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DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGIES IN THE ENERGY SECTOR

Case companies:

Royal Dutch Shell Plc and Neste Oyj

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of the thesis was to examine whether energy companies are shifting from traditional marketing and start investing their resources into digital marketing as well as to identify the common patterns in digital marketing strategies of businesses operating in the energy sector. The focus was made on the two case companies selected for this research: Royal Dutch Shell and Neste. The key objective of the thesis was to analyze the case companies in terms of their digital marketing presence and strategies. The final goal of the thesis was to formulate the main trends in energy companies digital marketing strategies based on the conducted analysis.

The theoretical part of the thesis includes the literature review of marketing strategy, marketing mix and market research methods. Furthermore, in order to obtain a deeper expertise on the research topic, digital marketing strategy and essential components of digital marketing were studied and discussed from the theoretical point of view. For the empirical part of the thesis a qualitative research method has been used. Moreover, companies' social media accounts and website activities were analyzed by using a developed by the author research framework and with a help of SEMrush analytics tool.

During the research, several common trends in the digital marketing activities of the case companies were identified. The research findings demonstrate that sustainable marketing, content marketing, influence marketing and video marketing are actively used by both case companies as a part of their digital marketing strategies. The conclusions part of the thesis discusses the findings and suggests the ideas for further research.

Keywords   Digital marketing strategy, sustainability, digital marketing trends, social media, content marketing, influencer marketing, energy sector

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1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter intent is to acquaint readers with the background of the thesis, its primary purpose, objectives, structure and limitations which were used throughout the thesis process.

1.1 Background of the thesis

Nowadays, the energy sector plays a fundamental role in the development and growth of the global industrial economy. Energy companies strive for discovering innovative approaches and alternatives towards sustainable and efficient ways to supply world with energy. Nevertheless, while concentrating on designing and ensuring the novelty and high quality of their products, energy companies should in addition to researching the market, also focus on communicating with the target audience and efficiently promoting their products and services.

The energy sector is primarily focused on B2B customers and for decades energy companies have been using traditional marketing for promotion. Companies have relied on traditional marketing tools, such as trade shows, conferences, television etc., which are still, doubtlessly, effective ways of promotion in certain industries where customers have more trust towards traditional marketing channels. However, traditional marketing is associated with high costs, difficulties to target, customize and measure the results (Todor, 2016, 51). As a consequence of Covid-19 pandemic, energy sector has faced a significant drop in demand. Therefore, in order to reduce marketing costs, expand the customer base and enhance the brand awareness, many energy companies shifted from traditional marketing and started actively adopting digital marketing trends (Energy Dais, 2021).

The key purpose of the thesis is to analyze and examine whether energy companies implement digital marketing strategies, as well as to identify which digital marketing trends, tools and media channels are primarily used by them.

Two case energy companies have been selected for the thesis analysis: Royal Dutch Shell PLC and Neste Oyj. Headquartered in the Netherlands and Finland respectively, these multinational businesses operate in the energy sector and focus on producing, refining, distributing and marketing oil and gas products.

The main objectives of the thesis are (1) to conduct a comparative analysis between Royal Dutch Shell PLC and Neste Oyj in terms of their digital marketing and social media activities, (2) to identify whether energy companies are changing their focus from traditional marketing to adopting digital marketing trends based on the conducted comparative analysis, (3) to formulate common digital marketing trends in the energy sector.

There are several research questions involved in the thesis. Firstly, are energy companies shifting from traditional to digital marketing? Secondly, what digital marketing strategies and platforms are used by energy companies? Lastly, are there any similarities and trends to be observed?

1.2   Structure of the thesis

The thesis includes six main chapters: introduction, theoretical framework divided into two chapters, research methodology, empirical study and final conclusions.

The theoretical research contains two chapters and familiarizes readers with the definitions of marketing strategy, marketing mix and market research tools. Additionally, digital marketing strategy and different trends of digital marketing will be described and analyzed.

The research methodology chapter provides with a theoretical explanation of two approaches which might be used for gathering data during the research process. Furthermore, it presents the research method chosen for this thesis.

The empirical study focuses on the qualitative research and the analysis of the case companies' website performance and social media presence.

Lastly, the conclusions part summarizes the research findings and results regarding the common trends in the energy sector digital marketing.

1.3 Limitations

The thesis explores the digital marketing activities of companies operating in the energy sector. However, the research focus will be on two case companies, Royal Dutch Shell and Neste which operate in the oil and gas industry. This implicates that other energy companies and fields of energy sector will not be mentioned.

Moreover, limitations will be as well applied when analyzing the case companies' marketing strategies. The thesis focuses only on digital marketing strategies in order to narrow down the scope of the research. Lastly, when observing the social media marketing activities of the case companies, the study will be limited to their Instagram and LinkedIn accounts, indicating that other social media platforms where Neste and Shell are also present in will not be discussed in this research.

2. MARKETING STRATEGY

2.1. Definition of marketing strategy

Formulating an effective marketing strategy is a vital element for succeeding and overcoming market's competitors, as it allows businesses to identify their strong and weak sides, to test actions and tactics, to outline common organizational goals and mission as well as to determine the tactical plan for achieving them (Fifield, 2007, 13).

According to Kotler and Armstrong, marketing strategy can be viewed as a marketing logic, by following which companies aim at creating customer value and making their business profitable (Kotler & Armstrong, 2014, 72). In addition, marketing strategy is defined as a set of processes that establish a vector of actions and choices aimed at gaining a long-term benefit at a firm or strategic business unit levels. (Varadarajan, 2010, 121).

In a modern economy, companies realize that serving and satisfying the needs of all customers in a particular market is unreasonable in terms of profitability. Therefore, companies are faced with a need of deviding a given market into segments and developing a marketing strategy for serving only the selected segments of a total market (Kotler et al., 2014, 73).

Figure 1 depicts that marketing strategy is founded upon market segmentation and market targeting (includes the question of who are the potential customers of a company) as well as differentiation and positioning (involves the question of how and by what means will a company create the value for these customers) (Kotler et al., 2014, 72).

Figure 1. Managing Marketing Strategies and the Marketing Mix (Kotler et al., 2014, 72).

After an overall marketing strategy has been determined, the next step for a company is to discuss and plan the details of a marketing mix.

2.2. Marketing mix

In 1953 Neil Borden, American academic, has presented the definition of marketing mix in a presidential address to the American Marketing Association referring to it as the mixture of various useful elements for achieving a particular response from the market (Walter van Waterschoot & Christophe van den Bulte, 1992, 84). Nowadays, the concept of marketing mix is defined as a set of marketing tactics and actions utilized by a company in order to promote and sell its products to the target audience (Kripanithi & Ramachander, 2018, 1).

Basic 4Ps marketing model consists of four key elements:

1. Product

Product can be defined as products or services that a company has to offer to a target market to satisfy the needs and wants of consumers. Product element of

marketing mix considers such factors, as quality, brand name and logo, design, additional features and others (Kripanithi et al., 2018, 4).

2. Price

Price is a marketing mix element which directly impacts business's profits, sales and market share. It is defined as a monetary value which a customer pays in exchange for a product or service. Price might be influenced by several factors, such as products' costs, market competitors pricing strategies, consumers' purchasing power, the perception of a product by consumers as well as by distribution and marketing costs (Isoraite, 2016, 30-31).

3. Place

Goods and services are produced with an aim of selling it to customers. Therefore, place and distribution strategy are considered as vital elements of marketing mix, as suitable location and availability to consumers play an important role in a company's success and profitability (Kripanithi et al., 2018, 4).

4. Promotion

Promotion is a set of various activities aimed at spreading information, strengthening brand loyalty and recognition on the market as well as encouraging the sales (Isoraite, 2016, 33).

Companies use promotion tools in order to raise awareness of their products to target audience. Some of these promotional activities are advertising, direct marketing, public relations, sales promotion, personal selling and others (Kripanithi et al., 2018, 4).

In 1980s, with a development of service concept, traditional 4P's model has been expanded to 7P's marketing mix with People, Physical evidence and Process

elements, which are also known as the service mix (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2015, 250):

Product	Promotion	Price	Place	People	Process	Physical evidence
• Quality • Image • Branding • Features • Variants • Mix • Support • Customer service • Use occasion • Availability • Warranties	• Marketing communications • Personal promotion • Sales promotion • PR • Branding • Direct marketing	• Positioning • List • Discounts • Credit • Payment methods • Free or value-added elements	• Trade channels • Sales support • Channel number • Segmented channels	• Individuals on marketing activities • Individuals on customer contact • Recruitment • Culture/ image • Training and skills • Remuneration	• Customer focus • Business-led • IT-supported • Design features • Research and development	• Sales/staff contact experience of brand • Product packaging • Online experience

Figure 2. The elements of the marketing mix (Chaffey et al., 2015, 250).

5. People

People can be defined as a crucial marketing mix element which refers to any company's employee who directly or indirectly communicate with stakeholders and customers before, during and after the sales. The key purpose of people element is to ensure an excellent customer service is provided in order to obtain satisfied and returning customers process (Chaffey et al., 2015, 286).

6. Physical evidence

Physical evidence is referred to everything tangible and measurable a customer sees and experiences throughout the integration process with a company. In a digital environment, physical evidence comprises the customer experience received through a business's website or app (Chaffey et al., 2015, 288).

7. Process

In marketing mix, process can be explained as all actions and methods that an organization applies in order to reach its marketing functions, for instance, customer service, R&D, product design etc. Process element is aimed at making customers and business interaction process as convenient and optimized as

possible, as the easier the process is the better it affects sales and customer satisfaction process (Chaffey et al., 2015, 288).

Furthermore, in order to develop a comprehensive and effective marketing strategy it is crucial to conduct a market research.

2.3. Market research

Market research is a set of activities aimed at obtaining a broader understanding of a company's target market. In other words, market research is widely used for gathering, examining and presenting information regarding company's target audience, competitors, brand influence, market size and share (P. Hague, N. Hague & Morgan, 2004, 16).

2.3.1. SWOT analysis

SWOT analysis is a strategic planning method, which is used to help organizations and businesses identify their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats associated with competition or project planning (Helms & Nixon, 2010, 216).

SWOT is an abbreviation that stands for:

S - strengths, positive characteristics and internal factors of the business that distinguish it favorably from competitors.

W- weaknesses, negative internal factors that make a company vulnerable in relation to competitors on the market.

O - opportunities, external elements and trends of the environment that a company can utilize for its development.

T - threats, external elements of the environment that might potentially negatively affect and harm a business (Namugenyia, Nimmagaddab, Reinersc, 2019, 1146).

When it comes to strategic planning, SWOT analysis is a vital element of a market research, as it allows businesses to understand the current business situation in terms of internal and external factors which have an influence on their companies' performance. Thus, it is recommended to conduct a SWOT analysis before initiating a marketing campaign, developing a marketing plan and launching a new product (Vlados, 2019, 356).

2.3.2. PESTEL analysis

Another market research method that is widely used by marketers simultaneously alongside with SWOT is known as PESTEL analysis. PESTEL is an effective tool for determining and assessing external macro-economic factors, forces and risks that might potentially influence a business (Buye, 2021, 4-5).

PESTEL is an acronym which stands for:

- Political perspective – political factors play an important role in shaping the business environment in the region, the state and on the global level, as newly adopted rules and legislations might possibly limit the prospects for doing a particular business or, on the contrary, present new opportunities for the company. Therefore, the following factors should be considered: taxes, wars, political trends, governmental leadership, industry-specific regulations and others (Charmaine, Cortis, Perotti, Sammut & Vella, 2017, 2).
- Economic perspective - evaluation of economic factors is especially important for forecasting the financial condition of a company. Moreover, analyzing these factors helps companies to estimate a product's demand, price level and profitability on a certain market. Economic factors include a thorough analysis of inflation, exchange rates, local economy, GDP, market and trade cycles and others (Sammut-Bonnici & Galea, 2015, 2-4).
- Socio-cultural perspective – socio-cultural factors enable companies to assess consumer preferences, the likelihood of their change and the level

of future demand for their products and services. Thus, the following factors should be examined: consumer purchasing behavior, demographics, moral attitudes and religion influence, consumers' perception of brands, role models, education level and others. (Sammut-Bonnici et al., 2015, 4-5).

- Technological perspective – technological factors help companies to see opportunities for growth in time and keep pace with competitors in terms of technology. A comprehensive analysis of the technological component allows to reorganize the production in a timely manner, to prioritize a production and sale of a technologically promising product as well as to terminate the usage of outdated technologies. Some of the factors that belong to technological category are technical competency, R&D activities, level of innovation, technology progress, automation level and others (Perera, 2017, 13-14).

- Environmental perspective – the examination of environmental factors lets companies generate data related to country's natural environment and resources. Nowadays these factors are gaining the importance due to increasing role of CSR and raw materials shortage. The awareness of these factors will potentially affect the products and the way of manufacturing them in a particular country. For instance, waste and pollution level, climate, environmental policies, sources of energy and other factors should be considered under the environmental dimension (Buye, 2021, 7).

- Legal perspective – the assessment of legal factors enables companies to gather information regarding governmental regulations that can critically affect the organizational operations and the way of doing business in a certain country. Legal dimension involves an analysis of such factors, as country's health and safety laws, patents, employment laws, general legal regulations and principles etc., (Perera, 2017, 14-15).

3. DIGITAL MARKETING COMPONENTS

Digital marketing can be defined as a marketing component that includes managing company's online presence across different platforms in order to achieve marketing objectives (Chaffey et al., 2015, 11). Comparing digital marketing to traditional, several differences and advantages are existent. Firstly, it is less costly compared to traditional marketing forms of advertising, such as radio, trade shows and TV commercials. Secondly, digital marketing allows businesses to reach out to a broader audience, as every user who has access to the Internet, can potentially be targeted, without any geographical restrictions. Finally, digital marketing enables businesses to directly and precisely target the selected segment of audience based on their interests, age, location etc. as well as it provides marketers with tools for measuring the performance and the effectiveness of social media accounts, marketing campaigns, websites with a help of tools like Google Analytics and SEMrush (Mishra, 2020, 2-4). When developing a digital marketing campaign, it is important to elaborate a digital marketing strategy, a plan of actions which set directions for achieving business goals through online marketing activities and digital platforms (Chaffey et al., 2015, 178).

Further, different trends of inbound digital marketing will be discussed.

3.1. Content marketing

Content marketing can be explained as a marketing activity which focuses on creating and sharing insightful, valuable content online in order to engage with a target audience, increase sales and raise awareness of a brand. Marketers use content marketing as a powerful tool for producing relevant, educational pieces of content for current and potential customers. One of the key reasons why over the past years content marketing has been rapidly gaining popularity is that it enables companies to establish a long-lasting relationship with their customers by offering useful guidance or advice, while at the same time generate prospective

leads and indirectly sell their products or services (Bly, 2020). Robert W. Bly states that before making an online order, more than 40% (8 out of 20) of people shopping online tend to do a research and an analysis of a brand. For this reason, companies investing their resources into producing relevant SEO content, are more likely to have their sales increased compared to retailers who focus only on direct advertising and selling (Bly, 2020).

There exist numerous different forms of content marketing, which include not only writing a blog or articles on relevant subjects, but also making podcasts, creating engaging visual content, producing videos containing insightful information about, for example, a brand's values, its product range, seasonal offers etc., (Coles, 2017, 20).

It is recommended to start content marketing planning with defining a company's target audience. It is important to conduct a target analysis in order to understand the potential clients in terms of preference for particular social network platform, socio-demographic characteristics (age, education, gender, relationship status, level of income etc.) as well as behavioral (attitudes towards the brand, loyalty, usage rate etc.) geographic (country, region, population density etc.) and psychographic characteristics (lifestyle, personality etc.) (iEduNote, 2021).

With more and more companies using content marketing as a part of their digital marketing strategy, distinguishing from the excess of online content publications has become challenging. One way to stand out from the competitors is to incorporate storytelling in a company's content marketing (Barry, 2015, 91).

3.1.1. Storytelling

Storytelling is the process of communicating a message to the audience by provoking feelings and emotions. Companies often use storytelling to inspire the

audience to act and to turn prospects into customers at the awareness stage of the customer buying cycle (Barry, 2015, 91).

Storytelling can become an efficient marketing tool when companies design and ensure that all communication channels emphasize brand's values and characteristics and are united by the same distinctive story (Hattke, 2016, 31).

Incorporating storytelling into a digital marketing campaign provides with the following benefits:

1. Storytelling creates a distinguishable identity for a brand – by delivering unique stories with a captivating hook companies can communicate their principles and values and have a deeper connection with customers.
2. It can be applied across all digital marketing platforms, for instance, in social media, landing pages, emails etc.
3. It helps customers recognize a brand – by addressing emotions and engaging with customers attention, brands can build lasting relationships with their clients and encourage to purchase their products (Yap, 2020).

Effective storytelling is based on three main elements. Firstly, stories should be personalized and relatable to readers' feelings and ideas. Secondly, stories should create an emotional response from the audience. Finally, it is recommended to support the stories with research data in order to address not only readers' emotions, but also their rational thinking and inspire them to make a purchase (Carter, 2021).

3.1.2. Search Engine Optimization

Search Engine Optimization or SEO can be defined as the algorithm-based process of improving and optimizing a website content in order for a website to be more visible and ranked at the top of search results (Leake, Vaccarello & Ginty, 2012, 38). By using a ranking algorithm, search engines are searching and gathering new

information on the Web, which allows users to easily access the most relevant content (Papagiannis, 2020).

Figure 3 shows that in order to execute search engine optimization, three main pillars should be implemented.
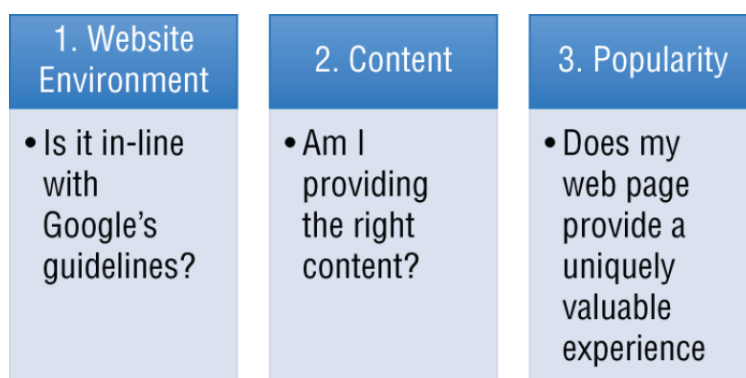

Figure 3. The three pillars of good SEO (Papagiannis, 2020).

Firstly, a website technological environment should be set up correctly and fully optimized, as it directly affects how search engines recognize and crawl a website content. Following tips might be followed for a more effective set up: ensure a website pages are loading fast by keeping the programming code simple and easy to process, avoid duplicate content and broken pages, for every page of a website create at least one internal link redirecting to it and other important areas. Secondly, creating long-form, relevant content is vital when it comes to SEO. To reach the top of a targeted search, a website should include a web page devoted to every search term a company is aiming to rank for (Papagiannis, 2020). It is also recommended to use the most relevant words to a company's customers in titles, body paragraphs and links as well as to ensure that after reading a title customer will easily grasp the main content theme (Odden, 2012, 10). Finally, it is important to organically build links to a website by providing high-quality and unique content, as search engines consider some of these links as a trust factor. According to N. Papagiannis (2020), for exponential rise of a website ranking following

techniques should be followed: striving for receiving links from popular and trusted sites, particularly from .org and .gov websites, monitoring the quality of links via link quality tool on a monthly basis, raising interest and awareness of content by using content promotion tactics (Papagiannis, 2020).

3.2. Sustainable marketing

Rapidly growing population, decreasing availability of natural resources, industrialization and other environmental issues have resulted in a noticeable shift in consumers buying behavior towards environment-friendly commodities. Simultaneously, this change has led to marketers starting to incorporate green practices into companies' marketing strategies (Khandelwal & Yadav, 2014, 1). Initially created as an idea in 1980s, a broad concept of sustainable marketing can be explained as marketing activities oriented at promoting brand's commitment to sustainable practices as well as ensuring safe production and manufacturing from the ecological point of view (Strategic direction, 2016).

Figure 4 demonstrates that sustainability embodies the interconnected combination of social, economic and environmental dimensions. Environmental dimension addresses the rational resources consumption, biodiversity, environmental protection etc. Social dimension involves social justice, stakeholder participation, social inclusion, fair labor practices and regulations etc. Lastly, economic dimension refers to cost savings, prosperity, research and development, economic growth and other factors (Leat, Revoredo-Giha & Lamprinopoulou, 2011, 608).
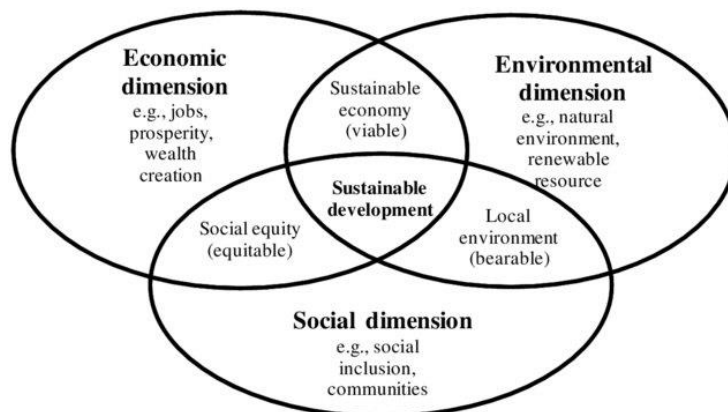
Figure 4. Dimensions of sustainability (Leat et al., 2011, 608).

Sustainable marketing is focused on two perspectives: marketing sustainability and marketing sustainably. While marketing sustainability encompasses facilitating and endorsing a global concept of sustainable values and consumption, marketing sustainably means supporting and developing company's processes and culture in a way where all marketing activities are benign to society and environment (Martin & Schouten, 2014, 2).

Nowadays brands that are perceived in society as environmentally friendly and positively impacting the planet have significant customers' support and loyalty. Feeling appreciation to these brands, consumers spread a message by word of mouth, which means a powerful and cost-free promotion for many sustainable companies (Ottman, 2011).

3.3. Social media marketing

Introduced in early 2000s, social media is a collective term for Internet-based interactive applications and websites which have distinguishable features of communication among users, creating content, sharing thoughts and ideas (Singh & RatnaSinha, 2017, 36). Over a past decade, the number of users of various social networks has been increasing exponentially. According to Statista (2021), the number of worldwide social network users is approximately 3,78 billion people in

2021. The number is forecasted to continue its growth and reach 4,4 billion users in 2025 (Statista, 2021). Therefore, social media has become a very effective tool for many businesses, which they use in order to develop relationships with their customers by engaging in a dialogue with them (Mahoney &Tang, 2016, 21).

Social media marketing is an essential tool for raising awareness and brand recognition for both SMEs and large enterprises. Social media marketing or SMM can be defined as a form of internet marketing that involves creating and distributing content on social media to achieve businesses' marketing and branding goals (Risius & Beck, 2015).

Nowadays, there exist numerous social media platforms through which individuals are able to interact with each other, as well as to build connections with brands and get familiar with their products and services (Bajpai, Dr. Pandey, Mrs. Shriwas, 2012).

According to T.L. Tuten and M.R. Solomon (2014), for more convenient comparison and contrast social media platforms and channels can be divided into four zones: social community, social publishing, social commerce and social entertainment. Based on the topic and aim of the research, the most relevant zones for a more detailed description are social community and publishing zones (Tuten & Solomon, 2014, 16).

Figure 5 illustrates that zone 1, social community, involves social media channels that are primarily focused on two-way and multi-way collaboration, communication and interaction for creating and maintaining relationships with people who share the same interests and ideas. Social media channels that belong to social community zone are, for example, Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter etc. When it comes to zone 2, social publishing, it contains social media channels that are used for editorial and commercial purposes, as well as for disseminating content to a target audience. Social publishing zone could be viewed as one of the most crucial zones for B2B companies, as through its channels, businesses are able

to demonstrate their competence, leadership and continuous improvement. This zone includes such social media channels as, for instance, blogs, media sharing and news sites: blogger, YouTube, Scribd etc., (Tuten et al., 2014, 16).

Figure 5. The zones of social media marketing (Tuten et al., 2014, 16).

While designing a social media marketing strategy, marketers are accessed to three main types of media: paid, owned and earned. Earned media can be described as publicity gained organically, meaning that messages are shared at no direct cost to a business entity. When it comes to social community zone, examples of earned media are shared content, conversations in communities, influence impressions etc. As to social publishing zone, search rating, links, comments and shares are common examples of earned media. In contrast, paid media is defined as an outbound marketing technique, which involves paid marketing activities for promotion and traffic driving purposes. Paid media includes ads (social community zone), endorsements, branded channels in media sharing sites (social publishing zone). Finally, owned media can be explained as channels controlled by a brand, created and published through company's own platforms. For instance, controlled profiles (social community zone), brand-

controlled media sharing sites, corporate blogs (social publishing zone) etc., (Tuten et al., 2014, 17).

One of the most trending type of social media marketing is influencer marketing. It refers to the type of marketing, where brands engage in paid collaborations with social media influencers, people with a large number of followers who have a certain level of influence on their audience, in order to promote their brand and products on the influencer's social media accounts. More and more marketing professionals are implementing influencer marketing as a part of their digital marketing strategy, as this method of promotion allows brands to reach both their target audience and influencer's followers, as well as it is considered to lead to more authentic and organic connection with prospective customers (Lou, Yuan, 2019, 58).

When it comes to oil and gas companies, previously they had prejudices towards social media marketing, assuming that this type of marketing is not efficient for reaching their target audience. However, social media marketing provides oil and gas companies with numerous benefits, such as being able to connect both with local and global audience, raising awareness and enhancing brand image, as well as educating the audience by creating informative, unique content, as typically the audience is not familiar that well with energy sector's specifics and products. Having understood these benefits, many oil and gas companies started utilizing social media marketing as a part of their digital marketing strategy (Salman, 2019).

In the next subchapters four most relevant for this study social media platforms will be introduced.

3.3.1. Facebook

According to statistics, in 2021 Facebook remains the most popular social network worldwide with more than 2,7 billion people using it every month.
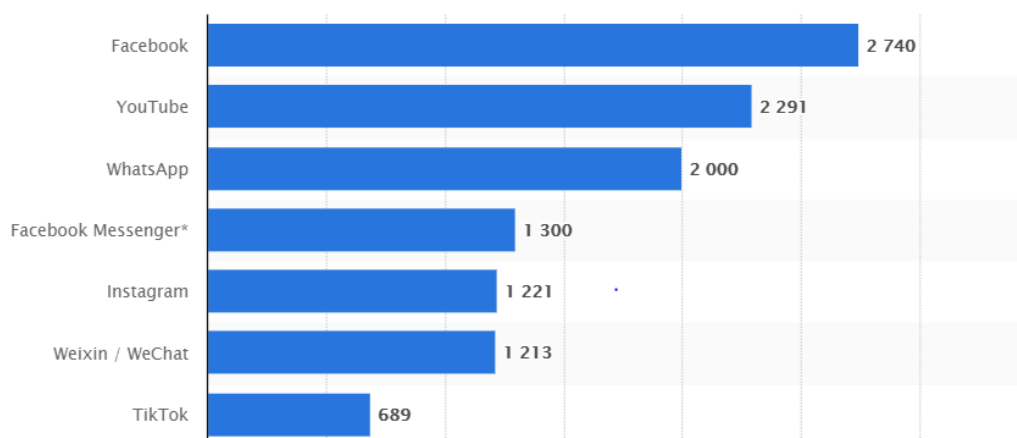
Figure 6. Most popular social networks worldwide as of January 2021. In millions. (Statista, 2021).

Facebook is a social network launched by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004. Back in the days, Zuckerberg was studying at Harvard and, therefore, initially Facebook was available only for Harvard students and was used as a tool for intercommunication. Only two years later, in 2006, Facebook was adapted into 68 languages and all other Internet users who had an email address received an access to the social network.

Facebook provides a free and available to everyone opportunity to create business pages. Facebook business pages can be run by small and medium businesses, by large enterprises as well as celebrities. The only aspect that is emphasized in the rules is that only an official representative of an organization, company or a famous person has the right to create a page (Facebook, 2021).

A business Facebook page can be an add-on to a business's web page that provides with unique opportunities and free tools for business promotion and increasing brand awareness. When it comes to advantages of Facebook marketing, reduced marketing expenses are one of them, as social networking allows businesses to directly promote their products and communicate with the audience. In addition,

businesses can launch targeted marketing campaigns and select their target audience according to gender, age, location, behavior, interests etc., (Ramsaran, 2013, 76). Furthermore, Facebook advertising has a feature of automatically managing the budget across different ads in order to receive overall better results, where less money is spent on underperforming advertisements and most of the budget is distributed to more successful ads (Facebook, 2021).

3.3.2. Instagram

Instagram is a social media platform, which has a visual nature and allows its users to create, edit and share video and photo content with their followers (Coles, 2017, 121-122). Started in 2010, nowadays Instagram is one of most post popular social networking app with over 1 billion users worldwide in 2021. The number of Instagram users is forecasted to steadily grow and reach approximately 1,2 billion users by 2023 (Statista, 2021).

Instagram has incorporated numerous tools available for both regular and business accounts. Firstly, businesses can use Instagram Ads to advertise their brand and engage with future customers. Though it is impossible to launch an advertising campaign in Instagram, it can be done through Facebook account by selecting "Instagram" as a preferred social media platform for placing an add (Coles, 2017, 127). Instagram ads allow companies to set and later update their campaign budget, as well as to track and analyze the add performance, which enables to improve the efficiency of future campaigns (Instagram, 2021). Secondly, companies with insufficient marketing budgets for big advertising campaigns can take advantage of an Instagram tool called Instagram Live. By using this tool, companies can interact with their audience and get more visibility and interest in their brand. Instagram Live is an efficient tool for holding Q&A sessions, launching new product lines, announcing possible changes and goals for upcoming months etc. Lastly, in 2016 Instagram has introduced Instagram stories – photo or video content with a time limit of 15 seconds. Instagram stories are displayed in the top of users' feed, as well as they disappear after being published for 24 hours.

For these reasons, stories can be used by brands as a useful tool for experimenting and analyzing before making any significant investments into new implementations and ideas (Coles, 2017, 124).

3.3.3. LinkedIn

Established in 2003, LinkedIn was a social networking site, primarily used as a job search platform. However, over the years it has expanded to a major multifunctional social platform, where professionals from all around the world have an opportunity to promote their skills, share information and connect with each other (Castillo-de Mesa & Gómez-Jacinto, 2020, 103-104). According to LinkedIn (2021), the number of their members worldwide accounts for 756 million coming from more than 200 countries (LinkedIn, 2021).

By using LinkedIn as a part of a social media marketing strategy, companies can raise awareness of their brand to prospective and current clients, drive website traffic and generate leads. LinkedIn offers a wide range of ads to be used for promotion, for example, dynamic ads, text ads, conversation and video ads, sponsored content and messaging (LinkedIn, 2021).

In order to create a maintain a positive brand image, generate potential leads and turn them into customers, build a trustful, long-term relationships with a target audience, following practices are recommended to be followed. Firstly, consistency and regular posting are important for growing and retaining the audience. LinkedIn (2019) states that business pages that have posts update at least once a week, receive two times more engagement compared to rarely posting pages. Secondly, quality video and image content attract five times more engagement than posts containing only text information. Finally, integrating a formula of 3-2-1 is recommended when designing a content marketing plan on LinkedIn. The 3-2-1 is a model, following which a company posts three posts with industry-related content, two posts devoted to appreciation of a company's

employees or community and one post containing promotion of a brand itself, its services and solutions (LinkedIn, 2019).

While conducting a study of over 5000 B2C and B2B businesses, HubSpot has discovered that LinkedIn is significantly more efficient for lead generation compared to Twitter and Facebook. Figure 7 shows that LinkedIn has generated 2,74% visitor-to-lead conversion rate, which is nearly three times higher than Facebook (0,77%) and Twitter (0,69%) (HubSpot, 2020).
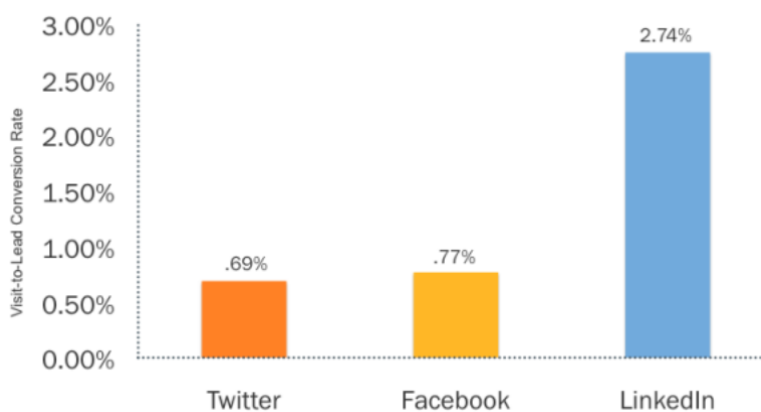

Figure 7. LinkedIn Best Social Network for Lead Generation (HubSpot, 2020).

3.3.4. YouTube

Video marketing is considered as one of the digital marketing trends, as it is a low-cost way of products and services promoting and gaining more attention to the brand. Businesses can use video marketing to their advantage by creating informative videos including demonstrating the products, talking about their technical qualities and how they can be used to solve customers' problems. Furthermore, video marketing can be used for announcing the launch of a new product line, as well as introducing the audience to a company's current and future projects and redirecting them to a company's website (Coles, 2017, 107-112).

Launched in 2005, YouTube has become a massive online video sharing channel and social media communication platform (Duffet, 2020, 1). According to Statista

(2021), YouTube has over 2,2 billion of users in 2021 and the number is forecasted to continuously increase over the next four years, reaching around 2,85 billion users by 2025 (Statista, 2021).

Initially designed for entertainment purposes, YouTube has expanded to one of the largest social media platforms which also functions as a tool for creating user-generated content, advertising, promotion, product placement etc. Companies use YouTube for promotion purposes, as it enables them to market their brand sustainably and cost-efficiently, as well as to make their advertisements targeted and controlled. In addition, YouTube offers a comprehensive and detailed metrics to analyze the audience of a company's own brand content channel as well as the competitors' channels in terms of demography, geography, engagement, personal preferences etc., (Duffet, 2020, 3).

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The intent of this chapter is to introduce and discuss different research methods. Moreover, the chapter contains a research framework and key metrics for analyzing digital marketing strategies of the case companies.

4.1. Research methods

Choosing a research approach plays an important role in conducting a scientific research. There exist two common research methodologies for gathering and analyzing data: qualitative and quantitative methods.

Qualitative research is a type of scientific research aimed at exploring a phenomenon and analyzing non-numerical data. It is commonly used for examining the "human" perspective of a hypothesis, including such intangible factors as beliefs, cultural values, religion, social behavior etc., (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, Namey, 2005, 1).

Qualitative research is the most effective for answering "why" and "how" questions. Usually, it can be characterized as rather flexible and iterative, as it does not have a predetermined structure (Marshall, 1996, 522-524). Moreover, qualitative research findings are based on textual, non-numerical data format, such as audiotapes, notes, videotapes obtained through conducting in-depth interviews with open-ended questions, as well as focus groups and participant observation (Mack et al., 2005, 2-3).

As to quantitative research, it is defined as a process of collecting, measuring and analyzing data in order to obtain structured and measurable statistical findings. The main characteristics of quantitative research are (Goertzen, 2017, 12):

- It is concentrated on the measurable and possibly numerically represented data.

- It is helpful for finding answers for "how much", "what" and "to what extent" research questions.
- Research results are expected to be objective and can be assessed and demonstrated through statistical analysis.
- Unlike qualitative research, it does not focus on discovering the underlying reasons and motivation behind the behavior of a sample group, but rather on testing a hypothesis and finding logical trends and conclusions across large-scale numerical data (Goertzen, 2017, 12-13).
- Data is collected by using surveys, questionnaires, statistical tests and structured observation (Mack et al., 2005, 3).

The selection of a scientific research method should be solely based on the nature of a research objectives and questions; thus, researcher's personal preferences should not be considered as a determining factor (Marshall, 1996, 522). The aim of this research is to analyze the digital marketing strategies of two case companies and identify general trends and patterns in the energy sector digital marketing. Therefore, a qualitative research method has been chosen for this thesis work for the following reasons. Firstly, this study explores the questions of "How do companies operating in the energy sector promote themselves in the digital environment?" and "How similar or different their digital marketing strategies are?". As mentioned previously, qualitative research helps with seeking answers for "how" questions. Secondly, the data of this research will be in textual, non-numerical format obtained by collecting secondary data through companies' websites, social media platforms, annual reports and other related articles. Finally, the research findings will be analyzed non-statistically, through developing a research framework and grouping of common metrics and trends, which is a common qualitative research data analysis method.

4.2. Research framework

The empirical part of the thesis will be based on the research framework, which was adopted and modified from the model developed by Italian scientists when conducting a study related to brand visibility and social media strategies in the wine sector. Figure 8 demonstrates the three-dimensional model created to analyze the connection between web communications strategies and social media, as well as how they impact on brand visibility (Capitello, Agnoli, Begalli, Codurri, 2013, 133).

Figure 8. The three-dimensional research framework (Capitello et al., 2013, 133).

Since this study is limited to exploring case companies' activities in the digital environment, there has been developed a two-dimensional research framework inspired by the model mentioned above:

-) Website features   -) Social media platforms
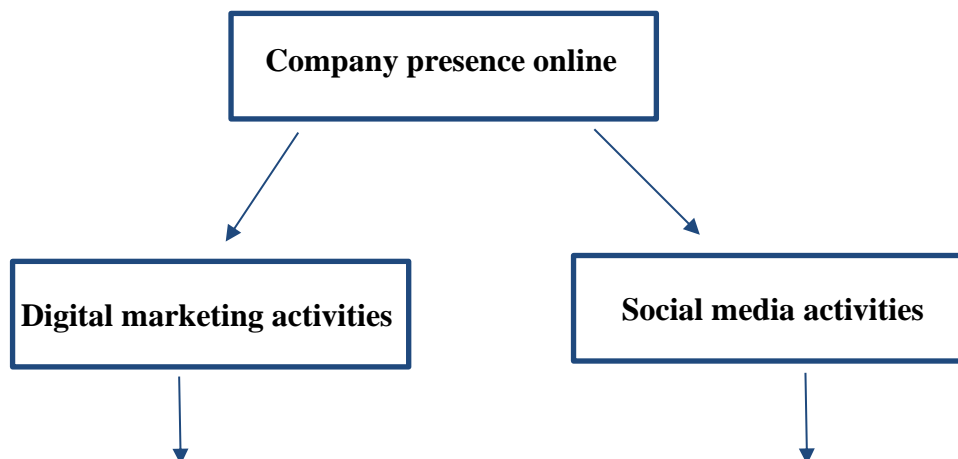
-) Communication style

-) Content marketing and SEO

For each parameter of digital marketing and social media activities, there has been assigned an evaluation criterion. When it comes to social media presence, following criteria have been selected:

1. The number and names of social media platforms a company has a presence in.
2. The frequency of postings, which will be measured according to the scale low (once a month), medium (once a week) and high (every day).
3. Analysis of published content, in terms of its format (video, pictures, plain text etc.), key topics, style of communication etc.

As to digital marketing activities, they will be analyzed through following metrics:

1. Website interface convenience and personalization on a scale low (not user-friendly, difficult to navigate), medium (user-friendly, but overwhelmed with content), high (easy to navigate, well-structured).
2. Style of communication on the website on a scale formal (uses formal tone, well-structured and standard language) or informal (uses relaxed tone and more casual language expressions).
3. Content marketing analysis in terms of quality, main topics and organic keywords.

5. EMPIRICAL STUDY

5.1. Case company: Neste Oyj

One of the selected case companies for this study is Neste Oyj, a Finnish company established in 1948 in order to secure and strengthen Finland's supply of oil (Neste, 2021). Headquartered in Espoo, Finland, Neste is a listed company on the Nasdaq Helsinki stock exchange (Neste, 2021).

When it comes to a company's production, Neste offers a wide range of renewable solutions and products, as well as oil products, which in fact contribute the most to Neste's revenue. Company produces water, air, on- and off-road solutions and, as figure 9 indicates, its products can be grouped into 4 key categories: oil products, renewable products, marketing & services and others (Neste, 2021).

Figure 9. Annual report 2020. Our businesses (Neste, 2021).

As to Neste's overall strategy, it revolves around three principles and is known as "Faster, Bolder and Together strategy". According to Neste's 2020 annual report, this strategy means focusing on accelerating efficiency in daily operations, developing innovational ideas as well as implementing faster and bolder lower-emission circular and renewable solutions that involve more sustainable practices (Neste, 2021).

As previously mentioned in the theoretical part, SWOT analysis is an effective strategic planning method used to analyze company's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (Helms & Nixon, 2010). Speaking about Neste's key strengths, extensive level of refining expertise, strong brand name and presence

in 14 countries across the globe are one of them. Moreover, company's strength lies in producing sustainable raw materials and building its business upon sustainability and responsible practices. When it comes to weaknesses, the most critical one is the descending demand for oil products caused by Covid-19. As a result, around 370 jobs are to be reduced during 2020-2022. There are numerous opportunities which Neste can use to its advantage, for instance, expanding operations to the new markets, thus generating more sales and profits as well as widening its oil and raw materials base. Finally, Neste's biggest threat is an extensive level of competition coming from large oil refineries located in Russia, Middle East and Northwest Europe (Neste, 2021).

5.2. Case company: Royal Dutch Shell

Another case company selected for the study is Royal Dutch Shell, also known as Shell, a global energy company established in 1907 and headquartered in the Hague, the Netherlands. The company specializes in producing, refining and marketing of natural gas and oil by applying innovative approaches and heavily investing in wind and solar power (Shell, 2021). Shell's operations are grouped into four categories: Upstream (explores, extracts, markets and transports natural gas and crude oil), Integrated gas (handles the production of gas-to-liquids fuels and liquified natural gas operations), Renewables and energy solutions (specializes on researching and identifying solutions and new business models to meet the constantly evolving customers' demands and needs, and Downstream (serves more than 30 million customers daily by offering products for domestic, transport and industrial use) (Shell, 2021).

According to Shell's annual report, the main company's strategy is to purposely and profitably advance and stimulate its transformation towards net-zero emissions. Achieving this strategy is planned through three areas: growth, transition and upstream (Shell, 2021, p.18-20). Furthermore, communicating

company's values, such as honesty, integrity and respect for people as well as promoting the principles of sustainable development, professionalism and environmentally, socially and economically responsible decision-making are important pillars of Neste's strategy (Shell, 2021).

Analyzing company's strong sides, high financial performance is one of them. In 2020, Royal Dutch Shell has been ranked as the 4th highest-earning oil and gas company with a revenue of $180,5 billion, despite the loss of approximately $21 billion due to Covid-19 negative impact (Verdict Media Limited, 2021). Moreover, Shell has a diverse distribution network and wide expertise in entering new markets with operations in more than 70 countries as well as innovative technologies for oil exploration, strong brand name and reputation. As to Shell's weaknesses, the company is facing legal and environmental issues related to the negative impact of Shell's operations on the environment. In 2021 the court has ordered it to reduce the carbon emissions by 45% by 2030 (Guardian News & Media Limited, 2021). Investing in exploring and developing new technologies and product segments could be a potential opportunity for Shell, as the company has enough financial resources and stable cash flow for that. When it comes to threats, market disruption and intense competition coming from such major oil and gas companies, as Petrobas, Chevron, Saudi Aramco etc., are one of them (Craft.co, 2021).

5.3. Social media presence

Both Neste Oyj and Royal Dutch Shell are currently present across five social media platforms: Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn and Twitter. In order to limit the amount of data for analysis, this study will focus on case companies' activities in LinkedIn and Instagram.

5.3.1. LinkedIn

As mentioned in the theoretical part, LinkedIn is an effective platform used by companies for raising brand awareness and promotion purposes.

Neste has an active LinkedIn company page with over 86000 followers. In the "About" section Neste has clearly stated their goal of overtaking a worldwide leader position in renewable and circular solutions (LinkedIn, 2021):
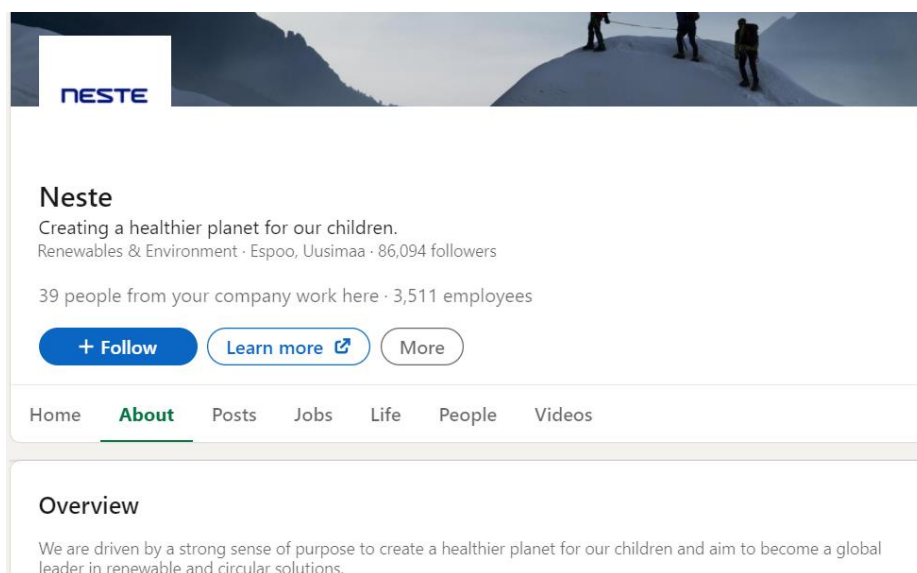

Figure 10. Neste. Home (Neste, 2021).

Neste's communication style on LinkedIn can be defined as formal and professional. Figure 11 is the example of one the company's clearly structured and grammatically correct posts, with no slang language used. However, to be more casual and reader friendly, Neste adds emojis to its posts where it is appropriate.

Figure 11. Neste LinkedIn post (Neste, 2021).

By analyzing Neste's feed in LinkedIn, it can be noticed that the company actively publishes content, at least once a day. When it comes to its content topics, two main categories are prevailing: sustainability and company-related updates. Sustainability aspect is frequently emphasized in Neste's posts. For instance, one of the posts is devoted to Neste promoting sustainable corporate travel by supplying low-emission aviation fuel.

Figure 12. Neste. Posts (Neste, 2021).

As to format of Neste's content on LinkedIn, two main formats can be distinguished: video marketing and content marketing. Video marketing has a significant role in Neste's digital strategy across LinkedIn, as by creating and

publishing short but informative videos, the company can effectively and visually communicate their values and goals. Furthermore, Neste has implemented content marketing as a part of their digital marketing strategy in LinkedIn. Figure 12 shows that the company has a tendency of briefly introducing the topic and then leaving a link to their website blog in order to make the readers curious and redirect them to the company's website.

Meanwhile, Royal Dutch Shell also has an active LinkedIn page with over 5,4 million followers. From the figure 13 it can be observed that the company's mission of powering progress by developing cleaner global energy solutions is mentioned in the "About" section.
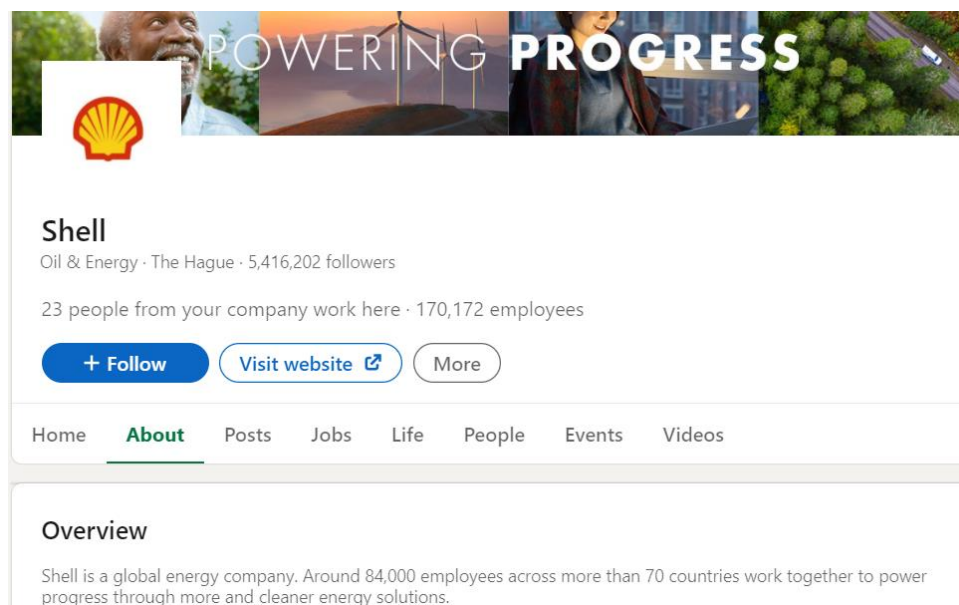

Figure 13. Shell. About (Shell, 2021).

Similarly to Neste, Shell's posts revolve around company updates and sustainability topics. Shell publishes news regarding company's efforts on becoming a net zero-emission company in 30 years as well as collaborating with biodiversity experts on the development of more responsible and sustainable solar projects. In terms of content forms, Shell designs colorful images alongside

with topic description as well as videos, which are usually no longer than 1 minute, for promotion purposes. While analyzing Shell's communication style on LinkedIn, it can be noticed that the company is delivering the content in a formal, explicit way by also focusing on correct punctuation and avoidance of slang language. However, in some posts Shell uses appropriate emojis to engage the readers.
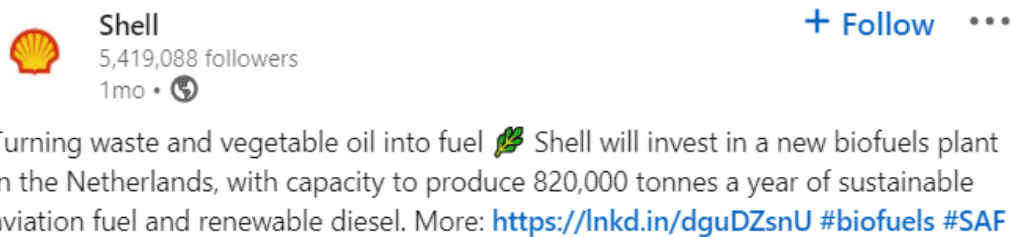

Figure 14. Shell's post on LinkedIn (Shell, 2021).

Comparing Shell's frequency of publishing content to Neste's, it can be observed from the yellow highlights on figure 15 that Shell does not create posts daily, but rather a couple of times a week.
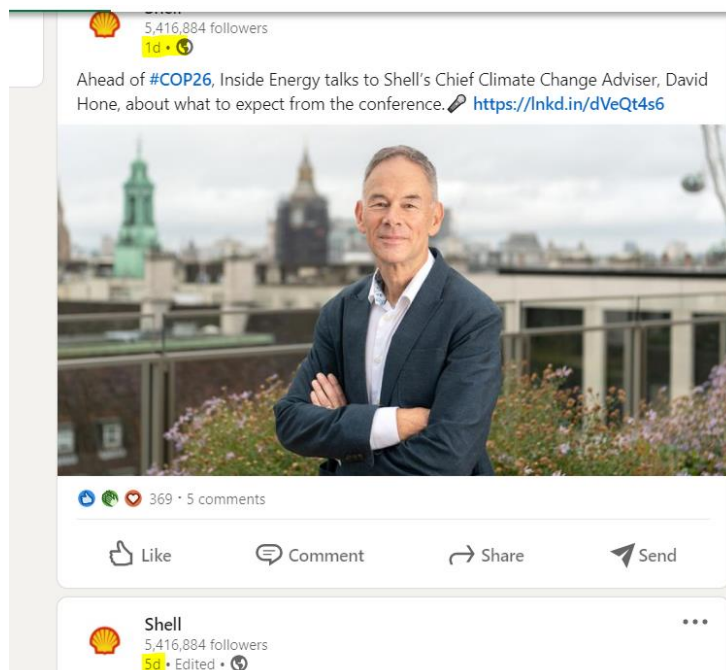

Figure 15. Shell. Posts (Shell, 2021).

Summarizing both case companies marketing activities in LinkedIn, three certain common trends can be noticed. Firstly, both Neste and Shell are emphasizing their focus on sustainability and design the promotional ads around their current and future sustainable projects. Secondly, both companies are regularly creating video marketing campaigns on LinkedIn to capture the audience attention and generate more leads to the campaign. Finally, the communication style incorporated by companies is rather formal and professional, though in some posts emojis are used to increase engagement.

5.3.2. Instagram

As figure 16 shows, Neste official Instagram page has currently slightly more than 13.000 followers and 1350 posts.
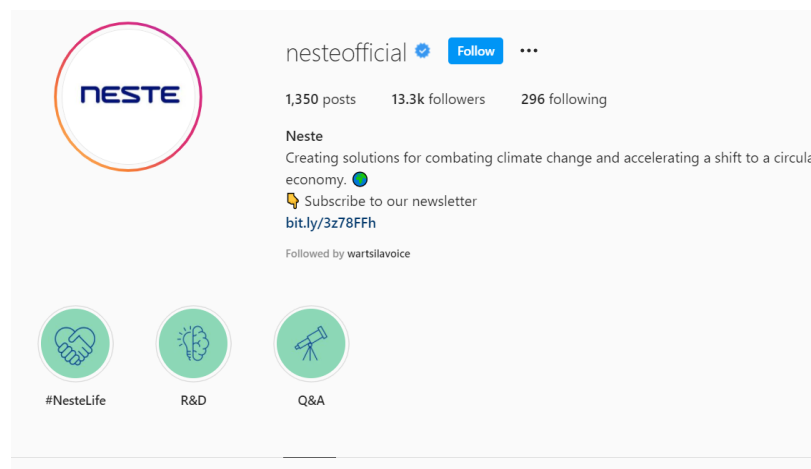

Figure 16. Neste official Instagram account (Neste, 2021).

Neste utilizes Instagram for presenting and informing regarding upcoming projects, promoting sustainable and renewable solutions as well as introducing company's employees to the audience. Figure 17 illustrates the news feed of company's Instagram and shows that both video and photo formats of posts are used by Neste.
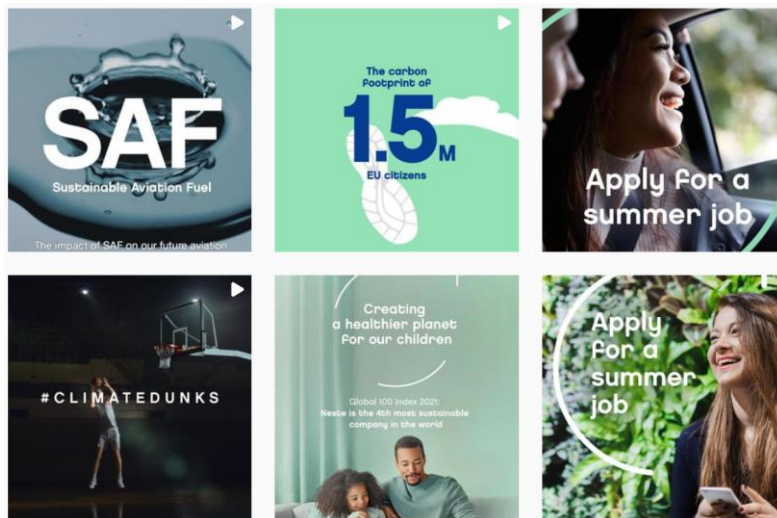
Figure 17. Neste official Instagram account. Posts (Neste, 2021).

Same as with LinkedIn, Neste uses Instagram as a platform for raising awareness of global climate problems and highlighting how the company is striving for transformation towards sustainable future. For instance, in 2020-2021, Neste has launched a promotional campaign "Climate dunks" in collaboration with NBA basketball player Lauri Markkanen. The aim of the campaign was to spread the awareness of rising temperatures and their drastic impact on climate change. In total, five videos were created and posted on Neste Instagram, each devoted to a specific environmental issue of: blizzards, hurricanes, flash floods, heat waves and wildfires (Neste, 2020).

"Clmate dunks" campaign demonstrates how Neste uses influencer marketing as a part of their digital marketing strategy. By collaborating with famous backetball player who was born in Finland, but currently has a professional career in the United States, Neste was able to attract both local (Finnish) and internal audience's attention. Figure 18 depicts one out of five videos published by Lauri, who has over 281.000 followers on Instagram. Lauri also highlighted that they were created in partnership with Neste.

Figure 18. Lauri Markkanen's Instagram post (Lauri Markkanen, 2021).

Moreover, Neste is actively posting Instagram Stories as a part of their digital marketing strategy on Instagram. Neste has three Instagram Stories highlights: #NesteLife which contains content published by company's trainees, R&D which tells how Neste's employees are involved in researching and developing new solutions, and Q&A which consists of answers to questions from the audience. Figure 19 shows how by creating a 15-second story with visuals and catchy topic introduction, Neste aims at engaging with its followers and redirecting them to the company's blog.
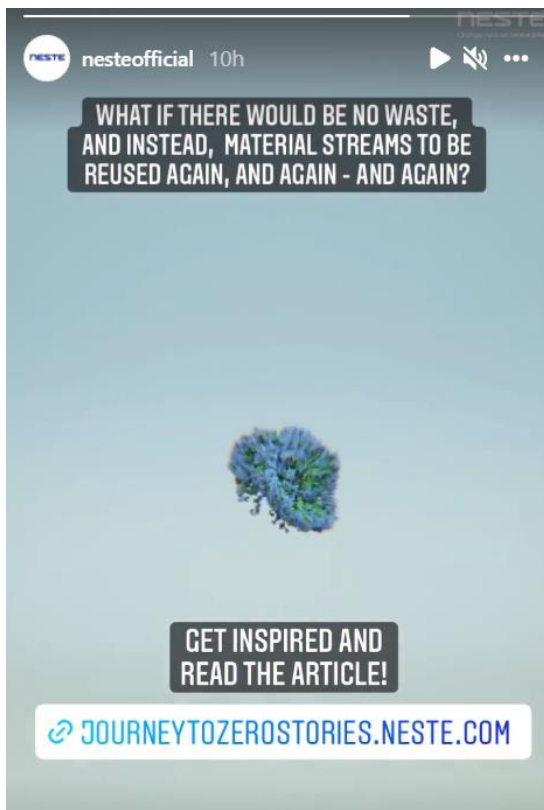
Figure 19. Neste's Instagram Story (Instagram, 2021).

Speaking about Shell's official account on Instagram, it currently has 328.000 followers and 621 posts.

Figure 20. Shell's official Instagram account (Shell, 2021).

When analyzing the newsfeed of Shell official Instagram account, it can be noticed that the company creates the content mainly in the photo format. Most of Shell's posts are devoted to promoting sustainability and introducing readers to actions which the company is taking to shift towards more sustainable practices and cleaner solutions. For example, figure 21 shows the post on Shell's Instagram talking about the company's initiative to plant a million trees in Scotland as a part of its goal to decrease CO2 emissions.
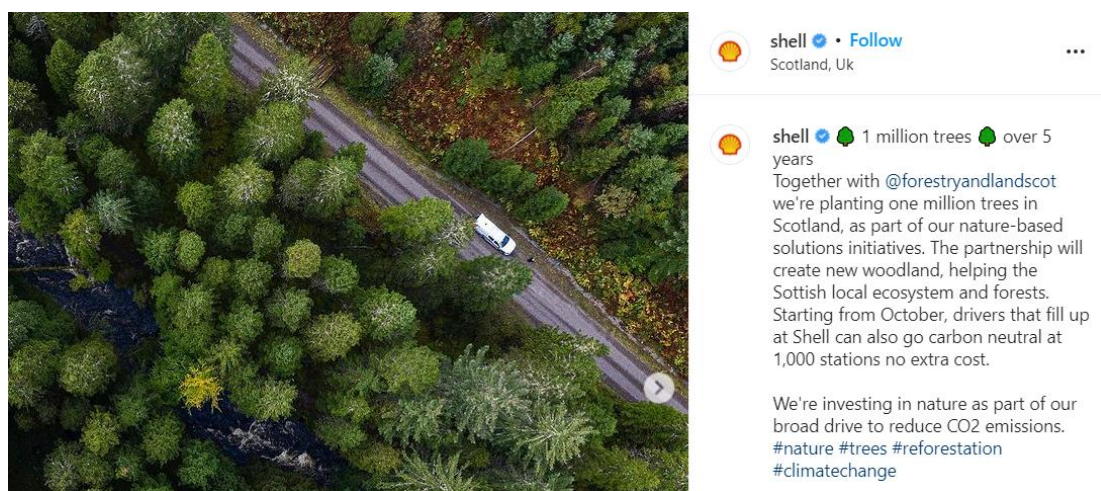

Figure 21. Shell's post on Instagram (Shell, 2019).

With an aim of promoting the brand image and at the same time raising the awareness of the environmental issues, Shell is consistently collaborating with Instagram's influencers and uses influencer marketing as a part of their digital marketing strategy. For instance, in 2020, Cherrie Lynn Almonte, a travel lifestyle blogger with around 190.000 followers on Instagram, has published a vintage-style video made in paid partnership with Shell. Filmed at a Shell's gas station in California, the video is dedicated to huge fires which were happening in Joshua Tree as a consequence of drought and climate change crisis (Taft, 2021). From the figure 22, it can be seen that the promotional video has got approximately 35,5 thousand views. Another example of how Shell is utilizing influence marketing is its campaign known under hashtag #Shellpartner. Instagram influencers used to

post video or photo content and tag Shell's account to indicate that the posts were made in the sponsorship with the company (Taft, 2021).

Figure 22. Cherrie Lynn Almonte's Instagram post (Cherrie Lynn Almonte, 2020).

As well as Neste, Shell is also creating Instagram Stories to engage with the followers. Shell currently has five Instagram Stories highlights dedicated to net-zero emissions, respecting nature, Q&A, energy debate and Covid-19. For example, in net-zero emissions highlight Shell talks about accelerating net-zero emissions and bringing more electric vehicles to the society, as well as encourages followers to swipe up to learn more about the topic on the Shell's blog.
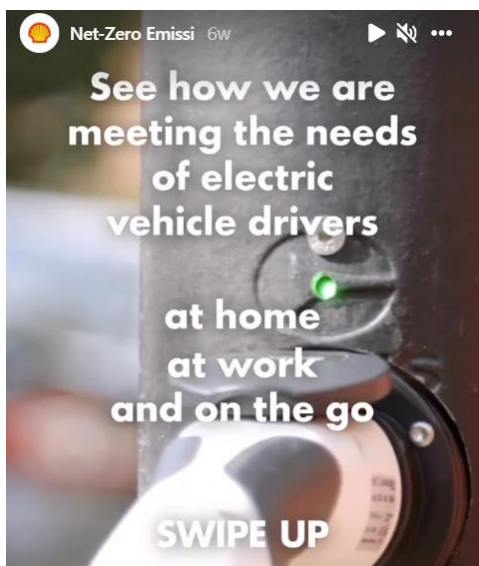
Figure 23. Shell's Instagram story (Shell, 2021).

After analyzing Neste's and Shell's official Instagram accounts, a comparison table has been created and three main common trends can be observed. Firstly, same as on LinkedIn, the companies are developing their content and posts around sustainability and responsible practices. Secondly, both case companies are collaborating with Instagram influencers to generate a wider reach and awareness of their brands. Finally, both Neste and Shell are creating not only regular posts, but also Instagram Stories in order to drive more traffic to their websites and blogs.

Parameter	Evaluation criteria	Neste	Shell
	Active presence in	Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube	Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube

Social media platforms	Communication style	Formal, objective, emojis are used to be more reader-friendly	Formal, polite, emojis are used to be more reader-friendly
	Forms of content	Photo, video, textual	Photo, video, textual
	Frequency of posts update (analysis of the official global accounts)	LinkedIn – high (daily) Instagram – medium (weekly)	LinkedIn – medium (1-2 times a week) Instagram – low (rarer than once a month)
	Content topics	Sustainability, innovation, aviation	Climate change, energy podcast, sustainability
	Common patterns	Focus on sustainability, video marketing, influencer marketing, Instagram Stories marketing	

Table 1. Social media comparison.

5.4. Website analysis

In general, Neste has a well-designed and functional website with a prevailing white and dark blue color theme. The company's website is also mobile-friendly, meaning that is can be conveniently accessed by both smartphone and desktop users. Figure 24 shows the design of Neste's Home page.
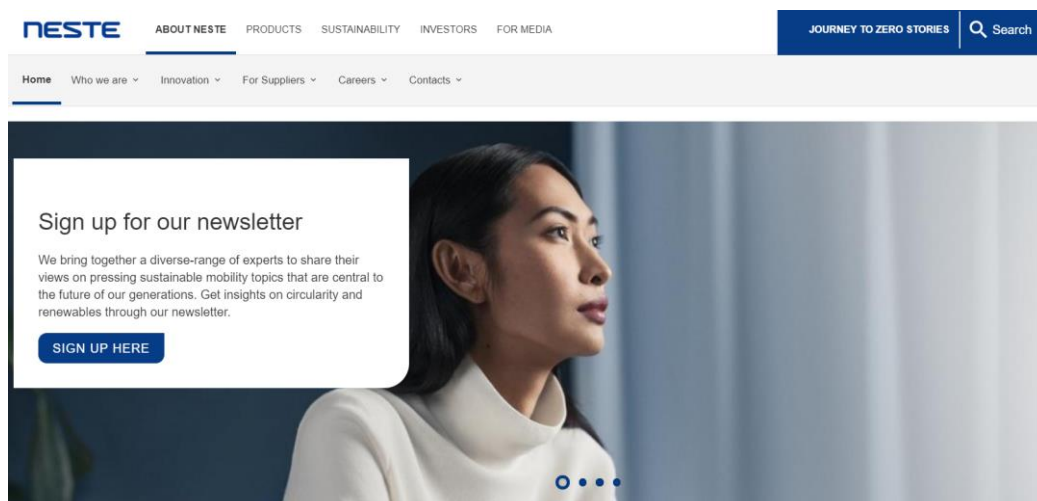
Figure 24. About Neste. Home (Neste, 2021).

When analyzing Neste's website, it can be noticed that the company is putting significant efforts into content marketing and storytelling. Neste has a separate page devoted to its blog called "Journey to zero stories", to which website visitors are redirected from the Home page by clicking the button in the upper right corner. Like the Home page, "journey to zero stories" page is also promoting and encouraging visitors to sign up for the company's newsletter in order to increase the brand credibility as well as to keep the audience updated regarding Neste's upcoming projects, collaborations and solutions.

The topics of Neste's website content can be distinguished into three main categories: sustainability, innovation and aviation. The communication style used in the articles might be defined as rather formal. Articles have clearly structured, cohesive paragraphs which are all united by the core topic idea. The length of the articles varies between 4 to 10 minutes estimated reading time.

When developing website content, Neste is once again uses video marketing by embedding short videos published on their YouTube channel into the articles. For instance, Neste has integrated a one-minute video as a part of an article devoted to fiction design. Figure 25 demonstrates how Neste is trying to keep the audience

focused and engaged by including a video in the middle of an article and saying "Watch the short film" written in a bigger font size compared to the rest of the article.

Design fiction provokes imagination and innovation by asking the question "what if?" What if there would be no waste, and instead, material streams to be reused again, and again – and again? Watch the short film that highlights the possibilities of tomorrow.

Watch the short film:
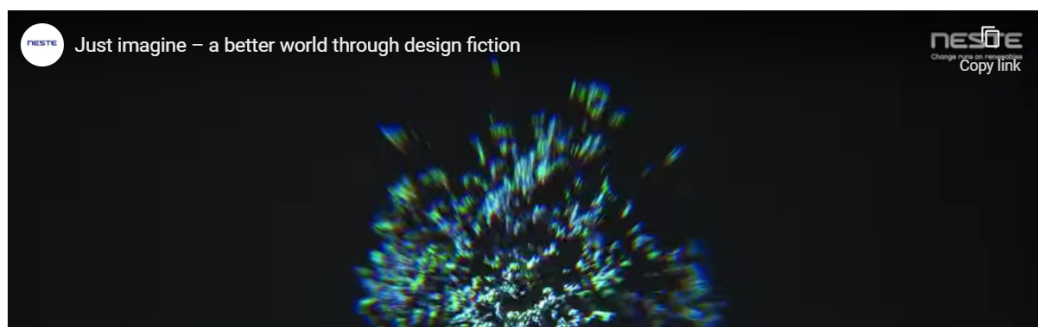
Figure 25. Using design fiction to imagine a preferable future (Neste, 2021).

When it comes to Shell, the company has a well-organized and easy to navigate website with a prevailing corporate red, yellow and black color theme. Functioning for both for desktop and smartphone users, Shell's Home page introduces the latest news and other featured content as well as can redirect the visitors to other main site pages, including strategy, business customers, energy and innovation, sustainability, investors and careers pages.

Figure 26. Shell Global Home page (Shell, 2021).

As mentioned above, Shell uses content marketing as part of their digital marketing strategy and publishes featured content and stories with valuable insights into energy and technology industries on its website. Most of the articles revolve around communicating company's corporate social responsibility and promoting environment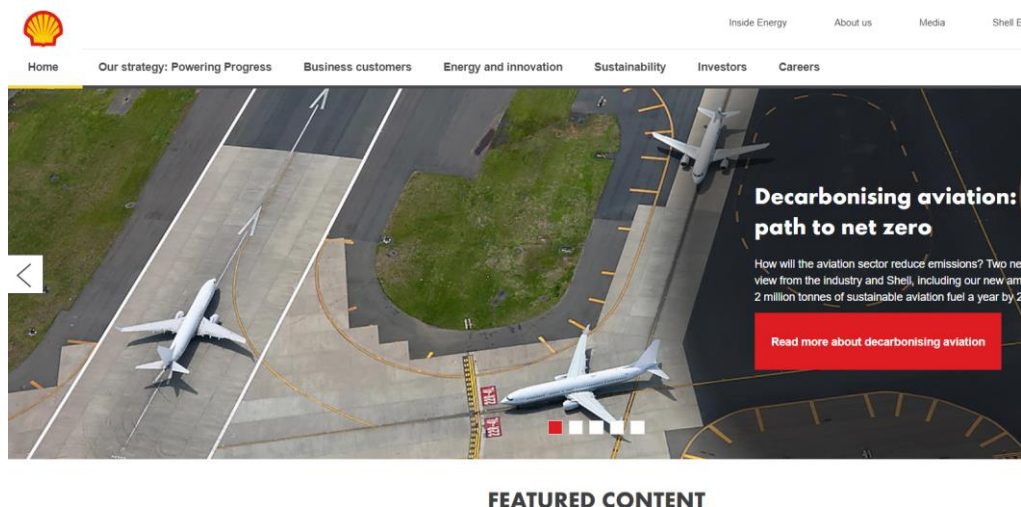al and sustainable solutions and news. Sustainability section of Shell's website includes top stories which talk about what plans and actions does the company undertake on its way towards the transition to zero-emissions. Shell's communication style can be characterized as formal and polite, that is achieved by using comprehensive and longer sentences and striving for presenting the topic as objectively and clearly structured as possible.

Shell creates content in both textual and visual format. For example, in the article which discusses Shell' first solar project in Middle East, marketers have embedded a 2-minute on-site video, so that the readers could obtain a visual idea and learn more details about the project. For those readers who are not able to watch and listen to the video, a useful function of reading the video transcript has been implemented.

The Qabas solar project, launched by Oman Shell, comprises 88,000 solar panels and generates 25 MW, the equivalent of powering 10,000 homes. The aim is to assist in facilitating cost-competitive solar power to companies based in SOHAR Freezone and help them to reduce their carbon emissions.

Take a tour around the Qabas solar project

Read the transcript

Figure 27. Powering industry with help from the sun (Shell, 2021).

One of distinguishable features of Shell's digital content is that the company has launched the Energy audio podcast, where energy experts discuss the questions and issues related to the future of renewable energy, solutions for reducing emissions, the possibility of carbon neutral cities and other environmental topics. The podcast is available on three platforms: iTunes, Spotify and Google podcasts.

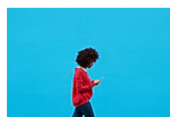**Figure 28.** The energy podcast (Shell, 2021).

With the help of SEMrush, an online analytical and search engine optimization tool, a comparative analysis between Neste's and Shell's webiste in terms of visits, unique visitors, pages/visit, average visit duration and bounce rate has been conducted. Picture 29 shows how Shell's and Neste's webpages scored in the above mentioned KPIs in September 2021. Since Shell is a significantly larger enterprise compared to Neste, its webpage have visited approximately 3 million unique visitors and 5,7 million visits in total has occurred during Septemeber, whereas Neste has received 64,9 thousand visits and 40,2 thousand unique visitors. Unlike visits, which can be explained as total amount of visits a webpage receives, unique visitors is a vital indicator of a website's performance in terms of search engine optimization, which refers to number of users who visited a website, meaning that each person's visit is counted only once (Ryte, 2021).

	Overview	Audience Insights	Traffic Journey	Top Pages	Subfolders	Subdomains	Geo Distribution	Bulk Analysis	

Root domain ⌄		Root domain ⌄					
● shell.com	✕	● neste.com	✕	○ Competitor	○ Competitor	○ Competitor	

Domain/URL	Visits	Unique Visitors	Pages / Visit	Avg. Visit Duration	Bounce Rate
● shell.com	5.7M -1.1%	3M +16.88%	3 -12.55%	08:37 -18.71%	51.42% +2.89%
● neste.com	64.9K -65.49%	40.2K +41%	2.4 +6.08%	04:08 -45.01%	55.97% -8.78%

Figure 29. Semrush analytics (Semrush, 2021).

Furthemore, an analysis of organic search positions of both companies has been conducted. In the upper left corner of the report, there is a "keywords" section which stands for how many keywords with organic positions in Google top 100 results does a website have. Further on, organic search positions table organizes the keywords in a way, that on the top of the list are shown those keywords that generate the most amount of traffic to the website (Semrush, 2021). Figure 30 demonstrates that Shell's website has 143,1 thousand organic keywords for that a domain ranks for in Google search in the U.S. as of 30th of October 2021.

Moreover, the most ranking keywords are "shell", "shell near me" and "royal dutch shell". Keyword "Shell" drives the most organic traffic to the website, around 75,97%.
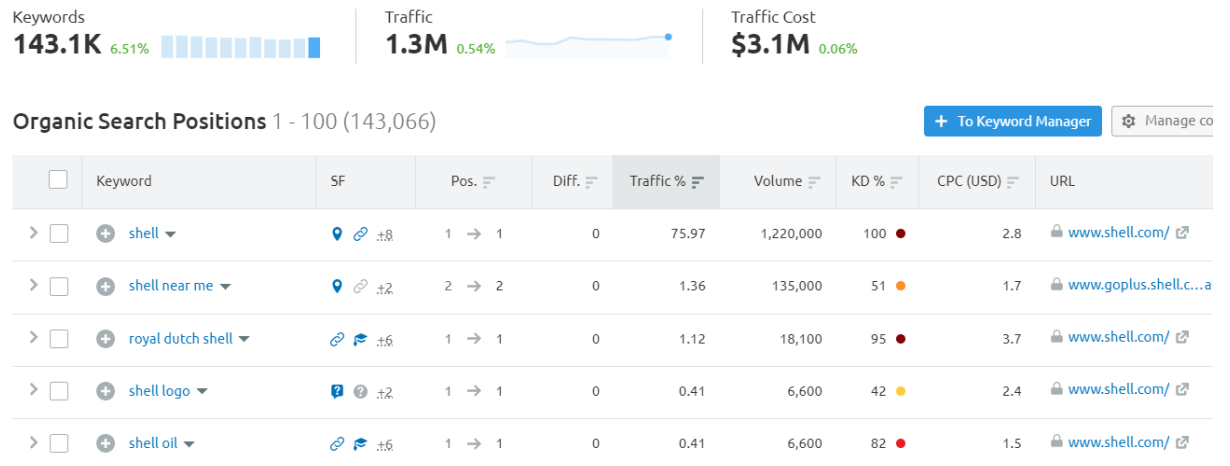
Figure 30. Organic research of shell.com (Semrush, 2021).

As to Neste, figure 31 depicts that its website has approximately 6,8 thousands organic keywords for that a domain is ranked for in the U.S. Google search on 30th of October 2021. The most ranking organic keywords are "neste stock", "neste" and "neste renewable diesel".
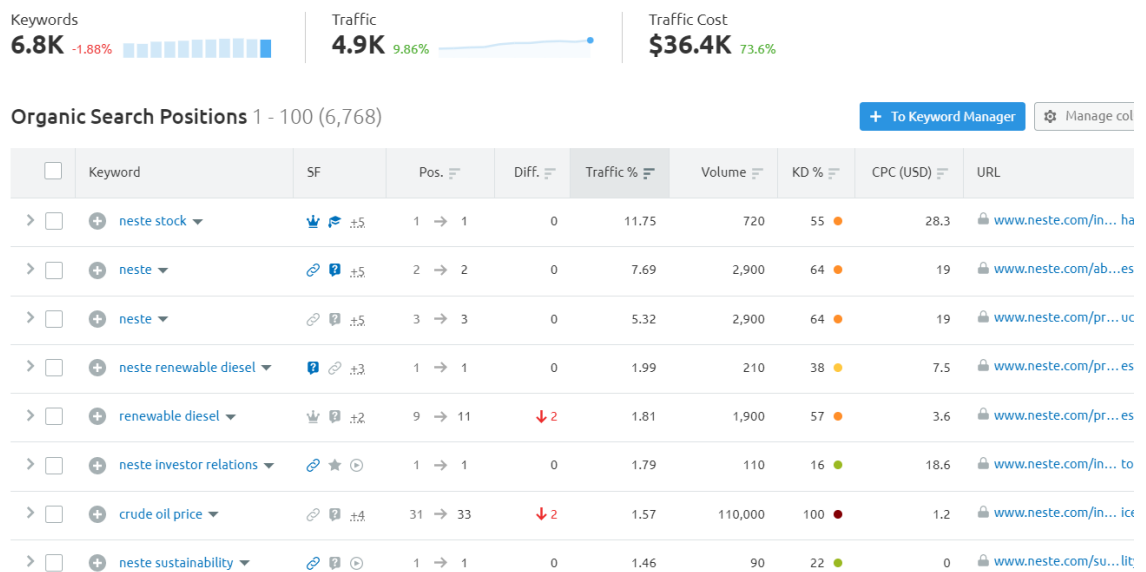
Figure 31. Organic research of neste.com (Semrush, 2021).

Parameters	Evaluation criteria	Neste	Shell
Website features	Design and interface quality	High (easy to navigate, well-structured, mobile-friendly)	High (user-friendly, information is easy to access, mobile-friendly)
	Homepage	Encorages to sign up for the newsletter, introduces products	Introduces the content and encourages to read more
Communication style	Formal/Informal	Formal (gramatically correct, objective, longer sentences used)	Formal (professional, comprehensive sentenses with no slang used)
Content and SEO	Forms of content	Textual, photo, video	Textual, photo, video, audio podcast
	Main topics	Sustainability, transportation, collaborations, aviation	Sustainability, oil and gas, technology, digitalization
	Most ranking organic keywords	Neste stock, neste, neste renewable diesel, neste sustainability	Shell, shell near me, Royal Dutch Shell, shell logo, shell oil

Table 2. Websites comparison.

After the analysis of Neste's and Shell's webpages, a website comparison table has been created in order to summarize the findings and identify the similirities. Firstly, both companies have visually and technically well-designed websites, which are easy to navigate both in a desktop and in a mobile versions. Secondly, companies' home pages encourage visitors to take action: Neste's home page introduces its newsletter and stimulates to sign up for its email marketing, while Shell encourages visitors to read more of its content. Moreover, both companies put noticeable efforts into content marketing, by publishing unique content in textual, video, photo, and in Shell's case also audio formats. The case companies content mainly revolve around topics related to climate change, sustainability, digitalization and aviation. Finally, after conducting a research with SEMrush analytics, it can be concluded that both companies are optimizing their content for organic SEO, as the websites rank for significant amount of organic keywords in Google Search top 100 results, especially Shell, with over 143 thousand organic keywords.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Energy companies make significant investments into researching and developing innovative, sustainable approaches towards supplying the world with cleaner energy solutions. While focusing primarily on product development, energy companies devote a comparably small part of their overall budget to marketing – only around 7% of the energy companies' financial budget is spent on targeting and advertising activities. For decades, energy companies have been using traditional marketing, including product showings, conferences, and trade fairs, as the main tools for promotion. Even though energy companies' core operations have been transitioning towards digitalization, compared to other industries, they were adopting digital marketing in their marketing strategies at a slower pace (Energy Dais, 2021).

Therefore, the aim of the thesis was to conduct a comparative analysis of two case companies digital marketing strategies and based on that analysis to identify whether energy companies are keeping up with the digitalization pace and investing their resources into digital marketing. Other objectives of the study were to examine what digital marketing forms and platforms are primarily used by energy companies as well as to formulate common trends in energy digital marketing relying on the conducted analysis.

The case companies selected for the study were Royal Dutch Shell Plc and Neste Oyj. During the study process, a comparative analysis between these energy companies in terms of their social media and web activities has been conducted. As a result, the objectives of the thesis have been achieved. The findings of the analysis demonstrated that both Shell and Neste are actively involved in digital marketing activities. Both case companies have an active presence across five social media platforms, including Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. The study was limited to analyzing companies' activities only in

Instagram and LinkedIn. As discussed in the theoretical part, LinkedIn is considered as one of the most effective platforms for lead generation, and during the empirical part it was concluded that both case companies are utilizing it as a platform for raising awareness of their brands and expanding the customer base by creating engaging content in photo and video formats.

After analyzing the companies' social media and web tactics, two comparison tables have been developed in order to understand what the similarities in the case companies' digital marketing activities are. As a result, the following common energy digital marketing trends have been identified. Firstly, in the theoretical part it was mentioned that oil and gas companies are using social media marketing as a part of their digital marketing strategies despite the previous prejudices. The empirical part and the analysis of the case companies' social media accounts has confirmed this theory, as both Neste and Shell are actively publishing posts, launching marketing campaigns and interacting with their audience across five social media platforms. Secondly, as a part of social media marketing, Neste and Shell are using influencer marketing to collaborate with popular media influencers and, thus, enhance brand image and awareness. That confirms the theory discussed in the theoretical part concerning the fact that marketers have started actively allocating marketing resources and budget to influencer marketing campaigns. Thirdly, content marketing is one of the digital marketing trends that both companies adopt. On their websites, Neste and Shell frequently post stories and articles related to energy sector updates, climate change, transition to zero-emissions etc. As a part of their content marketing strategies, companies aim at optimizing their website's content for SEO in order to rank higher in Google Search, therefore, be more visible and generate more traffic to the websites.

One of the most important aspects that both companies are aiming to promote in their content pieces is sustainability. As discussed in the theoretical part, brands that are seen in a society's eyes as environmentally caring and socially responsible have a more positive brand image and loyal, appreciative customer base.

Therefore, Neste and Shell are emphasizing their focus on sustainability in their articles and social media posts. Finally, video marketing is another digital trend adopted by Neste and Shell. Both case companies create video content published in their social media accounts and websites talking about their projects, steps they implement towards no emissions and developing cleaner, sustainable ways to supply the world with energy. As discussed in the theoretical part of the research, video marketing is a low-cost digital marketing trend used by companies to engage with the audience, educate them and raise awareness of the brand.

Summarizing everything mentioned above, it can be concluded that the study's objectives have been reached. The analysis of the case companies' social media and websites provided with a clear understanding that apart from traditional marketing, nowadays companies are actively engaged in digital marketing. Both Neste and Shell, implement social media marketing across five social media platforms. Moreover, they have adopted different digital marketing trends in their strategies, such as video marketing, content marketing and SEO, sustainable and influencer marketing.

6.1. Reliability and validity

In scientific research, reliability refers to the ability and the extent to which a researcher is able to obtain consistent, repeatable results time after time. Concerning validity, it is defined as a degree of accuracy to which a hypothesis and intended instruments are measured (Heale, Twycross, 2015, 66).

For the empirical part of the thesis, secondary data was collected in order to analyze the digital marketing activities of two case companies. Secondary data was obtained from the reliable sources, including official global social media accounts of Neste and Shell as well as their official corporate website and articles published on companies' blogs. When analyzing the results, the author tried to be objective and make conclusions based on collected data and not on personal biases and

beliefs. Therefore, the research findings could be considered as reliable and valid. In order to achieve more reliable results, there could have been conducted interviews with a sample group to gather primary data and obtain a broader perspective of the study questions.

6.2. Ideas for further research

Since this study was limited to comparing only two case companies, one of the suggestions for the future research would be to include other major companies operating in the energy sector. Analyzing other companies' digital marketing strategies will provide a broader perspective and an opportunity to identify more common patterns in their strategies as well as it will either strengthen or contradict the conclusions made based on the analysis of the two case companies.

Furthermore, in order to get a deeper understanding of how energy companies are developing their digital marketing strategies, one idea would be to conduct semi-structured interviews with marketing professionals employed by the case companies. By doing that, it could be possible to analyze the reasons behind the shift from traditional to digital marketing, what external and internal factors are affecting their digital marketing activities and what is their professional opinion on current trends in the energy sector digital marketing.

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