements, systems and formulations of the change process" (Green 2007, 7). Green states that there are a plenty of different organisational paradigms in existence which all include different approaches to change in organisations (2007, 161).

Green refers to de Caluwé & Vermaak (2004 in Green 2007, 19-20, 161) in outlining the five approaches to change: Blue – change through design; Yellow – change through addressing interests; Red – change through people; White – change through emergence, and Green – change through learning.

The blue paradigm is most commonly used in organisations and contains the idea of project management and a machine metaphor. The yellow paradigm entails the notion of addressing the political aspects of organisations where the different needs and wants of the stakeholders in question are dealt with. In the white paradigm, the focus will be laid on “creating the conditions for change to occur without specifying the exact nature of the changes”. (Green 2007, 19, 161.)

The green paradigm includes the notion that “the change is happening as a direct result of learning” within an organisation on individual, team and organisational level. The learning conditions shall be in place so that teams and individuals can acquire the knowledge and skills needed. The red paradigm contains the notion of engaging the organisation’s people so that their concerns are addressed but also “to have engaged with them in order for new attitudes, skills and behaviours to have been acquired or learnt and certainly demonstrated”. (Green 2007, 18–19.) For the thesis study, the red paradigm resonates the most since the whole channel sales team, not only sales director Forssell, and marketing communications are involved in the research and development project, from the phases of informing, engaging and implementing the aimed change. This will be discussed further in chapters 5.3 and 6.2.

Further, in Green’s (2007, 168) model of change follows the phase called mobilisation which means “the process of involving, engaging and catalysing the stakeholders affected by change”. It is key to understand that at this stage motivation, communication and engagement play a crucial role. Also, recognition of stakeholders’ interests and potential resistance to the change shall be acknowledged. (Green 2007, 168–180.) Green emphasises the need to identify and communicate with the stakeholders at an early stage of the change process. Communication can be done in a monologic (top-down) or dialogic way which will more likely aid successful change. As “the purpose of communication is to move people from one position to another in terms of their awareness, knowledge, support or commitment to change”, the classical AIDA(S) model (attention to increase awareness; I the need to gain interest; D for desire to be positively inclined to change; A for action that will happen; S for the satisfaction or realisation for the benefits of the change, also short-term wins motivate to commit further) can be of assistance. (Green 2007, 180–181). According to Green (2007, 190), mobilisation is the most critical factor in the change process and the checklist for mobilising people contains all the elements that need to be addressed:

- a pressure for change
- a clear shared vision

- capacity to change
- capability to change
- actionable first steps; and
- spotting resistance to change

As to implementation in Green's (2007, 192) model of change, the basic idea focuses on these aspects of change management: ensure that the organisation of change is followed through implementation, highlight areas of potential difficulties and ensure alignment between the intended changes and the organisation.

Although a change is planned and communicated, operationalising the change may include different barriers, such as the management barrier, the vision barrier, the resource barrier and the securing acceptance by those affected by the change (Green 2007, 195, 202). As to operationalising the change, Green relies on Kotter's (1995) 8-step model outlining eight key aspects of the change process but complements them to include more engagement and communication with stakeholders (Green 2007, 197–199). Kotter's model will be outlined in figure 11 where all other elements are the same except the last point: "institutionalise new approaches" (Kotter 1995 in Green 2007, 197) compared with "ratify and legitimate" presented in Kotter's (1996) model demonstrated by Jabri (2012, 14).

In Green's model of change, transition denotes how change affects individual and teams. Change process can include anxiety and concerns of individual facing change. It is common that a change process is realised within a change or transition curve (see the figure 10): from stages, such as shock, denial, panic, insecurity to acceptance, testing, discovery, feelings of satisfaction to integration and new meaning. Although, not everyone experiences these stages the same way. Green emphasises that "strategies to manage people's distress will make the changes smoother". It is key to communicate the changes at an appropriate pace modified to the individual change recipients being potentially at a different phase of the change curve and give people time to adjust to changes. (Green 2007, 209, 226.)

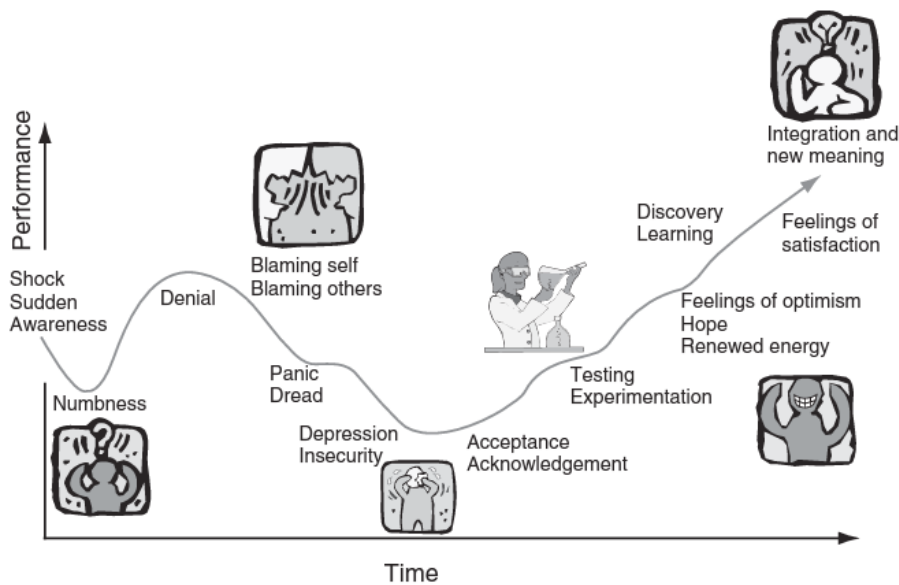


Figure 10. Change or transition curve. (Green 2007, 209.)

Leadership (culture, mindset) is related to leading change. Right leadership styles and tactics are needed in integrating the change. In Green's (2007, 244) model of change, by integration is meant that "the change becomes embedded in the organization and the degree to which learning has occurred and how changes can be sustained going forward". He further reminds that integration processes need to be well thought about at the beginning of the changes (Ibid., 253). To conclude integration or managing change, it is supportive to contemplate Green's word of advice: "In summary, there is no one right way, but there are a number of frameworks within which you can find a way that is right for your change today" (Ibid., 260).

To offer alternative change models, a few change models will be visualised:

Lewin's (1951) three-step model	Weick and Quinn's (1999) three-step model
Unfreeze	Freeze
Movement	Rebalance and then reinterpret as opportunities
Refreezing (ice-topping)	Unfreeze
<i>Source: Adapted from Lewin (1951) and Weick and Quinn (1999.)</i>	
Ulrich's (1988) seven-step model	Kotter's (1996) eight-step model
Lead change	Establish a sense of urgency
Create a shared need	Form a guiding coalition
Shape a vision	Create a vision
Mobilize commitment	Communicate a vision
Change systems and structures	Empower others to act

Monitor progress	Plan to create short-term wins
Make change last	Consolidate
	Ratify and legitimate
<i>Sources: Adapted from Ulrich (1988) and Kotter (1996).</i>	

Figure 11. Some change models. (Jabri 2012, 14.)

As the aimed communicational outcome of the thesis study will be a more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications towards Brother Finland's B2B customers, the writer is tempted to use involvement, engagement and change communication as tools to implement this type of change. Further, some elements of Green's (2007) change model and Kotter's (1996 in Jabri 2012, 14) will be applied. Engaging others, leading by example and showing the benefits of the approach will be crucial in the change project.

3.3.2 Change communication

It is a common notion that "leading is communication and communication is leading" which features in managerial literature and in common, modern knowledge related to leadership. Communicating change in a predictable, continuous and engaging way facilitates change management and advances well-being at work, as described by Men & Stacks' (2013, 174, 183) model of transformational and transactional leadership style. According to this model, transformational leaders can be defined as "strategic, charismatic, inspiring, democratic, and relational oriented" and their behaviour is more likely to advance employees' positive perception of the organisational reputation in contrast to transactional, authoritarian leadership (Men & Stacks 2013, 183). Where transformational leaders tend to "motivate subordinates and appeal to their ideals and moral values by creating and representing an inspiring vision of the future" and "take a real interest in the well-being of their employees", transactional leadership style is more often based on an exchange process and rewards/punishments on employees. Transactional leadership appeals "to employees' personal desires, based on instrumental economic transactions". (Men & Stacks 2013, 174 in reference to Bass & Avolio 1997; Yukl 2006.)

As transactional leadership style generally implies "more organisational bureaucracy, policy, power, and authority to maintain control", as noted by Bennett 2009 (cited by Men & Stacks 2013, 174), it has been proved in various studies that this leadership style is "less likely to generate trust and commitment to work, emotional appeal, and positive evaluation of the organizational reputation" (Men & Stacks 2013, 175 in reference to Zagoršek et al.

2009). Thus, it is no wonder that transformational leadership style is associated with empowerment, nurture of employees' development and participative decision making and sharing of power (Men & Stacks 2013, 174 after Aldoory & Toth 2004).

According to the key findings by Men & Stacks (2013, 171), "transformational leadership positively influences employees' perception of organizational reputation, not only directly but also indirectly, through empowering employees" whereas transactional style rather has "a significant negative direct effect on employees' perception of organizational reputation". It is, though, key to note that transactional and transformational leadership styles are not mutually exclusive but competent leaders know how to successfully switch between these styles according to the situation (Men & Stacks 2013, 174 in reference to Vera & Crosan 2004). As noted by Zagoršek et al. 2009 (cited by Men & Stacks 2013, 175), transactional leadership results in compliance and can work in some circumstances.

In the presented model, leadership and communication are embedded into each other extremely well, they are tightly interconnected, especially in the transformational leadership style where communication takes on an active, inspiring and leading role. Communication is not put in the background, it is more than a tool or vehicle, it is simply an equal element in the leadership model (in transformational leadership style). The power of communication is being made visible in that sense that communication equals to leading. As mentioned in the previous chapters, transformational leadership can be associated with empowerment and participative decision making. That again is one proof that the role of communication is crucial, even an elementary part of the essence of this model.

Green (2007, 180) advocates that communication with stakeholders shall be done at an early stage of change. Witherspoon & Wohlert (1996, cited by Green 2007, 180) support the same idea within the context of organisational change in stating:

Communication is the process on which the initiation and maintenance of organizational change depends... Ultimately the success of any change effort depends on how effectively the strategy for and the substance of the change is communicated to those who are the targets of the change.

As discussed in Green's (2007, 168, 180) model of change in chapter 3.3.1, the phase mobilisation incorporates communication, engagement and mobilisation. Mobilisation means "the process of involving, engaging and catalysing the stakeholders affected by change" (Green 2007, 168). Change communication can be monologic or dialogic, the first

being more often top-down and one-way communication, as the latter invites to a dialogue. Green urges to decide upon “who you want to communicate with; what you want to say or discuss; when you want the process to begin; and how you want to communicate”. (Green 2007, 180–183.)

In this thesis study, the stakeholders or the ones we want to communicate with regarding change, are Brother channel sales team employees, marketing communications department and B2B customers (distributors, dealers). It is pertinent to show example and engage in the common change process, otherwise good plans may more likely end up being wishful thinking. Therefore, some elements of Green’s (2007, 184) communication grid (see figure 12 below) will be applied as to implementing the change communication: in particular, pressure for change (the need for the thesis study emerged from discussions with the sales director) and the point actionable first steps into the more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications which will be guided by the researcher.

	Pressure for change	A clear shared vision	Capacity to change	Capability to change	Actionable first steps	Resistance to change
<i>Who</i>						
<i>What</i>						
<i>When</i>						
<i>From whom</i>						
<i>How</i>						

Figure 12. Communication grid. (Green 2007, 184.)

To be more of value towards our B2B customers, it is wise to enquire how we could support them in marketing communications for optimal results. The findings of the research can help Brother Finland to improve its modus operandi. It was estimated beforehand by the sales director and the researcher that the scope of the study was sensible to limit to the channel sales team and marketing communications department, as these departments work closest with Brother’s B2B customers. Also, being in the same boat helped: the sales director and the researcher (/digital marketing manager) work together with the departments participating in the change. There was a consensus with regards to the pressure for change, a clear shared vision, capability and capacity to change, actionable first steps and change resistance. To address potential change resistance, the progress of the research

and development project was continuously discussed with the sales director and the teams, and the researcher informed the whole company about the case study (before, during and after) in face-to-face meetings and via emails. All relevant documents (Power-Point presentations, pictures depicting both the current and the new more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications) were shared with the teams and the whole company has access to these files.

3.3.3 How to implement change via engaging and involving employees

Employee engagement and involvement is a crucial part in a change project. Developing Brother Finland's approach to marketing communications towards more customer-centricity and dialogue as a research and development project requires understanding the scope of, planning, leading and implementing the change. Involving and engaging employees can be seen as a vital tool in implementing change since change participants and agents live up the change and make the change real. Some changes need to be implemented top-down but here our perspective and tactics was to develop Brother Finland's approach to marketing communications to be more interactive one based on the initial idea of this thesis study, fortified by the need (urgency) found out in the GAP analysis (cf. chapter 2.3 and the current flow of B2B communications described in chapter 2.4 and in figure 13), and at a later stage, on the main findings of the empirical research. The aimed outcome of the research and development project captures the change: from a linear to a more cyclical, customer-centric and dialogic approach with the emphasis on more dialogue internally and externally by the means of internal marketing and a feedback process. See figures 13 and 14.

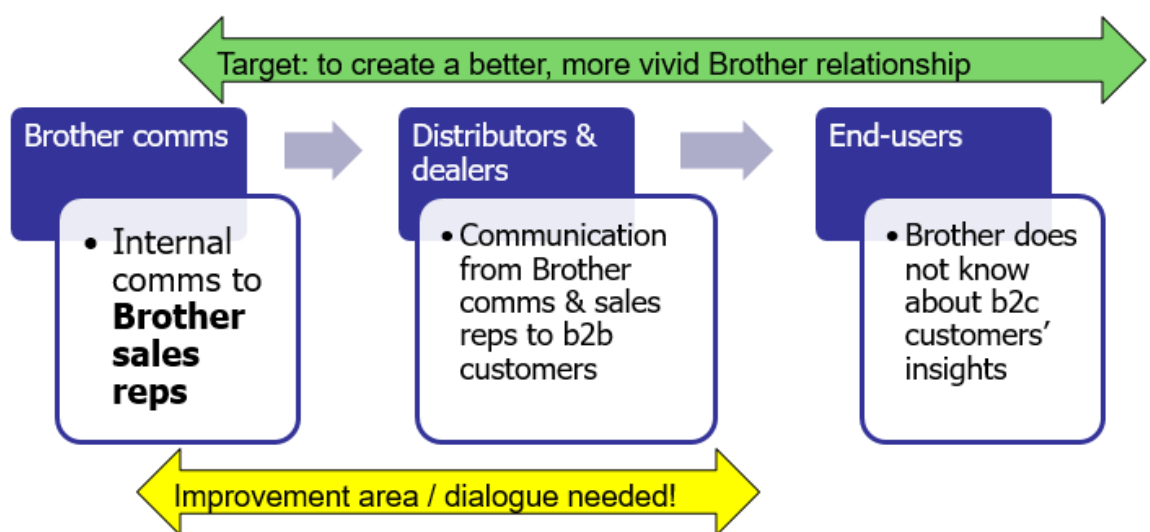


Figure 13. Current flow of B2B communications at Brother Finland, depicted by Rankala.

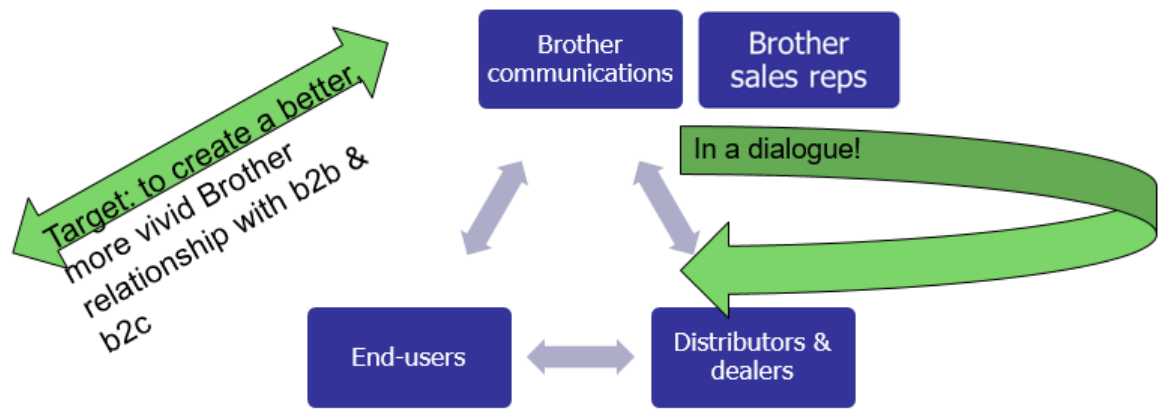


Figure 14. The communicational outcome of the study, a more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications towards B2B customers and indirectly B2C customers, depicted by Rankala.

In this thesis study context, employee engagement can be associated being close to involvement. Involving and communicating with employees is key – be it about organisation-wide studies, like in Walker’s (2012, 25) book providing useful insights into researching employee engagement internally. Although the focus of this thesis study is both laid on B2B customers (distributors and dealers) and on the channel sales team, Walker’s notions can be applied to the thesis as well: “For organization-wide studies, it is essential to communicate with employees and create an environment where they feel involved in the process. The first step is to start a conversation at senior levels [...] to ensure full commitment and interest from the top” (Ibid., 25). These were the reasons why both the sales director and the researcher work closely together, why the thesis topic was presented to the top management before starting off, and why colleagues from the marketing communications and channel sales teams were informed about and involved in the progress of the research and development project.

According to Walker (2012, 92–93), there is a myriad of meanings and models related to engagement. She urges to choose the right definition for your organisation. Two definitions resonate with the thesis study with the aim to together develop marketing communications at the case company towards more customer-centricity and dialogue:

Employee engagement describes employees’ emotional and intellectual commitment to their organization and its success. Engaged employees experience a compelling purpose and meaning in their work and give their discrete effort to advance the organization’s objectives. (The Work Foundation, cited by Walker 2012, 92.)

A heightened emotional connection that an employee feels for his or her organization, which influences him or her to exert greater discretionary effort to this or her work. (The Conference Board, cited by Walker 2012, 92.)

How this worked out in practice will be further dealt with in the empirical sections of the study.

4 Conducting the research: methodology and data

This chapter explains the research approach and methodology used in this thesis study. The data collection process and the methods used for qualitative data analysis are introduced. Ethical considerations and the role of the researcher are also discussed. Finally, the issues of reliability and validity of the research are dealt with.

4.1 Case study approach

The strategy for this study is case study. Yin (2014, 16–17) provides a twofold definition of a case study describing what the case study is all about and what are the relevant features of a case study (the latter part of the definition):

1. A case study is an empirical inquiry that
 - investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the “case”) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when
 - the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident.

2. A case study inquiry
 - copes with technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result
 - relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result
 - benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis

Yin further defines that a case study research can include both single and multiple case studies. By the same token, case study research can include qualitative and/or quantitative evidence. (Yin 2014, 18–19). It all depends on the case study in question.

There are different types of case studies to be conducted, depending on the purpose of the study: whether it is exploratory, descriptive or explanatory. However, Yin complements, there are overlaps among them. (Yin 2014, 8–9.) Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2009, 138–141) discuss the purposes of the researches and use the terminology research strategy to portray different researches, such as experiment, case study, and action research. They further specify referring to Yin (2003 in Saunders et al. 2009, 141) that each strategy can be used for exploratory, descriptive and explanatory research. Saunders et al. (2009, 138–141) give concise definitions of the terms: an exploratory study seeks to answer the question “what is happening; to seek new insights; to ask questions

and to assess phenomena in a new light”, whereas descriptive research aims at portraying accurately a profile of a person, event or situation. Descriptive research can precede a piece of exploratory research or more often a piece of explanatory research. Lastly, they coin that “studies that establish causal relationships between variables may be termed explanatory research. The emphasis here is on studying a situation or a problem in order to explain the relationships between variables”. (Ibid., 138–141.)

In reference to Saunders et al. (2009, 140), there can be combinations of two research purposes, i.e. a descripto-explanatory study where description is utilised prior to seeking explanation for the case in question. This thesis study will be conducted as a single case study research whose purpose falls into the category descripto-explanatory (understanding) with the aim to develop marketing communications towards distributors and dealers for optimal results. This is in line with Yin’s (2014, 10) notion that “how” and “why” research questions are more explanatory and tend to lead “to the use of a case study, history or experiment as a research method”. However, he reminds that there are research questions which can be replied to using a choice of methods (Yin 2014, 11). Case study is a choice among other research strategies (term used by Saunders et al. 2009) or methods (term used by Yin 2014). Saunders et al. (2009, 141) succinctly note “that strategies should not be thought of as being mutually exclusive” and that it is “quite possible to use the survey strategy as part of a case study” or to combine other strategies when feasible.

But when to choose a case study approach or in Yin’s (2014, 4) terms the case study method? The common denominator is focused on the research question(s): “the more that your questions seek to explain some present circumstance (e.g. “how” or “why” some social phenomenon works”), the more the case study research will be relevant”. The method is relevant too when your research questions “require an extensive and in-depth description of some social phenomenon”. (Yin 2014, 4.)

Case studies have been used as a research method in several fields, such as social studies (e.g. psychology, sociology, political science), business, education and in economics. It is key to remind that a case study can be applied when complex social phenomena are desired to be understood. (Yin 2014, 4.) Noor (2008, 1602) points out that it is thus not intended to be used while studying the entire organisation. Instead, Yin (2014, 4) holds that applying a case study allows researchers to focus on a case and to retain a holistic, real-world perspective. Suitable areas of study could be “individual life cycles, small group behaviour, organizational and managerial processes, neighbourhood change, school performance, international relationships, and the maturation of industries” (Ibid., 4).

Regardless of the chosen strategy for the study, it is key to plan and design the study in advance. Yin (2014, 4–5) urges to carefully design the case study (either a single or multiple case study), and to think about the data collection, analysis of the data and how to compose a case study report.

Yin (2014, 19–23) and Myers (2013, 82–84) discuss the traditional concerns about and critique of case study research. Myers (2013, 82) sees some advantages of case study research being the most popular qualitative research method used in business due to its face validity. That can be interpreted as expanding the common knowledge around the topic. He describes face validity as follows:

By 'face validity, I mean that a well-written case study based on empirical research in an organization represents a real story that most researchers can identify with. [...] Most cases are also contemporary stories, which means that the case documents one or more firms' attempt to deal with issues of current importance to other firms, many of which are likely to be in the same boat. (Myers 2013, 82.)

Myers recognises another advantage of case study research since “it allows researchers to explore or test theories within the context of messy real-life situations”. The case study research enables a researcher to get close to the subject researched. (Myers 2013, 82.)

Myers' (2013, 83) critique of case study research includes the following points: it can be difficult to gain access to a company/companies that one wants to conduct research in; one has no control over the situation e.g. the company can be taken over or key sponsor can leave the company. Both aspects are true but I as a researcher would still recommend a case study strategy to be employed if one is working in the case company since then accessing the data is not difficult. The other aspect can be valid too, yet that situation would likely inflict any chosen research strategy. Myers (2013, 83) expresses a valid point in critiquing that “a case study research can be difficult, particularly for younger, inexperienced researchers, to focus on the most important issues”. Therefore, I consider that one shall narrow down the scope of the research and not research everything in the subject. Finally, Meyers (2013, 83) holds that a case study research is time consuming, even for experienced researchers and notes that “it takes time to gain access, it takes time to do the empirical research, and it takes even more time to do the write-up. From start to finish, case study research is time consuming”. I agree to the parts that doing an empirical research and writing a report take time, but I consider these aspects would be valid in any chosen research strategy. Therefore, a thorough planning and a schedule will help in finalising the research at hand. Lastly, both Myers (2013, 83) and Yin (2013, 23) are aligned

that doing case study is not easy or a soft option. Doing a case study requires commitment, skills and systematic procedures. Therefore, it is wise to consult case study books and report the research stages in a detailed manner.

Yin recognises the critique exerted towards case study researches which have been conducted not following systematic procedures, or have allowed ambiguous evidence to influence the direction of the findings or have resulted in massive, unreadable documents instead of focusing on the essence. He urges case study researchers to be rigorous and follow systematic procedures while conducting the research and not to confuse with simplified teaching cases which demonstrate case studies used in teaching. (Yin 2014, 19–23.)

As to concerns associated with a case study research not being generalisable, Yin (2014, 21) states that a multiple case study can be generalisable when “your goal will be to expand and generalize theories (analytic generalizations) and not to extrapolate probabilities (statistical generalizations)”. Regarding the concern ‘unmanageable level of effort’, Yin admits that case studies conducted in the past may have taken too long of time and can have been mixed with ethnographies. It is thus key to understand that doing a valid and high-quality case study does not have to take up a long time, but it needs to be done following systematic procedures. (Yin 2014, 21, 23.)

In this thesis study, a single case study research was employed as a research strategy to gain understanding of the context, in other words, to get our B2B customers' insights into the main research question ‘How to develop Brother Finland’s marketing communications towards distributors and dealers for optimal results’. Objectives were also to elicit their insights into the future of the printing industry in Finland and to engage them into a dialogue with the channel sales team and marketing communications department. As the researcher is interested in insights and opinions of Brother Finland’s B2B customers at a specific time of the research, a single case study was the justified research strategy.

4.2 Methodological approaches

It is key to understand how methodology affects the research in question. Thus, it is crucial to understand principles behind the research, as explained well by Saunders et al. (2009, 108) in their research onion which depicts i.e. research philosophies (positivism, realism, interpretivism/social constructivism, pragmatism), approaches (deductive, inductive or abductive), and the choice of strategies (i.e. case study, action research) and methods (whether mono, mixed or multi method), and if the research is carried out cross-sectionally or in a longitudinal way. (Saunders et al. 2009, 108.)

The research approach in this study is abduction what denotes moving back and forth between empirical data and theory. That means combining research approaches deduction and induction. Deduction stands for testing existing theory (theory to data) whereas induction denotes building a new theory (data to theory). (Saunders et al. 2009, 124–127.) Saunders, Thornhill & Lewis (2016, 145) defined abduction as follows: “theory generation or modification; incorporating existing theory where appropriate, to build new theory or modify existing theory”. They note that it is often advantageous to combine research approaches in one study. That could be the case if there exists a lot of information in one context but less in the context one is researching. (Ibid., 149.) That is valid for this thesis study as its research approach is abductive that which suits my single case study best: there are models and theories available but not used specifically in my research topic.

Other relevant terms are ontology, epistemology and axiology (Saunders et al. 2009, 106) which go hand in hand with one’s research design. Ontology enquires “what assumptions do we make about the way in which the world works” and thus is concerned with the nature of reality (Saunders et al. 2009, 110). Further, in one aspect of ontology, in objectivism, social entities are perceived to exist independent of social actors whereas in other aspect, subjectivism, it is key to understand the meanings that individuals attach to social phenomena. “Social phenomena are created from the perceptions and consequent actions of social actors” which means that reality and context play an important role for the individuals (Saunders et al. 2009, 110).

In reference to Saunders et al. (2009, 112), epistemology deals with what is valid or acceptable knowledge in a particular field of study. They further present three major philosophical positions as to answer the questions of epistemology: positivism meaning working in the tradition of the natural scientist, while realism enquires whether objects exist independently of our knowledge of their existence whereas interpretivism seeks to understand differences between humans as social actors (Saunders et al. 2009, 112–116). Axiology being a branch of philosophy is concerned with values and enquires “what roles do our values play in our research choices” (Saunders et al. 2009, 116), and in other words, what is the stand point of the researcher, which are his/her basic values and basic assumptions that underpin the research choices.

As to ontology in this thesis study, subjectivism is best suited to the research topic. The researcher is interested in the context and in the meanings our informants will give us. Further with regards to epistemology, the researcher will lean on interpretivism (social constructivism) as a research philosophy as we seek to interpret and understand the meanings our B2B customers are giving. Saunders et al. (2009, 116) emphasise the

meanings: “In the same way we interpret our everyday social roles in accordance with the meaning we give to these roles. In addition, we interpret the social roles of others in accordance with our own set of meanings”. Lastly, as to axiology, the researcher would like to explore Brother Finland’s current state of communications in reference to the research questions, understand the reasons and justification behind our customers’ answers, explain and describe what will be found out. The distributors and dealers will not be judged based on their insights, but their replies will be valued as such. This is a good opportunity to further develop our marketing communications towards our distributors and dealers. As a researcher, I will adapt a role of an outsider researcher who is interested in informants’ insights and opinions. To conclude axiology, I will refer to Saunders et al. (2009, 116):

Choosing one topic rather than another suggests that you think one of the topics is more important. Your choice of philosophical approach is a reflection of your values, as is your choice of data collection techniques.

As discussed in the literature review in chapter 3, theories of communication, corporate communication, stakeholder communication, integrated marketing communication, change management and change communication will provide the conceptual framework for this thesis study whereby abductive research approach will be used. As explained in chapter 4.1, the research strategy is a single case study and the purpose of this research falls into the category of descripto-explanatory since we seek to understand and develop the present state of marketing communications into a more interactive dialogue and hence increase customer-centricity.

4.3 Data collection

Since this thesis study is a qualitative single case study conducted for Brother Finland with the aim to qualitatively analyse the data and improve B2B marketing communications of a single company, the data was collected using qualitative methods. Sales director Forssell and the researcher anticipated that a few distributors and dealers will take time to fill out the questionnaire but not all. As to interviews, we were positive that most of the pre-defined interviewees would be willing to co-operate as interviewees.

First, qualitative data was gathered via an e-questionnaire and five semi-structured interviews. The interviews with distributors and dealers were conducted after the questionnaire was created together with the sales director, approved by the tutor at Haaga-Helia, introduced internally at Brother Finland and sent out to the focus group of Brother distributors

and dealers. The questionnaire was sent out in April 2017 and two reminders were dispatched from Webropol system in May and early June. Channel sales team colleagues distributed the e-formatted questionnaire link to their B2B customers as well.

The interviewees were chosen by the means of purposive sampling meaning that we decided upon a good representation of B2B customers representing distributors, IT dealers, office dealers, chain, purchaser, owner and managing director. All predefined interviewees were ready to participate in the research. All semi-structured interviews were conducted in May face-to-face and recorded with a dictation machine. The interviews resulted in 3 hours 8 minutes of interview material, whereby three lasted on average 30 minutes and two 48 minutes. The material was transcribed and pre-analysed during summer 2017.

To address the issue of triangulation or in other words to triangulate multiple sources of data (cf. Saunders et al. 2009, 146) and to tackle external validity issues, it was chosen to gather data from various sources: e-questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, post-implementation phone calls with the interviewees, and discussions in the company with the channel sales team and marketing communications department prior, during and after the research and development project. The main findings of the research and development project were presented to the whole sales and marketing team in a joint meeting early September.

Additionally, the findings of the research were presented, and the more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications was implemented during a workshop at Brother Finland early September. That was conducted in a form of a focus group interview with the sales director, channel sales team and marketing communications department. The sales director introduced the topic and explained why the project was initiated. The researcher presented the former state of communications, main findings of the data (questionnaire and interviews) and the new, customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications which was already partially implemented into marketing communications. All participants were given freedom of speech to interrupt and ask more questions during the workshop since it was the most important part of implementing the approach in practice.

Lastly, in the end of September 2017, the interviewees were phoned separately to elicit whether and how the changes of the new approach to marketing communications were visible. All interviewees gave permission to record the short phone calls on loudspeaker with a dictation machine placed beside to better draw conclusions of the data gathered. Additionally, the researcher took notes of the answers.

Data gathering methods will be gone into in more detail in following subchapters.

4.3.1 Questionnaire

The aim of this study was to find out how to develop Brother Finland's marketing communications towards distributors and dealers for optimal results. Therefore, the objective of the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews was to find out how the B2B respondents perceive the current state of Brother's communications, whether it meet their requirements for it and thus to develop marketing communications.

Background situation with the help of a GAP analysis and questionnaire questions were outlined with the sales director/mentor at the workplace in the end of February 2017. The questions were finalised and approved by the Haaga-Helia tutor in the middle of March. The questionnaire contained background questions and 19 actual questions covering the following topics:

- 1) Background questions
- 2) The current state of Brother's communications (questions 2-4):
Brother's communicational support to distributors and dealers
- 3) Improvement ideas to develop Brother's communications (questions 5-10):
- 4) Customer communications (questions 10-15):
Your communication/liaison with your customers.
- 5) Brother as a brand (questions 16-18):
Refers to analysing and developing Brother's customer relationship towards end-users (B2C).
- 6) Your opinion/insights about the future of the printing industry (question 19)

The question themes were related to the research questions, and the formulation of the questions and question types were thoroughly thought: close-ended single and multiple-choice questions, open-ended questions and Likert scale questions were used to gather valuable B2B customers' insights. The questions concerning the current state of communications included questions about the content of the dialogue/communications between Brother and the respondents, with whom from Brother the respondents are in contact and a Likert scale assessment of the current state of Brother's dialogue/communications.

In the questions related to improving Brother's communications, the respondents were asked about how the mutual dialogue and Brother's communications could be improved (close-ended multiple-choice questions with a comment field), whether someone else

would benefit from Brother's communications, what works and what does not work in the current state of Brother's communications, and what kind of communications (content) the respondents long for.

As to questions concerning customer communications it was elicited how and how often the respondents communicate with their own customers (B2B and/or B2C), if Brother's nationwide campaigns were used by the respondents and how they functioned in terms of communicating and selling in the campaigns to them and if the campaigns brought in commercially. In the context of Brother as a brand, it was enquired how the respondents promote Brother's visibility and sales in their daily work, what arguments/attributes their customers use with regards to Brother and what attributes the respondents would associate with Brother (multiple answers). Lastly, Brother distributors' and dealers' insights into the future of the printing industry in Finland was elicited: whether it remains the same, declines, grows, concentrates on different sectors/departments or something else, with an appeal to justify their point of view.

The Webropol questionnaire was sent out to 19 contact persons being employed by distributors and 503 contact persons working for dealers in the middle of April 2017. First reminder to those who had not replied was sent on the 23rd of May. Additionally, Brother channel sales team talked to their customers about the research and development project and provided the questionnaire link to their customers. A second reminder with a small incentive to reply was sent on the 8th of June. The questionnaire was closed in the end of June.

The translated questionnaire can be found in appendix 1. The main findings of the questionnaire are introduced in chapter 5.1.

4.3.2 Semi-structured customer interviews

The interview themes were to a great extent similar to the themes used in the questionnaire, but the topics were discussed in a more depth and advanced during the interviews depending on the interviewee. The themes covered were at least background information, the current state of communications at Brother, ideas on how to improve communications, Brother as a brand referring to analysing and developing Brother's customer relationship towards end-users (B2C) or B2B when discussing with distributors, and the future of the printing industry in Finland on a general level, specifically related to Brother product groups and with regards to the informant's own position (as a distributor/dealer).

The main purpose of the semi-structured interviews was to deepen the data gathered, give the informants an arena to have their saying and to triangulate the empirical data. Semi-structured customer interviews with Brother's distributors and dealers offered an excellent chance to elicit interviewees' insights and opinions in a safe and unhurried environment, and to hear about their replies which were transcribed and pre-categorised by the researcher into colour-coded chunks of important replies, positive feedback, improvement ideas and corrective feedback.

Semi-structured interview questions were drafted together with the sales director and the researcher on the 19th of April and approved by the tutor on the 24th of April 2017. We used purposive sampling to choose the five interviewees to represent comprehensively the variety of Brother's B2B customers: distributors, IT dealers, managing directors, owners, sales persons, buyers, and chains' representatives. As the chosen research philosophy (interpretivism) emphasises understanding meanings and context, and the researcher had earlier experience from semi-structured interviews, it was a justified choice to employ this data gathering method.

All five face-to-face interviews were arranged in the end of April and conducted in May. The interviews were transcribed and pre-analysed in summer. The main findings were written in autumn 2017. The interview themes and questions used in all interviews are presented in appendix 2. The main findings of the semi-structured interviews are discussed in chapter 5.2.

4.3.3 Internal data from focus group interview at Brother Finland

It is an intrinsic element of research and development projects conducted in a case company that the findings of the study will have a link to the research objectives i.e. research questions. Of equal importance is that the outcome of the research, in this case the more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications, will have an impact on the day-to-day work at Brother Finland and to its B2B customers. Therefore, marketing communications department and channel sales team have been constantly informed about the progress of the research project. Besides, ongoing discussions with the sales director being mentor at the workplace have been conducted on a regular basis.

A focus group discussion workshop was organised for the marketing communications department and the channel sales team on the 7th of September 2017. The workshop had the aim to meet the following purposes: to inform about the main findings of the research, to have an open and trustworthy arena for discussion around the topic – the research and the outcome – and to triangulate the qualitative data.

The focus group interview i.e. workshop went as follows: all team members were asked to join a meeting room for one hour. The sales director prefaced the workshop in describing the backgrounds and objectives for the research project. It was a purposive decision to engage the teams better: therefore, he talked first and then the researcher presented the topic and the whole team had their saying. Everybody gave a permission for an anonymous focus group interview which was recorded with a dictation machine. The clarity of the material was good enough to gather valuable insights and answers as to the research question: RQ3: How to engage employees to take on board the more dialogic approach? It was agreed with the tutor that only semi-structured interviews were transcribed and both internal and external focus group interviews suffice to be listened from the dictation machine.

Further, the researcher had prepared materials to go through together with the teams in the workshop: 1) a PowerPoint presentation about the main findings from the empirical research, 2) two pictures depicting both the current and the new, more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications, 3) a PowerPoint presentation about the new approach to marketing communications outlining the GAP analysis, research in brief, what changes had already been implemented, the most important findings of the research i.e. what B2B customers valued and hoped from us regarding marketing communications and what are the key changes to be rolled out according to the more customer-centric and dialogic approach. To conclude, the benefits of the approach were presented and discussed. Finally, team members were asked the following questions in the form of an open, freely flowing conversation:

- 1) What do you think of the more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications with regards to the following:
 - A) Internal marketing (derived from the GAP analysis)
 - B) Systematic feedback process and example questions to B2B customers for the SurveyMonkey survey tool.
 - How did the campaign work?
 - What did the campaign bring in commercially?
 - What changes should be implemented?
 - Your additional comments to us.
 - C) Most important feedback from the empirical data was presented and discussed.
- 2) Is the approach clear and understandable?
- 3) Have you internalised the approach?

The focus group interview lasted for one hour and included i.e. above-mentioned questions. Additionally, the researcher promised to prepare ready-made templates for Mail-Chimp newsletters and SurveyMonkey survey tool to implement the feedback process towards B2B customers (cf. chapter 3.3.2 where actionable first steps were discussed according to Green 2007, 184). Internal marketing will be practiced in a more systematic fashion as the need and benefits of it were visualised and agreed to with the channel sales team and marketing communications department.

The questions used in the focus group interview can be found in appendix 3. The main findings of the internal focus group interview are introduced in chapter 5.3.

4.3.4 Focus group interviews after implementation

It was agreed with the sales director and the tutor to enquire of the same five interviewees about their perceptions and insights regarding the new more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications. The questions used in the individual phone interviews included at least the following points:

- 1) Has the dialogue and interaction improved between Brother Finland and you?
- 2) How is the change visible? (If it is visible.) How is it realised concretely?
- 3) Do you feel as a distributor/dealer that Brother's support towards you has improved?

The interviewees were phoned separately on the 20th of September and the 25th of September. Each interviewee gave me a permission to record the follow-up interview conducted on a mobile phone on loudspeaker and recorded by a dictation machine placed beside. The interviews i.e. follow-up discussions lasted between 5–7 minutes. The quality of the recorded interviews suffices to gather the main findings from the interviews, thus no transcriptions were done. Instead, the researcher made notes on a printed paper including the common questions. The common questions used in the focus group interviewees can be found in appendix 4. The main findings of the focus group interviews are presented in chapter 5.4.

4.4 Interpreting and analysing data

It is paramount to comprehend that qualitative data collection results appear first as non-standardised mass of data (i.e. recorded interviews and their transcripts) which need to be prepared for analysis. Qualitative data will thus be converted to word-processed texts which then will be classified (summarised, categorised, and/or restructured as a narrative) during the actual analysis. Meanings will be gained using conceptualisation at that stage

of the research. As no standardised procedures for analysing qualitative data exist, it is recommended to summarise (condensate), categorise (group, i.e. unitising data, assigning data to categories) and/or structure (order) meanings using a narrative in order to interpret your qualitative data. The key is, however, to classify the data collected in more understandable chunks or units, and to seek to find relationships, develop and test propositions and produce conclusions. (Saunders et al. 2009, 480–497.)

Miles, Huberman & Saldaña (2014, 10–11) advocate similar principles to Saunders et al. (2009) regarding systematic analytic practices, the general nature of the qualitative data being in the form of words or images, and the strengths of qualitative data being rich, holistic and gathered from a close proximity to a specific situation, in a real-life context. As the essence of the qualitative data is often based on words (observations, interviews, documents), such data needs to be processed first before moving into actual analysis (Miles et al. 2014, 11).

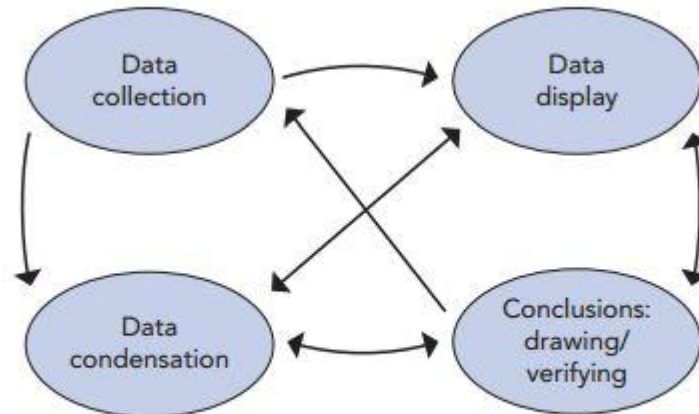
As to systematic, sequential analysis of qualitative data, Miles et al. (2014, 10) note that it is key to be able to assign codes or themes in the research data, to sort and shift through a wealth of materials in order to identify similar relationships between patterns, themes and categories, and to isolate these patterns and processes and their commonalities and differences. They urge researchers to note down reflections and remarks and to gradually elaborate assertions, proportions and generalisations from the database. Those generalisations can be compared with “a formalized body of knowledge in the form of constructs or theories”. (Ibid., 10.)

Miles et al. (2014, 12–14) support using techniques to make the qualitative data stronger: after the data collection follows an important phase of data condensation (selecting/focusing/simplifying/abstracting the data), after that comes data display denoting the selection what to analyse allowing then conclusions drawing and action to ensue. Then it is time to focus on conclusions: drawing and verifying them. The writers remind that the data analysis consists of all the stages presented and point out succinctly that data condensation continues during the whole research project, see also figure 15:

As we see it, data condensation occurs continuously throughout the life of any qualitatively oriented project. Even before the data are actually collected, anticipatory data condensation is occurring as the researcher decides (often without full awareness) which conceptual framework, which cases, which research questions, and which data collection approaches to choose. As data collection proceeds, further episodes of data condensation occur: writing summaries, coding, developing themes,

generating categories, and writing analytic memos. The data condensing/transforming process continues after the fieldwork is over, until a final report is completed. (Miles et al. 2014, 12.)

Components of Data Analysis: Interactive Model



Source: Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Figure 15. Components of data analysis: interactive model. (Miles et al. 2014, 14.)

Miles et al. (2014, 11) further point out that the researcher always influences on the fieldwork and the whole research as “the words we choose to document what we see and hear in the field can never truly be “objective”; they can only be our interpretation of what we experience. [...] And the influence of the researcher’s personal values, attitudes, and beliefs from and toward fieldwork is not unavoidable” (Ibid., 11). This aspect was discussed in chapter 4.2 and I as a researcher was determined to maintain high standards in designing, conducting, analysing and writing stages of the thesis study.

In this thesis study, qualitative data will be analysed qualitatively, but some of the findings will be visualised e.g. via graphs and statistics gained from the Webropol survey tool. All triangulated qualitative data (questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, internal data through focus group interview and separate focus group interviews by phone with interviewees) were grouped around the same topics and thus can be analysed using recurrent themes and patterns. Also, it is possible to discern where there are similarities and differences in the replies and insights. Due to the overview gained from the data, it was possible to answer the research questions.

The research data was then analysed by the researcher, and the findings of the study were shared with the teams accordingly to engage and facilitate the change process into

the more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications towards distributors and dealers. Main findings of the study will be gone into in chapter 5. The more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications and learning outcomes will be discussed in chapter 6.

4.5 Ethical considerations and the role of the researcher

Every research and development project may contain ethical considerations as to data collection and the use of data (Eskola & Suoranta 2005, 52). Information security and privacy shall be addressed during the project. This concerned for instance data collection through the survey tool Webropol. It was essential to distinguish the role of a researcher/employee during the project: as an employee and researcher I have access to Webropol account and to MailChimp distribution lists containing distributors' and dealers' emails.

As discussed earlier in chapters 4.1 and 4.2, a case study research was employed where the role of the researcher was to be an outsider denoting that he/she does not take actively part in the research like e.g. in action research being co-subject/co-researcher. I distinguished my researcher role from that of the employee. I was aware of the researcher bias denoting "any factor which induces bias in the researcher's recording of responses. For example, a researcher may allow her or his own subjective view or disposition to get in the way of fairly and accurately recording and interpreting participants' responses" (Saunders et. al 2016, 203). I managed to conduct the research ethically and methodologically right and maintained objectivity throughout the process. I kept an objective neutral stance as to positive and negative feedback received via the empirical data.

As a researcher, I needed to stress and guarantee respondents' anonymity in the questionnaire, interviews and during the whole thesis study. Background information only included questions regarding age group, industry (whether distributor or dealer), focus (whether selling hardware or supplies, or a mix of them), and area/locality (e.g. Uusimaa, Pirkanmaa), but no information about the names of the companies or personal names. It was ensured that their replies will not affect their position, terms and conditions in reference to their business relationship with Brother Finland. Respondents' replies or citations will be written anonymously.

The researcher role required not to disclose single, identifiable information gathered through the Webropol questionnaire or from the semi-structured customer interviews to other employees but had to treat it confidentially as research data. Even though it would have been possible to get caught away by the topic while interviewing the informants as

creating engagement requires passion and drive, but I constantly maintained my role as a researcher, recorded and transcribed the interviews, categorised and clustered the raw data into meaningful chunks, analysed the data and reported the findings in a professional manner.

4.6 Validity and reliability of the study

In reference to Saunders et al. (2009, 156–159), it can be stated that the credibility of research findings can be attained by paying attention to validity, generalisability (external validity) and reliability.

Saunders et al. (2009, 157) define validity as follows: “Validity is concerned with whether the findings are really about what they appear to be about. Is the relationship between two variables a causal relationship?” In other words, are the findings what they were supposed to be? Further, Miles et al. (2014, 312) ask whether “the findings of the study make sense? Are they credible to the people we study and to our readers?” I consider this a key point since the aim was to pursue a study which is meaningful to the case company in terms of findings but also of the end results: whether the study is going to accomplish a framework, construct, development idea, guidance or change. In reference to Raimond (1993 in Saunders et al. 2009, 156), his ‘How do I know test’ addresses issues of credibility of the research findings and nails the criteria and standards business researchers need to aim for. Raimond (1993 in Saunders et al. 2009, 156) puts it succinctly: “will the evidence and my conclusions stand up to the closest scrutiny”.

Besides, it is key to beware of any threats to validity prior and during data collection and especially at the stages of data interpretation and development of conclusions. Moreover, ethical consideration and any potential constraints in relation to accessing the data shall be considered. (Saunders et al. 2009, 157–160.)

According to Saunders et al. (2009, 156), “reliability refers to the extent to which your data collection techniques or analysis procedures will yield consistent findings”. It is important to beware of potential researcher biases, such as subject or participant error, subject or participant bias, observer error or observer bias (Robson 2002 in Saunders et al. 2009, 156). One shall aim for own quality control checks and clear steps in the following: clear research questions, explicit researcher’s role, connectedness to theories while analysing, quality of data collection techniques and actual data (Miles et al. 2014, 312).

In this thesis study, validity, reliability and quality has been achieved by following systematic procedures from designing the research, to qualitative data collection and analysis and to reporting the process in detail. The mentor at the workplace and the tutor at Haaga-Helia have been consulted during important milestones: first planning, then drafting, approving and conducting the empirical research. The same principles applied to the whole design of the thesis study forming a unified entity of the theory and practice with benefits to the case company: a more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications. As discussed in chapter 4.1, a single case study research does not aim at generalising but describing and understanding a case in question, whereas multiple case study researches can be generalisable in terms of generalising theories but not probabilities. Thus, the findings resulting from this thesis study in the context of Brother Finland's B2B customers' (distributors, dealers) insights can be presented to Brother's other Nordic subsidiaries. More importantly, the findings and the more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications can be presented, then applied and taken into consideration while planning the budget year 2018 starting in April for Finland in terms of personnel, time, money and planned actions regarding marketing communications department and channel sales team.

5 Main findings

This section will introduce the main findings from the study. The chapters provide answers to the main research questions 'How to develop Brother Finland's marketing communications towards distributors and dealers for optimal results' as well as to the sub-questions: RQ1: How to develop dialogue between Brother Finland, its distributors and dealers and end-users?, RQ2: B2B: How can Brother support distributors and dealers in an optimal way? and RQ3: How to engage employees to take on board the more dialogic approach?

The findings have been divided into four parts based on the qualitative data gathering methods: questionnaire, semi-structured customer interviews, internal data from focus group interview at Brother Finland and post-implementation feedback from focus group interviews. The main findings have been further categorised based on the themes that reflect the research questions and common questions used in data gathering methods where questionnaire and semi-structured interviews share similar topics (cf. chapter 4.3.1 Questionnaire and 4.3.2. Semi-structured customer interviews and respective appendices 1 and 2). However, semi-structured interviews provide more depth to the topic, and complement and triangulate the findings. The data analysis includes direct quotes from customer replies from the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews to illustrate examples of their perceptions of the topics.

The purpose of gathering internal data from focus group interviews and perceptions from interviewees in the form of post-implementation feedback was to present and implement the more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications, and elicit if and how the dialogue and interaction has improved between the respondents and Brother Finland. The gathering of internal data serves in instilling the approach in the daily work as well as empowering and involving the marketing communications and channel sales departments to take on board the approach.

The main research question 'How to develop Brother Finland's marketing communications towards distributors and dealers for optimal results' will be answered in chapter 5.5. Summarising the findings by linking main findings from the research and theory and providing development ideas to Brother Finland's marketing communications.

5.1 Questionnaire

This section provides Brother Finland's B2B customers' perceptions of the current state of Brother's communications and improvement ideas on how to improve it. The background data and questions in the questionnaire were outlined in chapter 4.3.1 and questionnaire

questions can be found in appendix 1. 52 respondents out of 522 representatives of distributors or dealers shared their perceptions regarding Brother’s communications and specifically marketing communications. The main findings from the questionnaire represent perceptions of the informants who voluntarily partook in the research.

5.1.1 Background questions

Altogether, 52 persons replied to the questionnaire, and the response rate was 9,96 per cent. It is appropriate for a single case study research, although we had originally hoped to receive more replies, for example an ideal response rate of 20% since the opening rate of MailChimp newsletter is roughly 20%, depending on the distribution lists. However, the response rate suffices to reflect the insights from distributors and dealers triangulated with other data gathering methods. 9,62% (5) of the replies represent insights from distributors and 90,38% (47) those of dealers. The respondents’ anonymity was guaranteed, and therefore voluntary background information questions did not elicit which distributors and dealers were represented, nor were names and sex asked about. Nearly 62% of the respondents (26 out of 42), which replied to one of the background questions “How long have you collaborated with Brother”, replied 1–3 years of collaboration. Only four of 42 had less than one year of experience with Brother, whereas seven reported to have long common history with Brother (between over 15 years to 38 years).

41 out of 52 respondents replied to the question to which age group one belonged to. Most of them, nearly 49%, represented the age group over 50 years (20 out of 41), followed by nine persons, nearly 22%, representing the age group 40–49, eight persons (roughly 20%) falling into the age group 30–39 and only four respondents (almost 10%) belonged to the age group 20–29 years. See table 1 for more details.

Table 1. Background information from the questionnaire.

Age group	Respondents (N=41)	Per cent
20–29 years	4	9,76%
30–39 years	8	19,51%
40–49 years	9	21,95%
50+ years	20	48,78%

5.1.2 The current state of Brother’s communications

As to question 2, ‘Describe with a few sentences the current content of the dialogue/communications between you and Brother. Please provide concrete examples.’, the respond-

ents were asked in an open-ended question to describe the current content of the dialogue/communications between them and Brother. The perceptions about the content could be clustered into the following chunks of meanings: 1) marketing/communications via newsletters, 2) overall contentedness with dialogue/communications with Brother, 3) Brother's representatives (visiting/phoning them), 4) service-related content (instructions, support, newsletters), 5) sales support, 6) content via distributors, and 7) corrective feedback. It is remarkable to notice that almost all respondents (50/52) gave concrete examples of the content they have experienced with Brother's communications. Two replies were left unanswered and these were eliminated from the analysis regarding this question. 17 of the replies included comments which can be categorised in two or three chunks of meanings describing i.e. newsletters and campaigns as well as Brother's representatives contacting them or helping otherwise on the phone (sales support, service-related content). See table 2 for more details.

Table 2. Chunks of meanings regarding questionnaire question 2: Describe with a few sentences the current content of the dialogue/communications between you and Brother. Please provide concrete examples.

Chunks of meanings	Respondents (N=50)	Per cent
Marketing/communications	10	20%
Overall contentedness with dialogue/communications with Brother	10	20%
Brother's representatives (phoning/visiting them)	6	12%
Service-related content (instructions, support, newsletters)	2	4%
Sales support	2	4%
Content via distributors	0 (though, part of content falling into several categories in 3 replies)	0%
Content falling into several categories	17 (out of which 2 contained elements of corrective feedback stating that actual dialogue is not maintained)	34%
Corrective feedback (no interaction in years, campaigns could be announced earlier to distributors, no dialogue yet)	3	6%

The replies revealed that most of the respondents who partook in the questionnaire were satisfied with the content of the dialogue/communications between them and Brother. They were happy with the regular newsletters (containing communication on campaigns, product novelties/product launches, marketing, product features, service-related newsletters). A few respondents described the marketing communications as follows:

Communication support has improved, for example with regards to QL800 label printer product launch, as target groups who could be potential buyers for this product, were mentioned in the communications. It helps sellers and creates faster an image who to target with this product.

Communication is quite abundant and versatile including planning of different kind of marketing activities and following up of a chain's sales performance.

Information regarding product launches and campaigns land well in my email inbox.

Many respondents were overall content with the dialogue/communications with Brother and described it e.g. to include the necessary information they wish for, co-operation being "nice, competent, fast and direct" via different channels: newsletters, by phone, via email and during customer visits. Brother sales representatives as contact persons were acclaimed in several responses. A few examples visualise the category of overall contentedness in the replies:

Collaboration has lasted long: Brother is a well-known and safe partner to operate with.

The content in our communications is mainly concerned with product information, availability queries, campaign prices and special prices. Communication is well-functioning, active and mutual.

Regular meetings. I receive well answers to my email queries. Good product-related support.

I am in touch with Brother's product managers if needed and while doing purchases. I also phone dealer support if I have problems with machines.

As to the category of Brother's representatives phoning/visiting them, it was stated in a few replies (6 highlighting solely the action of the Brother representatives) and in replies whose content fall into several categories that Brother contact persons keep in touch by

regularly phoning, visiting and emailing the customers, like two quotes from respondents exemplify:

For example, Brother's representative informs us about good offers on machines.

Case queries from Brother's representative. We check on the customer need and based on that we ask Brother to suggest right product alternatives.

This quote visualises an example of the category content falling into several categories where the content of the communications touches on Brother's representatives and marketing/communications:

Brother's representative calls me a few times a month and tells about new campaigns and products. Additionally, I receive product information on new products into my email inbox.

However, it was mentioned in two replies that Brother's representatives have not contacted them directly or visited them in years (corrective feedback). Additionally, two respondents question the claim about dialogue/communications:

What dialogue? Emails keep coming in, nothing else.

Actual dialogue is seldom maintained. Communications mainly consist of newsletters to service and installations partners sent by Brother's communications and of course advertisements. We also receive advertisements via distributors.

Service-related content was described to be either via newsletters (marketing/communications) or well-functioning support by phone by Brother. Sales support as a sole category was mentioned in two replies highlighting that respondents receive sales support when needed by Brother. Sales support was mentioned in many replies with content falling into several categories, such as a quote exemplifies:

We ask availability queries of the products from Brother. And questions regarding service or functioning of the products.

Brother-related content by distributors was mentioned in three replies (content falling into several categories) where the role of the distributors was clear: they distribute, serve commercially and with regards to marketing communications:

We negotiate with x [a Brother representative] about batch purchases, otherwise we order directly from distributors. Products are good and our collaboration with Brother has lasted over 30 years.

Commercial communications mainly come from distributors. In service-related matters we operate directly with Brother.

Question 3 in the questionnaire prompted respondents to rank how often they are in contact with Brother's departments (sales, service, marketing communications, and administration) and to rank these in order of the importance to the respondents (1 the most important, 4 the least important). The results were as follows: sales department was placed first, followed by service and marketing communications. Administration was ranked less high in terms of importance regarding dialogue/communications. Table 3 visualises the rankings.

Table 3. Question 3: With whom are you most often in contact/dialogue either personally or by the means of communications technology? Please rank in order of importance.

	1	2	3	4	Totaling	Average
A. Sales	34	9	4	5	52	1,62
B. Service	9	21	14	8	52	2,4
C. Marketing communications	4	18	25	5	52	2,6
D. Administration	5	4	9	34	52	3,38
Totalling	52	52	52	52	208	2,5

Lastly, respondents were asked to assess the current state of communications in question 4 (the scale ranging from 1 denoting the worst to 10 standing for the best score). The mean value was 7,42 which can be interpreted that respondents are somewhat satisfied with the current state. Table 4 presents how the assessments were divided.

Table 4. Question 4: Assess the current state of our dialogue/communications (1 worst, 10 best).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		Tot.	Average
Worst	1	1	1	0	3	4	13	15	10	4	Best	52	7,42

Overall, most of the respondents valued the current state of communications, which can be analysed in more detail in table 2 breaking down the respondents' perceptions into chunks of meanings. Based on the assessment of the respondents in question 4, there is however room to improve and develop Brother's communications – and the mutual dialogue/interaction. It is key to understand that this is a qualitative single case study which does not aim at generalising the findings. However, this small sample of findings is aligned with the theory confirming that it is recommended to map and segment one's key stakeholders and covet relationships with those who are willing to advance mutual relationships (Cornelissen 2014, 47; Fill & Turnbull 2016, 337). By the same token, the findings can be interpreted as a proof for Brother's representatives to keep up the good work with their B2B customers and for marketing communications department to carry on with the communications line but being open and ready for modifications to serve the customer needs better. As to the corrective feedback regarding lack of interaction/dialogue, it was good to receive that feedback from five respondents (3 in corrective feedback, 2 in content falling into several categories). This thesis study will contribute to adding a level of interaction/dialogue, first of all by plumbing the current situation, eliciting the perceptions from the B2B customers and then applying Cornelissen's (2014, 52–54) dialogue strategy (two-way symmetrical model of communication) to the more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications with the aim to improve communications both ways, from the organisation to stakeholders, and vice versa.

Improvement ideas from the replies in questionnaire (and semi-structured interviews) will be used in the case company to modify and develop its *modus operandi* towards excellence (cf. chapter 2.3 on background situation) and will contribute to the more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications with those willing to it.

5.1.3 Improvement ideas to develop Brother's communications

Questions 5–10 are of great importance to the research as the replies from the respondents will entail improvement ideas to overall Brother's communications and help answer the sub-questions RQ1: 'How to develop dialogue between Brother Finland, its distributors and dealers and end-users?' and RQ2: 'B2B: How can Brother support distributors and dealers in an optimal way?'

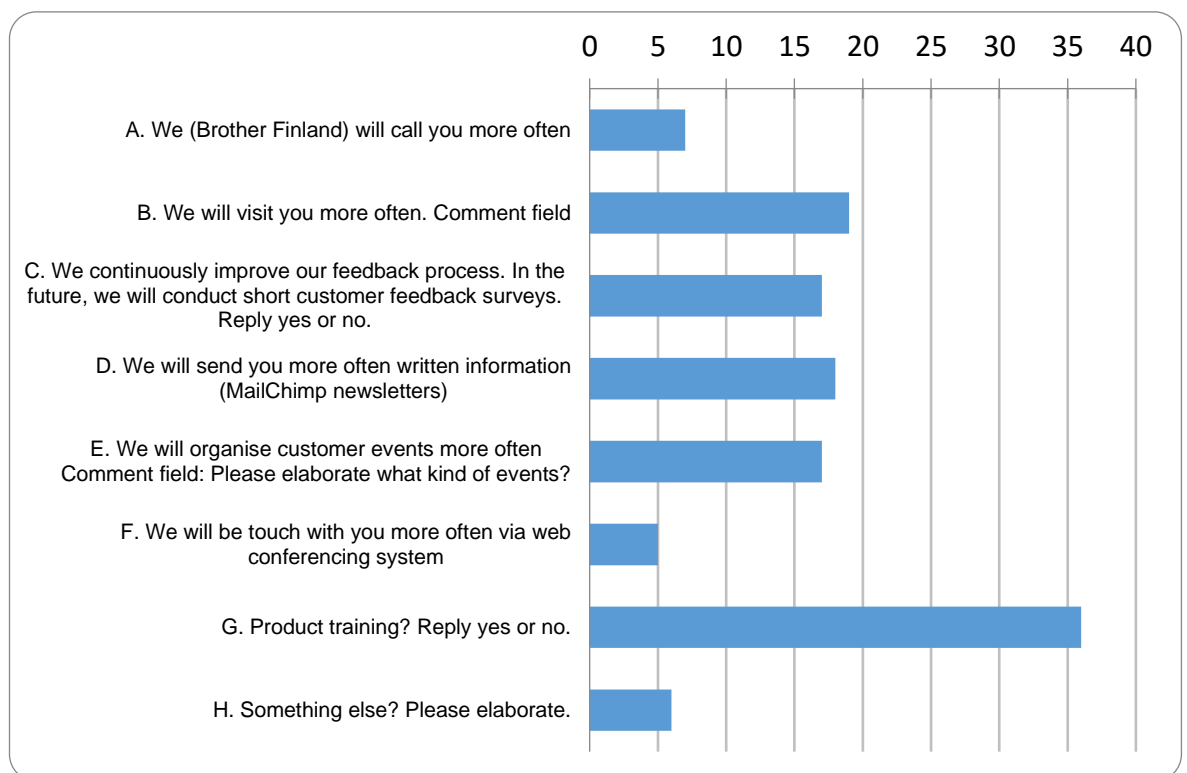
Responses to the question 5 'How could we develop our mutual dialogue and Brother's communications? You can select multiple answers.' revealed that nearly 70% of the respondents (36 out of 52) would like to receive more product trainings. Other improvement areas were mentioned quite evenly by the respondents: more customer visits by Brother's representatives, more often written information via newsletters and more events organised

by Brother (open comments included topics, such as product trainings, participation in customers' own events at stores, service trainings to technicians). Response alternative 5B resulted in polarised answers: 10 of the respondents were positive to short customer feedback surveys whereas seven did not see them necessary. Seven respondents hoped that Brother would call them more often, as one of the informants puts it:

It would be good that Brother phoned us and confirmed campaigns and stock-related matters. Occasionally, it happens to me that I have missed one email regarding the campaign and I do not have orders in with the campaign prices. For this reason, I would not take offense if someone at Brother would phone me personally and make sure that the intended message has come across. It does not always come across with the first information! :)

See the table 5 for more details.

Table 5. Question 5: How could we develop our mutual dialogue and Brother's communications? You can select multiple answers.



Although Brother's representatives inform marketing communications department about additions and removals from the newsletter distribution lists, the replies to the question 6 'Apart from you, would other people in your organisation benefit from Brother's communications' elicit that most respondents (41 out of 52) hold that other people could benefit

from the communications received from Brother. That information was fed back to the channel sales department.

In questions 7 and 8, the respondents were asked to freely give feedback with regards to Brother's communications: what is good about Brother's communications and what needs to be improved. The perceptions given by the respondents could be clustered into the following chunks of meanings: 1) Clarity of the messages (newsletters), 2) Informativeness of the newsletters, 3) Up-to-date information / new products (newsletters), 4) Adequate number of communication / newsletters, 5) Too many emails (newsletters), 6) Clarity of communications, 7) Active and versatile communications, 8) Good campaigns, 9) Brother's homepage (clarity) and 10) No comments / cannot say.

Categories up-to-date information / new products (newsletters), clarity of communications and adequate number of communications (newsletters) stood out from the total amount of analysed replies. However, 19% of the respondents did not reply to this question. One quote exemplifies the category clarity of the messages in newsletters:

Images and written message are aligned. It is targeted messaging and focuses on a few models at the most. The newsletters also contain a message how to action and a so called due date.

Overall, the data showed that newsletters and communications in total were acclaimed being clear, informative and up-to-date. Table 6 illustrates the chunks of meanings and how they were divided.

Table 6. Chunks of meanings regarding questionnaire question 7: What is good about Brother's communications? Please describe in a few sentences.

Chunks of meanings	Respondents (N=52)	Per cent
Clarity of the messages (newsletters)	5	10%
Informativeness of the newsletters	2	4%
Up-to-date information / new products (newsletters)	10	19%
Adequate number of communication / newsletters (not too often, not too seldom)	7	13%
Too many emails (newsletters)	1	2%

Active and versatile communications	2	4%
Clarity of communications	8	15%
Brother's representatives' performance (customer visits, availability)	3	6%
Good campaigns	2	4%
Brother's homepage (clarity)	1	2%
Brother's price lists (clarity)	1	2%
No comments / cannot say	10	19%

Equally, it was important to hear what needs to be improved in communications. It was noteworthy to see that this question triggered less replies, as 23 respondents out of 52, 44%, did not comment or found anything to be improved at the moment. Another remark was that the replies to this question were divided into a few similar categories whereas replies to the question 8 were more versatile and only a few replies were similar to one another.

All in all, the perceptions given by respondents could be clustered into the following 19 chunks of meanings which are presented in table 7. The versatility of the areas that need improvement in communications is a sign that respondents perceive Brother's communications differently and give thus valuable single points to be developed. The analysed data revealed that some respondents would like to receive more personal communication from Brother's sales representatives (13%) and better communication of offers and campaigns of the products (10%). This information has been fed back to the marketing communications department and the channel sales team.

Table 7. Chunks of meanings regarding questionnaire question 8: What needs to be improved in Brother's communications? Please describe in a few sentences.

Chunks of meanings	Respondents (N=52)	Per cent
Improvements to price lists	2	4%
Clarity and management of the product range	1	2%
Product specifications in some models	1	2%
Price lists and other communication should be kept separate	1	2%
Argumentation	1	2%

More personal communication by Brother's representatives towards the dealers (reminding of campaigns, special pricing, stock issues, visiting customers)	7	13%
Better communication of offers and campaigns (newsletters)	5	9%
Case studies (customer references)	1	2%
Service phone calls in Finnish (other language options desired)	1	2%
Ready-made productisation packages (including descriptions and product specifications, images)	1	2%
More tailored messages (instead of generic messaging)	1	2%
Ready-made point of sales brochures in A5 format / editable range leaflets in A4 format (own prices could be added)	1	2%
More clarity in special pricing and claiming (claim numbers)	1	2%
Personification	1	2%
Better homepage	1	2%
Communication of products and solutions, lack of Facebook profile	1	2%
Sales tips	1	2%
More marketing	1	2%
No comments / cannot say / nothing to improve	23	44%

The replies to the question 9 'What kind of communications (content) do you long for? You can select multiple answers.' revealed that nearly 70% would like to receive more product information and more sales information e.g. sales arguments. 54% (28 out of 52) of the respondents would like to get more marketing support, such as images, brochures and

posters. Four respondents elaborated their improvement ideas as follows:

Bigger campaigns.

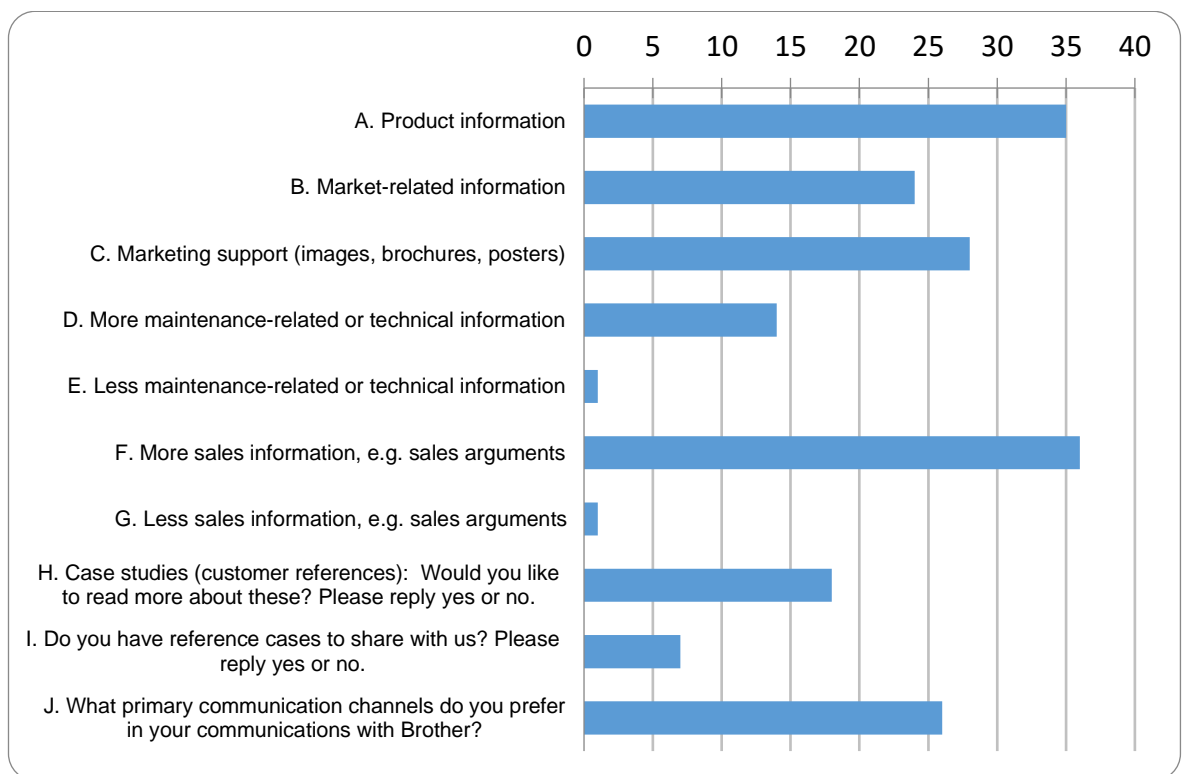
Product photos should be available easier.

More material to be used online.

Point-of-sales material, in max A4 format.

The fact that 9H was chosen as a response alternative showed that some respondents (12 out of 14) would like to read more case studies i.e. customer references produced by Brother’s marketing communications. The replies in 9J revealed that the respondents prefer email (22 replies out of 52) and phone (8 out of 52) as communication channels towards Brother. See table 8 for more details regarding replies to the question 9.

Table 8. Question 9: What kind of communications (content) do you long for? You can select multiple answers.



This feedback is important as to developing Brother’s marketing communications, especially MailChimp newsletters and other means of communication. More sales information (e.g. sales arguments) and product information in MailChimp newsletters would be the type of content the respondents are asking for, which would mean another example of

close collaboration between Brother Finland's marketing communications and channel sales departments to deliver the desired content. Marketing communications department already now tweaks the newsletters and tailors the messages to the target audiences by adding more information than in the original templates. The feedback from the replies fortifies the notion that the researcher has: content needs to resonate with the target audiences (B2B customers being distributors and dealers) and facilitate them to sell and inform about the products.

In response to RQ1: 'How to develop dialogue between Brother Finland, its distributors and dealers and end-users' and RQ2: 'B2B: How can Brother support distributors and dealers in an optimal way', the questionnaire data showed that the respondents would like to receive more product training by Brother and more customer visits by Brother representatives to develop mutual dialogue and Brother's communications. As to developing the communicational content, the informants emphasised the will to receive more sales information (e.g. sales arguments), product information and support to marketing, such as images, brochures and posters. This has been fed back to the respective departments and discussed during the focus group interview to instil the more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications.

5.1.4 Customer communications

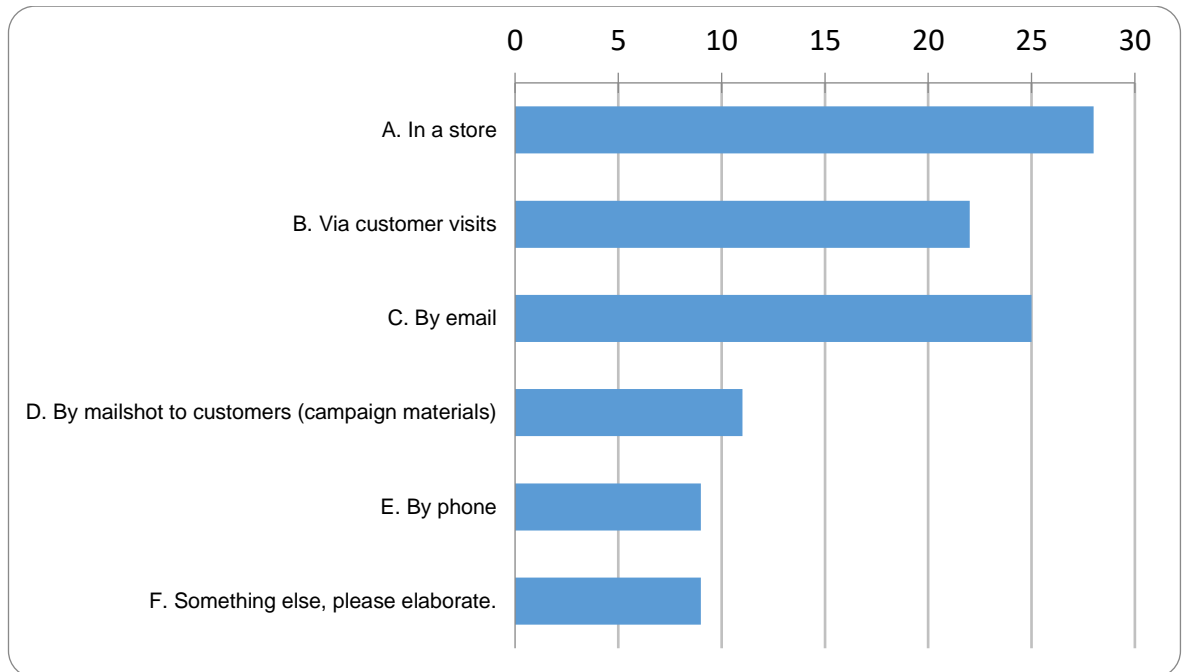
Questions 10–15 aim at canvassing how Brother's B2B customers (distributors to their customers being dealers and dealers dealing with B2C and/or B2B customers) communicate with their own customers. Replies to these questions shall further elicit RQ1: How to develop dialogue between Brother Finland, its distributors and dealers and end-users? Brother does not sell machines directly to end-users but co-operates with distributors and dealers, therefore developing the mutual communications is crucial and benefit all parties.

Question 10 enquires 'How often do you communicate with your customers?'. 44% (23 out of 52) communicate daily, followed by 31% (16/52) with monthly customer communication whereas 23% (12/52) of respondents maintain weekly communication. Only one respondent communicates 1–2 times a year with his/her customers.

It was interesting to read the replies to the question 11 'What are the main communication channels you principally use while communicating about Brother products and campaigns with your customers? Please choose two methods you use most often.' Three response alternatives stood out: in a store (54%, 28 out of 52 respondents), by email (48%, 25/52) and visiting own customers (42%, 22/52). Open comments by respondents included e.g. communication on homepages, web portals, web shop, as a part of own press advertising

and as a part of a chain's internal communication with its member shops. Table 9 illustrates how the replies were divided amongst the respondents.

Table 9. Question 11: What are the main communication channels you principally use while communicating about Brother products and campaigns with your customers? Please choose two methods you use most often.



Questions 12–14 enquire whether respondents use Brother's nationwide campaigns in their own communications with their customers and how Brother generally succeeds in informing and selling in nationwide campaigns to its B2B customers. Question 12 'Do you utilise Brother's nationwide campaigns (e.g. QL800 label printer series) in your own communications?' prompted the following results: 62% (32/52) of the respondents use those campaigns for instance in their own marketing online and offline, in emails to customers, telling about the campaigns by phone and in stores, and occasionally on social media. However, 38% (20/52) of the informants do not generally use nationwide campaigns. As to the specific campaign on QL800 label printers, a few respondents mentioned that they did not have a proper customer segment to the product and some had missed the campaign for some reason. Although, it is good to hear that more than half of the respondents use nationwide campaigns produced by Brother. The replies to the questions 13–14 imply that Brother needs to be more active in versatile ways in communicating nationwide campaigns to customers and improve on selling in those campaigns: communication of the nationwide campaigns scored 6,85/10 (10 the best) and selling in campaigns by the channel sales team 5,9/10. (See also improvement ideas stated by the respondents in chapter 5.1.3, more product trainings, more customer visits, more sales- and product-related information in MailChimp newsletters).

Lastly, the respondents were asked to assess in question 15 'How have Brother campaigns worked for you commercially? Please describe in a few sentences.' Four different quotes illustrate how some of the respondents perceived nationwide campaigns:

Some campaigns work, some do not.

Some campaigns would work better if more time had been invested in planning and preparation of the campaigns. Campaigns often commence hastily where communication is not adequate.

Campaigns function well when I am interested in them and the product is of interest.

Campaigns have somewhat increased demand for the products and the sales, depending on the products (target groups). A B2B campaign targeted to companies has a more significant effect than that of targeted to consumers.

Further, replies to the question 15 entail assessment and improvement ideas to develop nationwide campaigns. A few quotes give food for thought and prompt for mutual collaboration with all parties, marketing communications, channel sales team and the B2B customers:

We could put our minds into it and decide together to take a grip on the campaign.

With varying success, depending on the product, target group, timing and other factors.

Back in the day, a labelling machine campaign functioned well.

This is useful information as Brother runs a few nationwide campaigns yearly. Feedback has been communicated to the respective departments as part of the research and development project (see chapter 5.3).

5.1.5 Brother as a brand

The section 'Brother as a brand' refers to analysing and developing Brother Finland's customer relationship towards end-users (B2C). Brother Finland conducted a GAP analysis in February 2017 (see chapter 2.3) and defined as the company's key messages i.e. brand elements that promises are kept, objectives set by the Japanese parent company are met

and especially Brother's extended warranty policy and proactive and timely communication with its distributors/dealers. Brother sees these elements help the brand to distinguish from the competitors. To receive some perceptions from its B2B customers and indirectly from B2C customers, questions 16 'How do you promote Brother's visibility and sales in your day-to-day work' and 17 'What arguments/attributes do your customers use with regards to Brother according to your experience?' were posed. Question 19 enquires how preferable respondents perceive Brother trademark.

The analysed data revealed that most of the respondents (32%) tend to use a marketing mix as to promoting Brother products to their customers and hence contributing to Brother's visibility especially in stores (machines and supplies, demo machines, point of sales material, own Brother compartment), in emails to customers, online and offline marketing and by telling own customers about Brother products and solutions. Besides the use of a marketing mix, visibility in stores was stated by 28% of the respondents (as a sole means to promotion). Web presence and online marketing were mentioned too, as well as promotion of Brother in own catalogues, customer magazines and advertising. Only one respondent stated to promote Brother on social media. Some respondents told to offer Brother solutions to their own customers in stores and at customer visits.

Integrated marketing communication was discussed in chapter 3.2, where Morierty et al. (2015, 64) advocate the use of marketing communication elements in a planned, strategic way to promote a brand or organisation. As the data shows, 60% of all respondents reported to promote Brother either in a store or using a marketing mix. This implies that Brother shall further invest in providing both offline and online, visual and written material to its B2B customers. See table 10 for more details exploring the analysed categories.

Table 10. Chunks of meanings regarding questionnaire question 16: How do you promote Brother's visibility and sales in your day-to-day work? Describe in a few sentences and kindly give concrete examples.

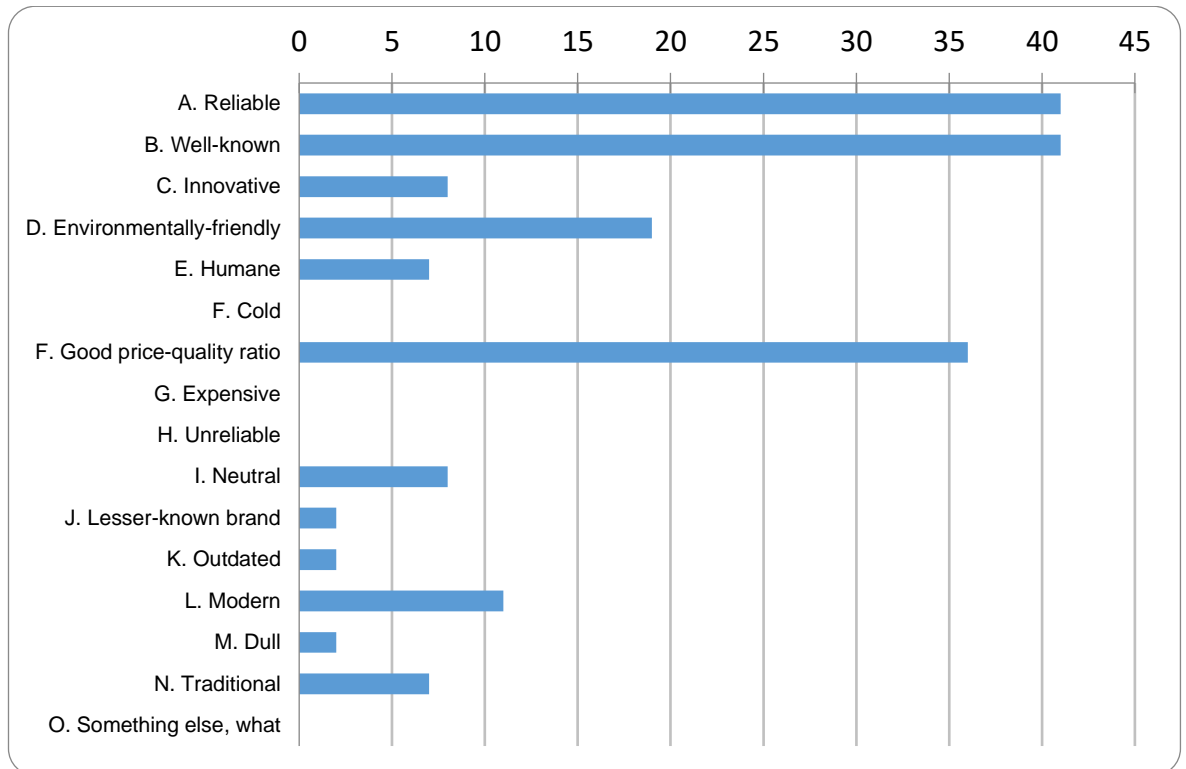
Chunks of meanings	Respondents (N=50)	Per cent
In a store	14	28%
Content falling into several categories (marketing mix) i.e. in a store and in emails to customers, in a store and in own marketing / advertising, online, word-of-mouth	16	32%

Word-of-mouth to customers / by offering Brother products/solutions	6	12%
Via own homepage or web portal	3	6%
In own marketing	2	4%
In emails to end-users (consumers)	1	2%
Case examples on social media and in sales talks	1	2%
No comments / cannot say	7	14%

In replies to question 17 'What arguments/attributes do your customers use with regards to Brother according to your experience?', a few attributes were emphasised, namely: reliability of working, warranty and reliability. These perceptions reflect some experiences from end-users stated by respondents and cannot be generalised. However, it gives some understanding of the brand image in this limited scope of the research.

Question 18 prompted the respondents to assess Brother as a recommended brand. Respondents could tick several attributes. Most of the respondents associated Brother with the following attributes: reliable (80%, 41 out of 51 respondents), well-known (80%, 41/51) and good price-quality ratio (70%, 36/51). For 37% (19/51) of the respondents Brother brand connotes the word environmentally-friendly. See table 11 for more details.

Table 11. Question 18: Assess Brother as a recommended brand (preference). Please tick those attributes you associate with Brother.



5.1.6 Your opinions/insights about the future of the printing

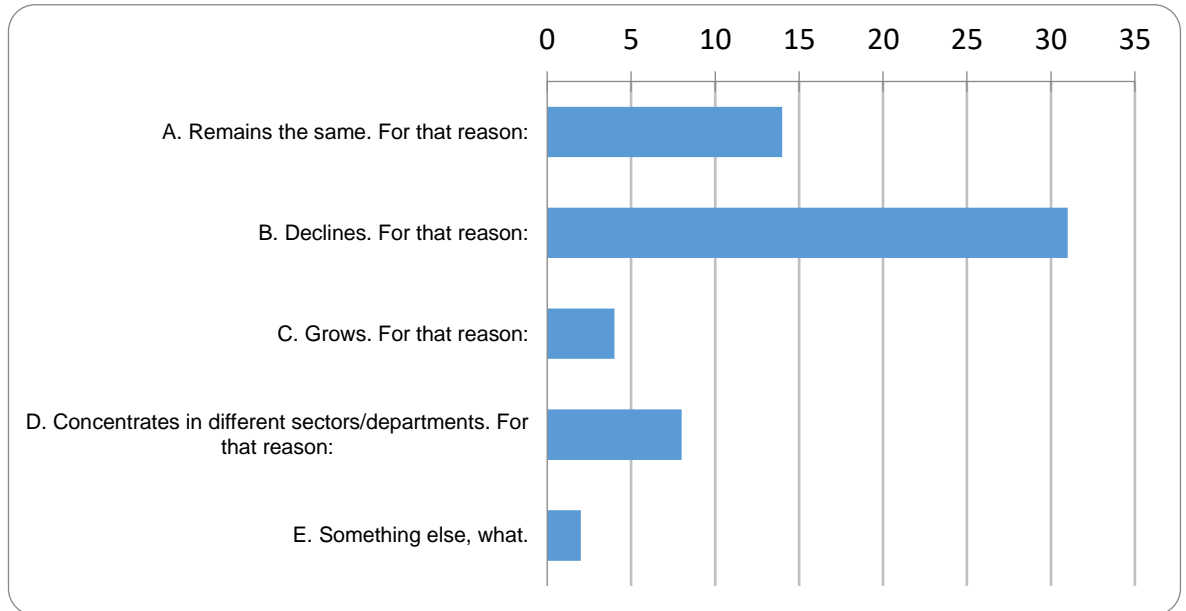
Chapter 2.1. discussed changes in the traditional printing industry. Further, question 19 aims to elicit respondents' perceptions regarding the future of the printing industry in Finland, whether they foresee it to remain the same, decline, grow, concentrate on different sectors/departments or something else. Most of the respondents (62%, 31 out of 50) see that printing will decline in the future i.e. due to electronic services, mobile services and digitalisation as was mentioned in seventeen comments. One respondent justifies his/her point of view as follows:

Customers often say that paperless office has been the topic of the day for over 10 years already. Well, paper and printing are still important. But I believe that printing is in decline, gradually, but it does not happen overnight. Something else will come to replace that, probably for Brother too.

28% (14/50) of the respondents hold that it will remain the same since, as a few respondents stated: "there have been years and years talks about paperless office, but it has not been realised yet" and that "many people still want to read on paper". 16% (8/50) see that the printing will concentrate i.e. in public sector, certain industries and applications, such

as labelling. Only four respondents (8%) foresee that printing will grow in the future. The respondents who stated something else (4%, 2/50) brought up prospects of increasing mobile printing and that managed print services would grow in importance in the future. Table 12 visualises how the replies were divided.

Table 12. Question 19: Your opinion/insights about the future of the printing industry in Finland. Please choose the most relevant alternative and justify your point of view.



5.2 Semi-structured customer interviews

This section deals with the main findings from the semi-structured customer interviews categorised in the following themes reflecting the interviews: background questions, the current state of communications at Brother, ideas on how to improve communications, Brother as a brand referring to analysing and developing Brother's customer relationship towards end-users (B2C) or B2B when discussing with distributors, and the future of the printing industry in Finland. All interviews were transcribed and colour-coded into important replies, positive feedback, improvement ideas and corrective feedback. This facilitated to discern similarities and differences of the replies and elicit the most important findings from the interviews.

5.2.1 Background questions

All five interviewees have worked a long time in the printing industry, from five years to nearly 30 years. As discussed in chapter 4.3.2, purposive sampling was used to have interviewees from different backgrounds: distributors, IT dealers, managing directors, owners, sales persons, buyers, and chains' representatives.

5.2.2 The current state of Brother's communications and improvement ideas

All five interviewees were content with Brother's communications: newsletters, contact partners and overall co-operation. They emphasised the clarity of the newsletters since it stood out among the flood of information as it is, as summarised from the interviewees' perceptions: "clear, informative, has a good visual layout and clear call-to-actions". A few improvement ideas with regards to newsletters were given: "less corporate advertising text, more sales tips and case studies". Additional spreadsheet containing information, such as product code, price and EAN code would fasten and facilitate productisation at distributors. Four interviewees said that they utilise campaign material provided by Brother at least internally and some elements of it are communicated outwards. One informant hoped that Brother would inform them about Brother's campaigns earlier than it does since "as a big company, we too have our marketing plans, and A, the timing of the campaign does not fit our plans, or B, products on campaign do not fit our marketing plan". Four interviewees were happy about the format of the newsletters (MailChimp) as "it includes a lot of information in a yet concise package".

Three interviewed customers felt that the pace of receiving information via email is adequate. However, two interviewees mentioned that newsletters (emails) are sent too often and sometimes important information may go missing. It was suggested by these two informants that it would be helpful that Brother's representatives phoned them after the send-out of an important newsletter by email to make sure the intended message would come across. This feedback is aligned with improvement ideas from the questionnaire, and would be a step towards a more interactive dialogue with these customers. Nevertheless, all interviewees mentioned that their relationship with Brother is "active and mutual" and that they too can and will contact Brother when needed.

Further, it was acclaimed by one informant that communication is more versatile nowadays and more visible compared to the state five years ago e.g. by the means of marketing and Brother being active on social media (LinkedIn, YouTube). All interviewees were pleased with communications with their contact partners at Brother.

Other general improvement ideas were related to marketing and websites. One informant would want Brother to make more use of video clips towards its customers, e.g. how dealers can use these on their own info television. Further, it was hoped by one informant that the process of getting customer references (case studies) would be explained to dealers better. Another informant suggested additions of a few key words/search terms to Brother websites "since Brother's homepage needs to serve many target groups, B2B and B2C".

One informant would like to have a supplies list with calculated cost per page on the most important laser printers and multifunction printers. The desire to have product trainings organised by Brother was communicated by all interviewees. One informant suggested that Brother could organise product trainings to a larger group of dealers. Corrective and positive feedback has been communicated to the channel sales and marketing communications departments and already applied to some extent. Chapter 6.2 deals with implementing development ideas from the study into marketing communications.

In response to RQ1: 'How to develop dialogue between Brother Finland, its distributors and dealers and end-users' and RQ2: 'B2B: How can Brother support distributors and dealers in an optimal way', the interview data revealed that the respondents would like to receive further product trainings by Brother and some of them hoped Brother to phone them after a send-out of an important newsletter, such as campaigns. As opposed to the feedback gathered in the questionnaire, the improvement ideas were more specified and reflected the different operating environments of the informants. Also, the interviewed customers already shared the perception that they are in a dialogue with Brother. However, all interviewees found elements that can be improved in already functioning communications.

As to developing the communicational content, the informants emphasise the will to receive more sales supportive information, such as sales tips in newsletters, more success stories in the forms of case studies, less corporate texts in newsletters, and that the campaigns would be announced earlier to dealers.

5.2.3 Brother as a brand

This section refers to analysing and developing Brother's customer relationship towards end-users (B2C) and/or B2B if applicable, as in these cases distributors and dealers deal with B2B customers, such as companies, and B2C customers, such as end-users (consumers).

All interviewees mentioned that they promote Brother's visibility and sales in their day-to-day work in versatile ways depending on their roles: ensuring that websites/webstores and the company have up-to-date Brother information at hand, by supporting their sales personnel, via in store visibility denoting e.g. their own dedicated Brother compartment, via neon signs outside the buildings, via info television screens, via brochures at customer visits, via phone calls to customers, and discussing with customers. One informant described the process in the daily work at customer visits as follows:

When I visit customers, I make a so-called 3D or 4D check and try to find out prospects for additional sales, not only focusing on the topic of the visit. [...] I do not take for granted that the customer is aware of all Brother solutions. I intend to promote Brother in all occasions, not just focusing on the topic for which I got the appointment.

Two informants added that they also educate their own customers in terms of Brother products and solutions. They added that Brother's product manager or sales representatives are often included in this undertaking. That supports the findings from the questionnaire: product trainings and customers visits are a sought-after way to create or maintain dialogue and interaction. One informant asked whether Brother's representative could participate in customer visits via web-conferencing calls, if there is not a chance for a live joint customer visit. This feedback has been conveyed to the respective departments.

Further, it came up that interviewees always tend to ask open questions with their customers to find out the most suitable product or solution. By maintaining an open dialogic connection, interviewees were able to come to terms with situations if a customer opposes to buy a Brother product. They try to find out the reasons for a reluctant stance by asking questions. If the customers still stay with their opinions, informants would not try to force them to choose Brother. As one informant said: "this is why we have another dealership, but we always give alternatives to choose from both vendors. [...] Good swapping policy, local service and warranty terms at Brother have opened for us the way to several companies".

The question 'What arguments/attributes do your customers use with regards to Brother according to your experience' emerged attributes, such as "high-quality products, reliable products, with good warranty terms, good price-quality ratio, B2B products, scarcely sold in retail". According to one informant, "Brother used to be a less well-known brand earlier, 10-15 years ago, but this has been improved by nationwide marketing, increased awareness and gained market shares". Another interviewee added that besides being "a reliable brand, Brother can still be associated with sewing machines and not with printers in some parts of Finland". Third interviewee noted that customers characterise Brother as "established brand, especially in the categories of printers and labelling machines". One informant mentioned that customers value the fact that Brother's models and supplies do stay on the market for a few years before the next models come in. "You can use supplies to more than just one model, this is valued by my customers".

Lastly, the question 'What arguments/attributes do you use with regards to Brother' elicits perceptions from the interviewees highlighting their personal insights and opinions. One informant depicted Brother as "well-known, trustworthy and with a convincing brand image". Another informant said to use this set of arguments in discussions with own customers: "these are the things we sell the products, excellent price-quality ratio, you get your money's worth, and that these are functioning machines". Another interviewee shared the perception that "Brother has affordable printing costs as the machines are inexpensive to use". Fourth interviewee mentioned to rely on "the strong brand image which stands for reliability, good warranty terms and local services which do function. Perhaps the slogan at your side is a good one as it holds true which is not always the case." Fifth informant said to use arguments such as "reliability of working, warranty, price, long-lasting supplies, archivable printouts and versatile, laminated labels in labelling machines". These arguments are in line with the perceptions from the questionnaire regarding the replies to question 18: words "reliable, well-known and good price-quality ratio" were ticked most often by the respondents.

5.2.4 The future of the printing industry

All interviewees foresaw that printing on paper will slightly decline but not drastically. One informant said that printing would even increase if printing costs were cut to half. Another interviewee stated that office paper is still their most sold item and "even though there has been discussion about paperless office, it is not yet here regardless of the major evolution of devices and IT". All interviewed customers saw that Brother's position as a significant vendor will remain as it is, as one of the biggest players on the market. One informant, however, anticipated that the printing industry will experience further consolidation since "during the past ten years, companies have been merged and split".

Two interviewed customers shared the perception that multifunction devices are needed in every office since one can print, copy and scan with one machine. They already focus more on multifunction printers over printers. Four interviewed customers hold that the trend is towards bigger and more expensive printers and multifunction printers with cost-effective supplies.

All five interviewees commented on the topic of special printers, such as PocketJet and RuggedJet mobile printers, that their use will increase in the future "as there will always be a need to label things". The interviewed customers were unanimous that Brother should do some nationwide advertising and marketing of the special printers to increase overall awareness and visibility of these products since it would help Brother's distributors and dealers to find right target groups. It was suggested that Brother give product training on

this subject to educate Brother's B2B customers meaning distributors and dealers. Three informants highlighted that they see growth potential in special printers as "this market has yet been underutilised and there is certainly huge potential".

As to labelling machines and label printers, one informant does not deal with these products since they "have left this segment for book stores". Other four interviewees hold that there is an enormous potential in labelling market even though the market is already shared between Brother and Dymo, and some smaller vendors. One informant was excited in the prospects:

The potential in labelling machines and label printers is huge and it will continue to grow for a long time. It is always the same story as someone asks me what can you then label with those machines and I am like what to answer since one can label basically everything.

Most of the interviewees anticipated that their role will stay the same in the near future. One informant had experienced some difficulties in certain segments of their business but was confident that "our mutual collaboration with Brother will further improve and develop, Brother will keep its market shares and grow. Products are still good."

5.3 Internal data from focus group interview

As to implementing the change and engaging the whole channel sales team and marketing communications department, the red paradigm of change (de Caluwé & Vermaak 2004 in Green 2007, 18), as discussed in chapter 3.3.1, was applied. For this thesis study, the red paradigm "change through people" resonates the most since the whole channel sales team, not only sales director Forssell, and marketing communications department were involved in the research and development project, first indirectly by informing them in a continuous manner about the phases in the research project (what was planned, when and how the empirical research will be done) and involving the channel sales team to distribute the questionnaire link to their customers as well. The main findings of the empirical study were shared with the whole sales team at work early September and presented in a more thorough fashion in the workshop on the 7th of September 2017.

As discussed in chapter 3.3.3, involvement and engagement were present in conducting the research and communicating with colleagues. All channel sales team members promised to contribute to the research and development project by helping to distribute the e-formatted questionnaire. The marketing communications department continuously adjusted and improved the MailChimp newsletters and other outputs (i.e. marketing related

collaterals) and was shared the key findings from the interviews and the questionnaire. The main improvement ideas from the semi-structured customer interviews were shared with the marketing communications and channel sales teams after the interviews so it was possible to react on and realise some of the ideas without delay. The main findings of the research, i.e. that Brother's B2B customers would like to have more product trainings, customer visits and sales tips, were shared with the teams in September to increase the awareness and suggestions expressed by the informants from the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews.

The focus group interview was conducted with four team members representing the channel sales team and marketing communications, the sales director and the researcher. All participants showed interested towards the subject: how to develop Brother Finland's marketing communications towards distributors and dealers for optimal results as this has a direct effect on everyone's work on the channel sales team and marketing communications department.

As mentioned in chapter 4.3.3, the following materials were gone into together with the teams in the workshop: 1) a PowerPoint presentation about the main findings from the empirical research, 2) two pictures depicting both the current and the new, more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications, 3) a PowerPoint presentation about the new approach to marketing communications outlining the GAP analysis, research in brief, what changes had already been implemented, the most important findings of the research i.e. what B2B customers valued and hoped from us regarding marketing communications and what are the key changes to be rolled out according to the more customer-centric and dialogic approach. To conclude, the benefits of the approach were presented and discussed. Finally, team members were asked the following questions in the form of an open, freely flowing conversation:

- 1) What do you think of the more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications with regards to the following:
 - A) Internal marketing (derived from the GAP analysis)
 - B) Systematic feedback process and example questions to B2B customers for the SurveyMonkey survey tool.
 - How did the campaign work?
 - What did the campaign bring in commercially?
 - What changes should be implemented?
 - Your additional comments to us.
 - C) Most important feedback from the empirical data was presented and discussed.

- 2) Is the approach clear and understandable?
- 3) Have you internalised the approach?

The focus group interview lasted one hour and included i.e. above-mentioned questions, discussion, questions and comments by the team members. All participants agreed to the more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications as “this helps us elicit how we succeed in business and at the same time in communications towards our customers”.

One informant mentioned that “this research confirmed certain perceptions we have had earlier, for example we understand now better the need for more product trainings to dealers and distributors as we have hundreds of products on offer”. Another one added that “it is odd that dealers themselves do not often express the need explicitly that they would like to have more product trainings. They do not usually say that they would like to have more product trainings”. However, it was pondered that sales representatives could enquire of their customers more often regarding product trainings. One informant added that his customers’ reactions to product trainings varied “from kindergarten to a deep interest into the topic”. Third participant commented that “we have actually talked about having more product trainings via OmniJoin web conference calls”. By the same token, all team members acknowledged and approved this improvement idea from the field: more product trainings to Brother’s B2B customers at customer visits and/or via OmniJoin web conference calls. As mentioned earlier in chapters 5.1.3 and 5.2.2, there is a certain need to product trainings as 36 out of 52 respondents and 5/5 interviewed customers expressed their desire to have more product trainings. It was delighted to hear that two focus group participants asked during the workshop whether Brother Finland could send out a SurveyMonkey survey link to its B2B customers to elicit what kind of product trainings (what topics) the customers specifically need to have.

Consequently, the sales director noted that we need to increase the level of internal marketing “so that we can convey the messages in the same way, consistently. I have said this to BIE (Brother International Europe) too, since once we are familiar with the subject, it is then easy to give product trainings to our customers”. One informant added that he had already drafted a set of product training topics about P-touch labelling machines which was ready to be communicated with B2B customers via email (newsletter). The sales director added that internal marketing sets can last roughly 15–30 minutes and can be done live and/or via OmniJoin web conference calls. Another team member took on this project and will add appointments to calendars. Internal marketing supports internal product trainings given by BIE but is more focused on Brother Finland. Internal marketing

will be implemented prior bigger campaigns and product launches, and will be conducted by the channel sales team and marketing communications department.

One improvement idea from the field mentioned by a focus group participant included a ready-made A5 collateral representing a Brother model which could be modified by the dealer logo and prices. That feedback emerged also from a few replies in the questionnaire and by one interviewed customer. Another focus group participant added that similar feedback was expressed to him more than once. "These sorts of collaterals work too as a mental support to dealers". The sales director supported the idea and specified collaterals to SMB products to support the sales of these models.

As to the content of MailChimp newsletters, the participants listened to the feedback from the research analysing the part of MailChimp: mostly being clear and informative. One participant added that a newsletter explaining the structure of a MailChimp newsletter could be useful to some dealers as opening rates of the newsletters were still modest (20–25%). "We cannot take for granted that dealers and distributors would read the newsletters the same way as we do." Another participant supported the idea of adding sales tips to the newsletters, as expressed by a few respondents in the questionnaire. Sales tips are not included in any Brother Nordic MailChimp newsletter templates. It was discussed that Brother Finland could create own newsletters from time to time also in the future. One participant suggested adding technical sales specifications to newsletters which could facilitate dealers and distributors to familiarise themselves with the models.

Another main finding from the focus group interview was an improvement idea with regards to campaign follow-ups and analytics:

It has been rather poor earlier on the Nordic level. We have followed up the sales during the campaigns but then analysing has died away and remained superficial. This should be done more systematically and with a campaign overview from the Nordics: i.e. Finland performed like this, Sweden like that etc. That way we knew the results for the next campaigns. But we do not go through campaign results.

The suggested systematic follow-up questions by SurveyMonkey tool could be a solution to improve campaign follow-up qualitatively and thus learn from earlier campaigns. The researcher had promised to create a few templates of the survey questions and a MailChimp newsletter as first actionable steps.

The main benefits of the more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications were listed as follows, based on the main findings from the research compared to the GAP analysis:

- it advances dialogue between Brother Finland and our B2B customers being distributors and dealers
- it advances customer-centricity
- it has more influencing potential, advances the functioning customer relationship (excellence) between Brother Finland and B2B customers
- it enables the development of Brother Finland's marketing communications as it is based on actual customer feedback

In response to RQ3: 'How to engage employees to take on board the more dialogic approach', the researcher relied on ongoing communication and early engagement and involvement of the colleagues in this process. It was key to co-operate with respective departments and with the sales director, and to illustrate the need for change by presenting the current state, the key findings from the research and the benefits of the more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications. Changes need to be feasible and clear, therefore a workshop was a good means for team discussions and putting the approach in practice. All relevant documents have been shared with the teams and actionable first steps were realised by the researcher to facilitate implementation. All team members actively participated in the discussion which was one proof that they have felt a level of engagement and involvement in the research and development project: everyone said to have internalised the approach. Increasing internal marketing, systematic feedback process with a SurveyMonkey tool a few times per year and a continuous dialogue internally and externally were the main elements to be included in the more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications.

5.4 Post-implementation feedback from focus group interviews

Semi-structured customer interviews were conducted in May 2017 and post-implementation feedback was gathered from the same five interviewees in separate phone calls in September. The questions used in the individual phone interviews included at least the following points:

- 1) Has the dialogue and interaction improved between Brother Finland and you?
- 2) How is the change visible? (If it is visible.) How is it realised concretely?
- 3) Do you feel as a distributor/dealer that Brother's support towards you has improved?

Three interviewed customers said that they perceived that the level of dialogue and interaction has improved between Brother Finland and them after the empirical research was conducted during April–June. One informant was remarkably pleased with it:

Yes, both have improved. Information is easier to access, and I have got a feeling that we are now more aware of upcoming campaigns – what might then be the reason for that. I also feel that campaign communication is now clearer.

Another informant perceived that “dialogue and interaction with Brother has always been easy and convenient. The research had an activating effect and the dialogue has opened my eyes too”. This informant added that “the communications and interaction clearly have improved from its rather good level”.

Two informants did not see any changes in dialogue and communications during the research period and mentioned that “it is business as usual to me, same as usual”. Another one perceived that “this period has been so hectic in business, so I cannot comment clearly one that. It has been the same, I feel.”

The question ‘How is the change visible? (If it is visible.) How is it realised concretely?’ emerged two replies where the interviewees did not perceive any change regarding dialogue and interaction whereas three interviewed customers reported to have perceived the change. One informant experienced the change as follows:

Well, we have always been kept up-to-date but the way this is being done is now more efficient. It is down to personal contacts which is hard to estimate as these were already on a good level. The activity level has remained the same and we are much in touch with Brother. The most significant change is that information is more available nowadays, it is easier to access it.

Another interviewee perceived the change being visible in the following way:

It is easier to receive support. For instance, video clips from Brother help in my daily work. I feel that campaign support is now on a better level. In total, interaction has increased further.

Third informant commented on the question that “the level of interaction and dialogue has improved, we get support when needed. MailChimp newsletters are business-like and informative. Co-operation with our Brother contact partner works brilliantly”.

The last question 'Do you feel as a distributor/dealer that Brother's support towards you has improved?' elicited interviewees' perceptions during the research period and after the more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications had been put into practice by Brother. Three informants hold that Brother's support had improved whereas two felt the level had remained the same, as one informant put it: "Good and proactive support, the same level as before". Three informants who had perceived a change in Brother's support described it the following ways:

Brother's support now feels closer, with a human touch. MailChimp newsletters are more appealing. There is altogether a close interaction between Brother and us. You have come to my folks as a contact person.

It has improved, my colleague can confirm that. We get support when needed.

Yes, I would say so. Information is easier to access, from personal channels too and we have then contacted our own customers. Boys [Brother's representatives] have kept me up-to-date regarding stock replenishments.

Additionally, one interviewee commended that Brother had already implemented online product trainings offered via OmniJoin web conference calls. That was one of the improvement ideas suggested by informants from the questionnaire and interviewees.

5.5 Summarising the findings

Based on this research, Brother's B2B customers would like to receive more product trainings (live/via web conference calls), customer visits and that they would like to be phoned after an important campaign MailChimp newsletter has been sent. As to developing the communicational content, many informants emphasised the will to receive more sales information (e.g. sales arguments), product information and support to marketing, such as images, brochures and posters. This has been fed back to the respective departments and discussed during the focus group interview to instil the more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications to advance interaction and dialogue.

Product trainings, regular phone calls and customer visits would increase the level of interaction and enable a dialogue. However, it is key to remember that an actual interaction and dialogue is based on voluntariness, especially from the customers' side and that not all relationships can be equally collaborative and fully relational (Fill & Turnbull 2016, 337). Some level of stakeholder mapping amongst customers is often applied due to resources

(i.e. the number of B2B customers in proportion to Brother's representatives, the importance of the customers) and other factors (i.e. mutual chemistry).

All five interviewees and most of the respondents of the questionnaire hold that printing in Finland will decline in the future i.e. due to electronic services, mobile services and digitalisation. Although this finding cannot be generalisable due to the nature and scope of this single case study, it gives some silent signals from the customer interface, B2B and B2C.

In conclusion, this thesis study aims to answer the research question 'How to develop Brother Finland's marketing communications towards distributors and dealers for optimal results?' and the following sub-questions RQ1–RQ3 derived from the research question.

In response to RQ1: 'How to develop dialogue between Brother Finland, its distributors and dealers and end-users?' the empirical data showed that according to customers, more interaction and dialogue could be attained by organising more often product trainings to distributors and dealers, by visiting the B2B customers more often and by phoning them more regularly after a send-out of an important campaign or product launch newsletter. The empirical data indicated that B2B customers valued personal relationships with Brother Finland's sales representatives. As to improving the content of MailChimp newsletters, it was suggested by the B2B customers that Brother Finland add more product information and more sales information, e.g. sales arguments, to the newsletters to meet better customers' expectations of newsletters. Better sales- and product-related MailChimp newsletter content would facilitate distributors and dealers to deal with their own customers and familiarise themselves with Brother's solutions and products. Additionally, support to marketing was desired, such as images, brochures and posters to be used online and offline. The latter helps distributors and dealers to advance Brother's visibility in day-to-day business, e.g. promoting Brother in stores, in emails to customers, in online and offline marketing, and by telling own customers about Brother products and solutions.

In response to RQ2: 'B2B: How can Brother support distributors and dealers in an optimal way?' the empirical data revealed that the respondents would clearly like to receive more product trainings by Brother and more customer visits by Brother representatives to develop mutual dialogue and Brother's communications. As to developing the communicational content, the informants emphasised the will to receive more sales information (e.g. sales arguments), product information and support to marketing. Additionally, many respondents would value that Brother phoned them after a send-out of an important campaign or product launch newsletter. RQ1 and RQ2 partially yield similar perceptions and development ideas.

As to RQ3: 'How to engage employees to take on board the more dialogic approach?', the researcher relied on ongoing communication and early engagement and involvement of the colleagues in this process. It was key to co-operate with respective departments and with the sales director, and to illustrate the need for change by presenting the current state, the key findings from the research and the benefits of the more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications. Changes need to be feasible and clear, therefore a workshop was a good means for team discussions and putting the approach in practice. All relevant documents have been shared with the teams and actionable first steps were realised by the researcher to facilitate implementation of the more dialogic approach. All team members actively participated in the workshop discussion which was one proof that they have felt a level of engagement and involvement in the research and development project: everyone said to have internalised the approach. Later, team members took on realising the next steps, such as putting the internal marketing dates into calendars, creating a set of product trainings topics, and they were ready to embrace the more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications. Besides, this approach is aligned with Brother's strategy of advancing customer-centricity instead of the previous more product-centred approach. This follows our corporate strategy with the motto "Transform for the future" (Brother Industries, Ltd. 2017c).

In response to the main research question 'How to develop Brother Finland's marketing communications towards distributors and dealers for optimal results?', this section presents the key development ideas identified from the empirical data and theory covered in this thesis study.

It is suggested by the researcher that Brother Finland make use of the more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications which entails 1) internal marketing at Brother Finland, 2) a systematic feedback process with SurveyMonkey survey tool to elicit how Brother's campaign work, and as a result 3) the approach enables improved dialogue and interaction between Brother Finland's marketing communications and channel sales teams and its B2B customers. In other words, feedback from the field back to the marketing communications makes it possible to adjust and improve marketing communications towards distributors and dealers for optimal results. This is aligned with Cornelissen's (2014, 52–54) dialogue strategy where communication runs in both ways: from the organisation and stakeholders, and vice versa. Increased dialogue would enable more Brother's B2B customers to have their saying regularly, and potentially move from a relationship to a more intense partnership.

Further, Brother Finland would benefit from analysing campaigns and their actual reception by the customers in order to learn and adjust for future campaigns. The same principle could be applied to MailChimp newsletters and other marketing communication collaterals since that way Brother Finland and Brother Nordic A/S would make the most out of the in-house resources and meet the customers' needs best. Therefore, an increased dialogue (internally and externally) and a regular feedback process would give valuable information from actual customers' needs and response regarding Brother's marketing communications and communications in general.

6 Conclusions

Functioning communication is essential in forming and maintaining long-lasting customer relationships. As Brother Finland's channel sales team and marketing communications department work with its B2B customers, it was wise to find out how communication, especially marketing communications, was perceived by the customers. It was the first needed step in order to improve Brother Finland's communicational modus operandi, create and implement the more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications. This approach and its benefits will be summarised in chapter 6.1. whereas chapter 6.2. outlines how this approach will be integrated into marketing communications. Learning outcomes and limitations of the study as well as suggestions for further research will be discussed in the remaining chapters.

This thesis study also provided the case company a chance to review and expand its view on communication. Communication is an intrinsic element in engagement and involvement, and therefore change communication was included into the research and development project. In order to bring about a change in the current communications structure/approach, preceding structures needed to be outlined, analysed and put into the actual context, as perceived by Brother's B2B customers.

An internal GAP analysis, as discussed in chapter 2.3, emerged areas that were on a good level but also some improvement areas, such as lack of internal marketing and systematic feedback process to feed information from the field back to the marketing communications, and vice versa. Further, the empirical data revealed that the B2B customers who partook in the questionnaire and/or semi-structured interviews, appreciated Brother as an established brand and mainly acclaimed their contact persons. Also, the clarity and informativeness of the MailChimp newsletters was commended.

Although Brother Finland's B2B customers were in general content with the communications, certain areas of improvement were indicated. The empirical data showed that according to customers, there is clearly a need for product trainings, followed by customers visits and phone calls after a send-out of an important campaign newsletter. Some customers expressed their wish to receive more marketing support. Some modifications to the MailChimp newsletters were expressed: more sales- and product-related information.

The more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications entails two key elements, such as internal marketing and systematic feedback process, which increase internal and external dialogue and interaction. However, it is wise to conduct

stakeholder mapping (Cornelissen 2014, 47) and not to try to reach every stakeholder with similar messages and effort. Fill & Turnbull (2016, 337) advocate the view that all relationships do not need to be collaborative and fully relational. The researcher supports that view based on the empirical data: the level of engagement shown in the questionnaire replies and interviews varied. Common interest in building business-level strategies and relationships is required, besides economic interests and mutual chemistry may influence Brother Finland's and its B2B customers relationships. The more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications works best based on voluntariness and it offers Brother employees and its B2B customers an arena to a more intense dialogue and interaction. This is aligned with Cornelissen's (2014, 52–54) dialogue strategy where communication runs in both ways: from the organisation and stakeholders, and vice versa. With the help of the more dialogic approach, Brother Finland can interact better with its B2B customers, develop its internal collaboration across departments and finally develop marketing communications towards distributors and dealers for optimal results benefitting all parties.

This study contributed to an overall reviewed view on the role of communication in Brother Finland's *modus operandi*. Further, it acted as a first invitation to a more intense dialogue and interaction with B2B customers and delivered a more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications alongside development ideas to the case company. It also provided the case company with its B2B customers' insights regarding the future of the printing industry in Finland. According to their perceptions, printing will decline in the future due to increase of electronic services, mobile services and digitalisation but it will not happen overnight.

6.1 More customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications

The aimed communicational outcome of this thesis study captures the change: from a linear process to more cyclical approach with the emphasis on more dialogue internally and externally by the means of internal marketing and a feedback process. The more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications was first sketched by the researcher at the outset of the research and development project, as depicted in figure 16. A level of interaction and dialogue were thought to be outcomes of the approach, benefitting both Brother Finland and its B2B customers being distributors and dealers.

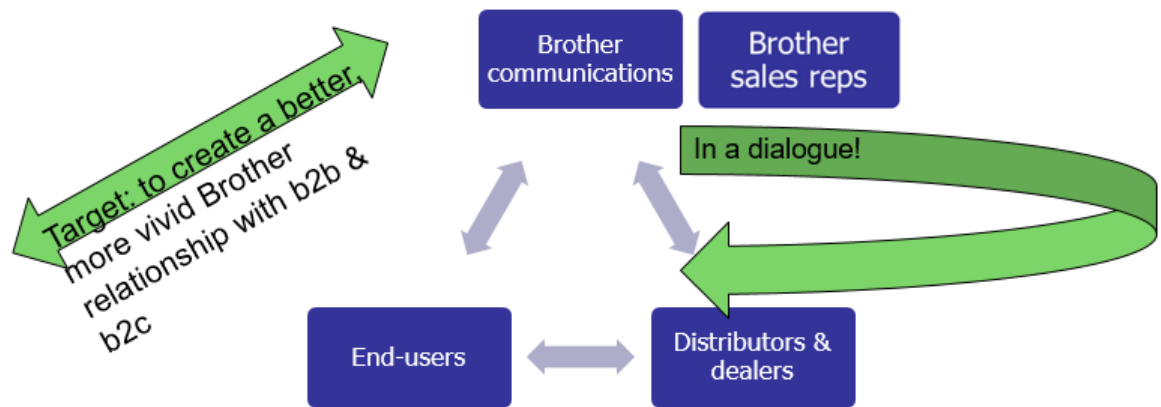


Figure 16. The communicational outcome of the study, a more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications towards B2B customers and indirectly B2C customers, depicted by Rankala.

As already discussed in chapter 5.3, the more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications will be harnessed to support B2B distributors and dealers for optimal results. The main benefits of the approach were listed as follows, based on the main findings from the research compared to the GAP analysis:

- it advances dialogue between Brother Finland and our B2B customers being distributors and dealers
- it advances customer-centricity
- it has more influencing potential, advances the functioning customer relationship (excellence) between Brother Finland and B2B customers
- it enables the development of Brother Finland's marketing communications as it is based on actual customer feedback

Thus, the communicational outcomes of the study were the more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications towards B2B customers and indirectly B2C customers being end-users, as well as enhanced dialogue with our B2B distributors and dealers. In addition, this approach increases dialogue both internally and externally, e.g. via internal marketing and via the systematic feedback process with SurveyMonkey survey tool regarding bigger product launches and campaigns. Moreover, the approach facilitates in assessing and adjusting marketing communication outputs, such as newsletters and marketing collaterals, to meet the needs of the customers. It enables the development of Brother Finland's marketing communications based on actual customer feedback. The approach includes a higher level of engagement and involvement from the team members and thus advances collaboration across teams and departments.

6.2 Implementing development ideas into marketing communications

The research and development project brought about a more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications as well as concrete development ideas to improve marketing communications. Development ideas will be integrated into Brother Finland's marketing communications in versatile ways: adding internal marketing prior bigger campaigns/product launches, implementing the SurveyMonkey feedback process to increase campaign follow-up, offering Brother Finland's B2B customers online/live product trainings, making changes into the content of MailChimp newsletters, and employing a more customer-centric and dialogic stance to communicational *modus operandi* across the teams and departments.

Internal marketing will be employed prior bigger campaigns and product launches to ensure that everyone at Brother Finland is aware of the upcoming campaigns/product launches, and that the core messages will be conveyed internally and externally coherently. Product manager took on this undertaking and added dates for the appointments into calendars based on the Nordic Marketing Launch and Campaign Plan. Internal marketing concerns in particular the channel sales and marketing communications teams as they deal with Brother's B2B customers who are the target groups of product launches and campaigns. Internal marketing contributes to hype creation internally and indirectly externally. Brother representatives continue phoning, especially after a send-out of an important MailChimp newsletter, and visiting their customers regularly and contribute to both internal and external dialogue and interaction.

Additionally, the researcher promised to prepare ready-made templates for MailChimp newsletters and SurveyMonkey survey tool to implement the feedback process towards B2B customers (cf. chapter 3.3.2 where actionable first steps were discussed according to Green 2007, 184). That was done, and the first MailChimp newsletters containing a SurveyMonkey link were sent out in September 2017 to Brother Finland's B2B customers where they had a chance to influence what topics will be chosen for the next sets of Brother product trainings organised via OmniJoin web conference calls. Also, the researcher prepared a few templates on SurveyMonkey regarding the systematic campaign feedback process to be used for the next nationwide Brother campaigns.

Marketing communications department made changes to MailChimp newsletters to serve B2B customers better: it has added more product-related information to the newsletters and provides B2B customers with a link containing product images and other online collat-

erals, such as banners, flyers and posters. The reception by the customers has been positive: e.g. they do not have to ask for product images but can use them in their own productisation and marketing communications. An additional spreadsheet containing information, such as product code, price and EAN code would fasten and facilitate productisation at distributors, and this was taken into use already in summer 2017. As a few improvement ideas with regards to newsletters were given both in questionnaire replies and semi-structured interviews: “less corporate advertising text, more sales tips and case studies”, marketing communications and channel sales teams further modify and improve the MailChimp newsletters often based on a Nordic template and keep on producing occasionally own newsletters when needed, e.g. for a local campaign in Finland. Sales tips or arguments have not yet been integrated into the usual content of MailChimp newsletters, but they are a good asset in distinguishing the newsletter content from that of competitors. Marketing communications department will consult Brother channel sales team and product manager to produce together good sales arguments and tips occasionally to be included into MailChimp newsletters. Marketing communications and channel sales teams will further continue looking for case studies (customer references) and produce these. As soon as new case studies have been written, they can be communicated via MailChimp newsletters alongside the usual promotion of them on LinkedIn, on the webpage and on Mynewsdesk.

6.3 Learning outcomes

Both the company and the researcher learnt a lot during the research and development project. The thesis study was a trigger to map the current communication situation, conduct a GAP analysis and start systematically to elicit Brother’s B2B customers’, distributors’ and dealers’, insights into our marketing communications delivered by marketing communications and channel sales teams in concert.

The research and development project has enabled marketing communications and channel sales departments to work in a more integrated way than before. Some of the learning outcomes refer to the widened perception of communication at the company. This is an important step since communication has been partly perceived in a narrow fashion. This thesis study has given marketing communications more importance, and what is more, brought marketing communications and channel sales departments closer to Brother Finland’s B2B customers, in a more interactive relationship.

6.4 Limitations of the study and recommendations for further research

It could be of interest to research the effects of the implemented more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications with the same target audiences (distributors, dealers) in a follow-up study after a certain period. Although this was a single case study research, it could have been beneficial to use some elements of action research, namely a follow-up round after a few months of the implementation of the approach: how the dialogue is like and how the feedback process works. Marketing communications and channel sales departments will continue using the more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications and improve it further.

As people tend to reply to questionnaires scarcely, it could be speculated whether we had had more replies if the questionnaire was shorter and quicker to fill out. We discussed in advance whether we should have used incentives already at the outset in order to motivate more respondents to participate. The researcher considers this was a justified move not to appeal to people's desire of participating by bluntly giving incentives as it could have influenced their motive to reply to the questionnaire: a price draw versus desire to help Brother Finland develop its marketing communications. Nevertheless, a qualitative single case study conducted helped the case company to improve its modus operandi and marketing communications.

As the thesis study was narrowed down to the channel sales team in Finland, it could be relevant to research marketing communications regarding the young end-user team and some of their corporate B2C customers. An integrated collaboration between that team and marketing communications department could have positive prospects and synergies in the future, and eliciting customers' insights could inform the case company of its current modus operandi in that field.

As sketched earlier with the sales director Forssell, similar study could be conducted in the Nordics. It must be pointed out that the empirical study shall be conducted in the local language since it allows respondents to use their power of expression best. As all Brother Nordic countries deal both with distributors/dealers and end-user teams' customers actualising the same global Brother strategy of customer-centricity, it would be highly recommended that aspects of internal and external dialogue with B2B customers and the perceptions of the marketing communications by distributors/dealers would be elicited in the future. If not in this scope, at least with a shorter SurveyMonkey questionnaire sent-out to distributors and dealers deepened with few focus group phone calls.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Questionnaire

From organisational communication into functioning interaction/dialogue. How could we encourage our distributors and dealers into a dialogue with us?

Hi,

we are conducting a research and development project to Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences (Master of Business Administration) to develop Brother Finland's marketing communications. We aim at charting the current state of our marketing communications and developing it. We would like to know whether our way of operations/communications meet your demands. The empirical data will be gathered during spring 2017 and the Master's thesis will be finished this year. Communication refers to all kinds of dialogue between you and Brother Finland. Marketing communications refer to communications from Brother's marketing communications department, such as websites, newsletters, brochures and other marketing collaterals.

We are grateful that you help us in developing our way of operations. In order to utilise the findings of the questionnaire to the fullest for your benefit, we would wish that you reply to the questions as you perceive the current situation. It takes 15 minutes on average to fill out the questionnaire. All entries in the questionnaire are handled anonymously.

Kind regards

Tom Forssell, Sales director, Brother Finland

Heidi Rankala, Brother Finland, Haaga-Helia. heidi.rankala@myy.haaga-helia.fi

1. Your relationship with Brother:

- A. Are you a distributor
- B. Are you a dealer
- C. Something else, please specify
- D. I am not in touch with Brother in my current position
- E. Job title
- F. Area/Locality
- G. Age structure:
20-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-
- H. How long have you collaborated with Brother?
Less than a year, 1-3 years, over 3 years

The current state of Brother's communications (questions 2-4):

Brother's communicational support to distributors and dealers

2. Describe with a few sentences **the current content** of the dialogue/communications between you and Brother. Please provide concrete examples.
3. With whom are you most often in contact/dialogue either personally or by the means of communications technology? Please rank in order of importance.
 - A. Sales department
 - B. Service department
 - C. Marketing communications
 - D. Administration
4. Assess the current state of our dialogue/communications (1 worst, 10 best).

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Improvement ideas to develop Brother's communications (questions 5-10):

Improving Brother's communicational support towards distributors and dealers. Communications refer to comprehensive communications from the marketing communications department and the sales department.

5. How could we develop our mutual dialogue and Brother's communications? You can select multiple answers.
 - A. We (Brother Finland) will call you more often
 - B. We will visit you more often
Comment field_____
 - C. We continuously improve our feedback process. In the future, we will conduct short customer feedback surveys.
Yes___
No___
 - D. We will send you more often written information (MailChimp newsletters)
 - E. We will organise customer events more often
Comment field___Please elaborate what kind of events?
 - F. We will be in touch with you more often via web conferencing system
 - G. Product training?
Yes___

No_____

H. Something else? Please elaborate. ____

6. Apart from you, would other people in your organisation benefit from Brother's communications?

Yes, who_____

No_____

7. What is good about Brother's communications? Please describe in a few sentences.

8. What needs to be improved in Brother's communications? Please describe in a few sentences.

9. What kind of communications (content) do you long for? You can select multiple answers.

A. Product information

B. Market-related information

C. Marketing support (images, brochures, posters)

D. More maintenance-related or technical information

E. Less maintenance-related or technical information

F. More sales information, e.g. sales arguments

G. Less sales information, e.g. sales arguments

H. Case studies (customer references):

- Would you like to read more about these? Please reply yes or no.

- Do you have reference cases to share with us? Please reply yes or no.

I. What primary communication channels do you prefer in your communications with Brother?

Customer communications (questions 10–15):

Your communication/liaison with your customers.

10. How often do you communicate with your customers?

A. Daily

B. Weekly

C. Monthly

D. 1-2 per year

11. What are the main communication channels you principally use while communicating about Brother products and campaigns with your customers? Please choose two methods you use most often.

- A. In a store
- B. Via customer visits
- C. By email
- D. By mailshot to customers (campaign materials)
- E. By phone
- F. Something else, please elaborate.

12. Do you utilise Brother's nationwide campaigns (e.g. QL800 label printer series) in your own communications?

Yes, how? _____

No, why not? _____

Assess how well Brother has succeeded in national campaigns in terms of:

13. Communications (from marketing communications department)

(10 best, 1 worst on a Likert scale)

14. Selling in the campaign to you (from Brother channel sales department)

(10 best, 1 worst on a Likert scale)

15. How have Brother campaigns worked for you commercially? Please describe in a few sentences.

Brother as a brand (questions 16–18):

Refers to analysing and developing Brother's customer relationship towards end-users (B2C).

16. How do you promote Brother's visibility and sales in your day-to-day work? Describe in a few sentences and kindly give concrete examples.

17. What arguments/attributes do your customers use with regards to Brother according to your experience?

18. Assess Brother as a recommended brand (preference). Please tick those attributes you associate with Brother.

- A. Reliable
- B. Well-known
- C. Innovative
- D. Environmentally-friendly
- E. Humane
- F. Cold
- F. Good price-quality ratio
- G. Expensive
- H. Unreliable
- I. Neutral
- J. Lesser-known brand
- K. Outdated
- L. Modern
- M. Dull
- N. Traditional
- O. Something else, what

The future of the printing industry (question 19):

19. Your opinion/insights about the future of the printing in Finland. Please choose the most relevant alternative and justify your point of view.

- A. Remains the same.
For that reason:
- B. Declines
For that reason:
- C. Grows:
For that reason:
- D. Concentrates in different sectors/departments
For that reason:
- E. Something else, what.

Thank you for your time and effort!

Appendix 2. Semi-structured interview themes

Background questions:

1. What is your relationship with Brother? (Distributor, dealer)
2. In which industry do you work? (e.g. IT, office, distributor)
3. What is your job description? Describe your usual workday.

THE CURRENT STATE OF BROTHER'S COMMUNICATIONS

4. How do you perceive Brother's communications? (e.g. How Brother sales representatives are in contact with you; how do you feel about our newsletters etc. – communications refer to Brother Finland's modus operandi throughout the organisation)
5. Do you utilise campaign materials provided by Brother? (e.g. Do you send out content from Brother's newsletters to your own customers or to your sales personnel? Does the newsletter format function?)
6. How do you communicate internally about Brother's material and/or campaigns within your organisation?

IDEAS ON HOW TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATIONS

7. What do you think, how our co-operation and communications can be improved?
8. Do you have products in mind that could be combined into bundles in marketing and sales purposes? (e.g. ergonomic products and printer; printers and copying paper; printers and laser toners/ink cartridges; protection shoes and labelling machine).

BROTHER AS A BRAND

Refers to analysing and developing Brother's customer relationship towards end-users (B2C).

9. How do you promote Brother's visibility and sales in your day-to-day work?
10. What arguments/attributes do your customers use with regards to Brother according to your experience? (e.g. What kind of image do your customers have about Brother?)
11. What arguments/attributes do you use with regards to Brother?
12. What if your customers oppose selling/buying a Brother product?

THE FUTURE OF THE PRINTING INDUSTRY

13. How do you foresee Brother's future as a player on the market as to following product categories? (e.g. grows, loses market share, remains the same as now)

A) Printers

B) Multifunction printers (MFC/DCP)

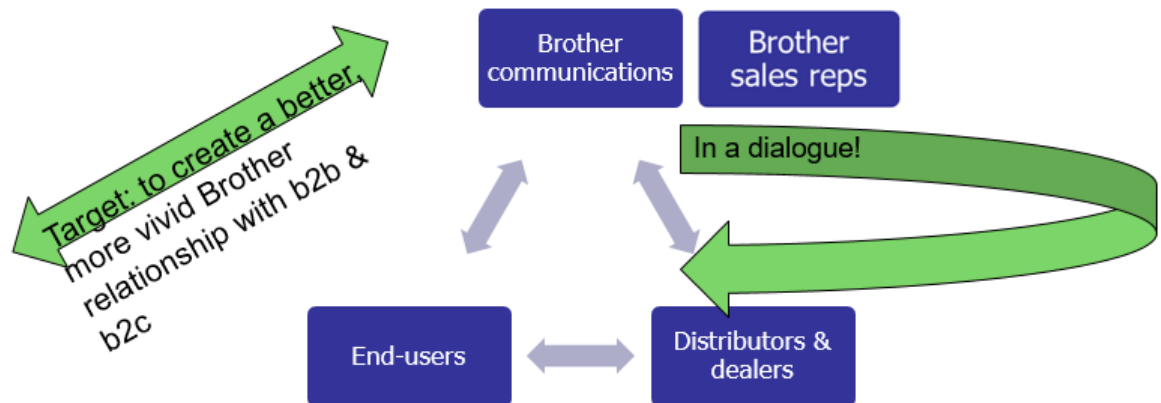
C) Special printers (PocketJet mobile printers, RuggedJet mobile printers)

D) Labelling machines and label printers

14. At a general level, how do you foresee the future of the printing industry in Finland?

15. How do you foresee your own role as a printer sales person/dealer/distributor in the future?

Appendix 3. The questions used in focus group interview with the channel sales team and marketing communications



The communicational outcome of the study, a more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications towards B2B customers and indirectly B2C customers.

1. What do you think of the more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications with regards to:

A) Internal marketing (derived from the GAP analysis)

B) Systematic feedback process and example questions to B2B customers

Sales and marketing communications define when and on what campaigns/products launches feedback process is realised by the means of a SurveyMonkey feedback questionnaire.

Preliminary draft of a SurveyMonkey feedback questionnaire. 3–10 questions which are quick and easy to reply to. For example:

- How did the campaign work?
- What did the campaign bring in commercially?
- What changes should be implemented?
- Your additional comments to us.

C) Most important feedback from the empirical data was presented in the form of PowerPoint presentations and discussed.

2. Is the approach clear and understandable?

3. Have you internalised the approach?

The benefits of the more customer-centric and dialogic approach to marketing communications:

- It advances dialogue between Brother Finland and our B2B customers distributors and dealers
- It advances customer-centricity
- It has more influencing potential, advances the functioning customer relationship (excellence) between Brother Finland and its B2B customers
- It enables the development of Brother Finland's marketing communications as it is based on actual customer feedback

Appendix 4. The questions used in focus group interviews with interviewees on the phone

1. Has the dialogue and interaction improved between Brother Finland and you?
2. How is the change visible? How is it realised concretely?
3. Do you feel as a distributor/dealer that Brother's support towards you has improved?

Appendix 5. Glossary

B2B	Business-to-business customers, distributors and dealers dealing with Brother Finland. Refers to companies providing products and services to other businesses.
B2B customers	Brother Finland's customers, distributors and dealers.
B2C	Business-to-consumers customers, end-users. Customers of the dealers dealing with Brother Finland. Refers to companies providing products and services to consumers.
BIE	Brother International Europe. European headquarters located in Manchester.
Corporate B2C	Customers of EUT. End-users and decision-makers in business environments.
Channel	Refers to Brother Finland's distributors, dealers and Brother's channel sales representatives/team.
Channel team	Refers to Brother Finland's channel sales representatives/sales department.
Copier machine	Copier. A bigger printer. Brother does not manufacture these devices.
DCP	Brother multifunction printers. All-in-one printers which print, copy and scan.
Dealer	Brother Finland's channel reseller partner. Companies which sell products and services to end-users and/or other businesses. Communicates with end-users.
Distributor	Brother Finland's distributing partner. Distributors communicate with dealers and sell and market Brother products to dealers.
End-user	Consumers of products and services, private end-users. Brother's dealers often deal with end-users.

EUT (end-user team)	Refers to Brother Finland's team which deals with i.e. municipal consortiums, educational establishments and hospitals. They do business with end-users and decision-makers in business environments but not with private end-users (consumers).
Labelling machines	Devices which can be used for versatile labelling applications, even outdoors.
Label printers	Devices which can be used for versatile labelling applications.
Marketing communications	In this context, Brother Finland's department which is responsible for marketing communications towards Brother's B2B customers. In the future, supporting EUT team more in their marketing needs.
MFC	Brother multifunction printers. All-in-one printers which print, copy, scan and fax. Similar to DCP which does not include a fax feature.
MPS	Managed Print Services. Contractual sales which emphasises sales of supplies and service to the customer. Means that printers fleet can be monitored remotely and thus printing costs can be tracked. Ease-of-mind as toners/cartridges (supplies) are sent automatically to MPS customers.
Printer	Office printer, printer for home offices. Different ranges to be used for SOHO market and business market.
Printing industry	The market in which printers, multifunction machines and bigger copiers are sold.
PocketJet	Brother's mobile printers. Portable printers to be used on the move.
RuggedJet	Brother's robust mobile printers. Portable printers to be used on the move.
SMB	Small and medium-sized businesses.
SOHO	Small office/home office.
Special printers	To be used on the move. Such as PocketJet and RuggedJet.
Transactional	One-shot sales.