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# Omnichannel Marketing in a Pharmaceutical Company – How to Optimally Reach the Customers in the COVID-19 Era?

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## **Abstract**

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With the COVID-19 pandemic, the pharmaceutical companies have been forced to shift their focus on digital marketing and targeting their customers in a more personalized manner. Due to the strict regulations of the pharmaceutical industry and the complexity created by these regulations, the digital marketing approach has not been applied to its fullest extent earlier. Finding and using optimal and appropriate medium in delivering promotions and right information to the customers has become a challenge for the pharmaceutical companies along with digitalization and virtual interactions.

The marketing activities concentrating to digitally focused approach has caused uncertainty on message resonance due to nuances getting lost in virtual engagements compared to face-to-face interactions. The physicians are to some extent dissatisfied towards pharmaceutical companies digital interactions, because the companies mainly offer promotional information about their products instead of education related to clinical practice desired by the physicians.

The topic of this Master's thesis is related to a real-life business need with a purpose to answer to the following research question: "What kind of an omnichannel solution model could work for a pharmaceutical company?". The research question got answered by conducting a research which aim was to build an omnichannel model for customer interactions for a pharmaceutical marketing company, to test the model and reflect it back to existing theory as well as propose potential next steps to improve the model for the future use.

As the omnichannel marketing aims to deliver consistent, integrated and personalized experience for the customer regardless of the used channel or device the constructive approach used in this thesis focused on providing and testing a solution for enhancing the customer engagement with relevant content offering by utilizing the channel offering used by the company. The constructed model fulfilled the set expectations and was proven to be functional and useful for the company. Due to confidentiality reasons the constructed model along with the functionality findings is classified and cannot be accessed by anyone outside the company.

As the society is currently dismantling the restrictions set during the COVID-19 pandemic, the model needs to be adjusted to fit the hybrid collaboration with the company and its customers to be able to fully fit for the future interactions and business needs.

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### **List of Key Definitions**

construction – a developed model which aims to solve a specific problem

general practitioner – a physician who works at a healthcare center

multichannel marketing – marketing approach where the company itself is at the center of the strategy using several different channels to communicate the same message to its customers

omnichannel marketing – marketing approach where the customer is at the center of the strategy and decides which channels he/she wants to interact with

operating environment – the conditions on the market which enable or hinder company's business interactions with its customers

pharmaceutical company – a company which develops, manufactures and markets medicines

physician – a professional in medicine who has rights to prescribe medicines

sales call – a meeting between a physician and a pharmaceutical representative where the intention is to increase physician's knowledge of the represented medicines and increase the usage of those in eligible patient population

## 1 Introduction

COVID-19 pandemic has changed the ways of working in business throughout the globe. Previously, it was common to travel for face-to-face business meetings and negotiations as well as to sales calls. The pandemic literally halted the “normal” ways of working and forced companies to move to digital interactions with their customers. When COVID-19 pandemic became reality and the Finnish government recommended remote working, digitalization and virtual interactions with customers became a must also in the pharmaceutical industry.

### 1.1 Readiness for Virtual Interactions

Some years ago, there was a discussion ongoing, whether the Finnish healthcare professionals would be willing to have virtual meetings with the pharmaceutical sales representatives. At that time some pharmaceutical companies tried virtual product presentation meetings with healthcare professionals, but the outcome of those meetings was, that face-to-face meetings were preferred by the physicians. As the access for face-to-face meetings between the pharmaceutical representatives and the physicians was also good, neither did the pharmaceutical representatives see the value of trying to implement this new interaction possibility into reality. Clearly, the business environment on interactions between pharmaceutical companies and healthcare professionals was not ready for virtual meetings at that time.

When COVID-19 halted the usual face-to-face interactions, the problem was, that even though many of the pharmaceutical companies had had discussions and ongoing planning related to omnichannel and virtual marketing, the plans, strategies and structures were not finalized. This was due to not having had the burning need to act virtually with the healthcare professionals earlier. The other problem was, that the healthcare professionals did not have proper hardware at their disposal to be able to have interactive virtual discussions – for example, many healthcare centers did not have microphones and cameras, which are crucial when trying to have fruitful discussions in a virtual space.

## 1.2 Background of the Thesis

There are more than 100 pharmaceutical companies in Finland doing interactions with healthcare professionals (Fimea 2021). The competitive environment is changing constantly due to legislation, new studies, patent expiries, access decisions in the healthcare units as well as normal lifecycle rotation among healthcare professionals where older physicians move to pension and lots of younger physicians are being educated. In this highly competitive branch of industry, especially now during the COVID-19 times, pharmaceutical companies have been forced to re-think their approaches and interaction styles with the healthcare professionals to be able to provide added value to their customers and secure ongoing collaboration.

According to Ojasalo, Moilanen & Ritalahti (2015, 12-13) companies need continuous work to be able to develop their profitability and increase growth, but also to solve potential problems occurring in the surrounding environment. This does not only mean adapting to change, instead the most successful companies are the ones which are able to act as enablers for development.

The author of this thesis has worked in the global pharmaceutical business for over sixteen years and during that time the pool of healthcare professionals has changed to younger persons with different ways of searching for information whereas some of the older doctors have moved to pension. This transformation has created a change also in the customer interactions and simultaneously the access to the customers has become more challenging.

The topic of this Master's thesis comes from a real-life business need as the client company has not had solid omnichannel strategy in use, nor the channel usage in its customer interactions has not been thoroughly utilized to reach its maximum potential and outcome.

## 1.3 Objective of the Thesis

The aim of this thesis is to build an omnichannel marketing model for a pharmaceutical company in Finland to support the company's strategy. The purpose is to conduct a research which aim is to test the model and reflect it back to existing theory. Proposing potential suggestions to improve the model is also one focus area of this thesis. The omnichannel model is directed to general practitioners, referred as physicians in this thesis.

General practitioner is a doctor who has a holistic approach to individuals, their families and the surrounding community. The work of a general practitioner is not determined by specific diseases or conditions, instead he/she has broad range of patients and hence the knowledge level of the physician needs to be extensive. General practitioner is a person who coordinates the patient's path in the network of services usually with long-lasting treatment relationship with the patients. This speciality is the biggest out of the 50 different specialities in medicine. (Hoidon jatkuvuus n.d.). Currently there are around 3 800 physicians working in healthcare centers in Finland (Suomen yleislääkärit GPF ry 2020).

#### 1.4 Research Problem and Research Questions

As stated earlier, there is an identified gap in the omnichannel marketing strategy of the client company. Based on the operational environment of the pharmaceutical industry within the COVID-19 era and the situation within the client company, the research question of this thesis is defined to be:

What kind of an omnichannel solution model could work for a pharmaceutical company?

The purpose of this question is to find out the expectations and needs of the physicians and link those with the available interaction types of the company to be able to create and test the omnichannel model as a strategical approach on customer interactions.

The sub-questions in this thesis are:

- a) What are the available interaction channels which the company has in use?
- b) How can those channels be utilized in the omnichannel marketing strategy?
- c) Are there some interactions channels which are missed and should be implemented into the omnichannel strategy?

#### 1.5 Research Strategy

This thesis is an interventionist, more specifically constructive, research utilizing qualitative research approach. Constructive research as a strategy aims for a change with its objective being in



seeking for a solution for an existing problem and removing the problem. (Kananen 2015, 76; Kananen 2017, 14). The solution provided in this thesis is an omnichannel model for the company.

The researcher is an active participant in the constructive research process working closely together with other participants who represent the practical aspect of the subject matter. Successful testing and piloting of the construction demands commitment of the personnel in the studied organization. (Kananen 2017, 37).

In this thesis, the qualitative approach was conducted by utilizing methodological triangulation where observations and interviews served as data collection methods. These methods were defined to be the best in serving the purpose of the research. The available channel offering for customer interactions was mapped by the author through observations and the results were verified by a marketing specialist. The physicians' expectations and needs were collected through interviews.

As the amount of data in this research was limited, the data analysis process was conducted through content analysis by reading and familiarizing oneself with the data content which according to Kananen (2015, 83, 89, 129, 163, 177) can be sufficient in finding the solution for the research question by finding structures, processes or patterns from the data. The findings of the data analysis were compared to the theoretical framework by utilizing abductive reasoning which provided strengthened reasoning and conclusions for the author for the model construction.

## 1.6 Structure of the Thesis

The structure of this thesis is built in a way, that the reader will be provided with some information of the pharmaceutical business and its operational environment including the specific restrictions set by different stakeholders. This information is then followed by explaining the definitions and differences between omnichannel and multichannel marketing moving into the current situation and expectations of the interactions between the pharmaceutical companies and the physicians. Different topics are explained with a focus on helping the reader in getting thorough understanding of the concept prior to entering on describing the research strategy and the outcome of the research. The empirical part of the thesis and the omnichannel model itself are defined as classified as those include company sensitive strategical choices which should not be shared to anyone outside the company.

## 2 Pharmaceutical Industry

Pharmaceutical industry is a significantly growing field of industry which works with research and development, production, distribution and marketing of medications (Mikulic 2020). According to Ledley, Shonka McCoy, Vaughan & Galkina Cleary (2020) the profitability of large pharmaceutical companies between the years 2000 to 2018 was significantly higher compared to large public companies in other fields of industry. The pharmaceutical industry is highly concentrated with 25 biggest companies accounting for 73 percent of the total sales in 2015 (Ledley et al. 2020) and the US and Europe being the biggest pharmaceutical markets in the world (Pistilli 2020, The Pharmaceutical Industry in Figures 2020). (Figure 1).

### BREAKDOWN OF THE WORLD PHARMACEUTICAL MARKET – 2019 SALES

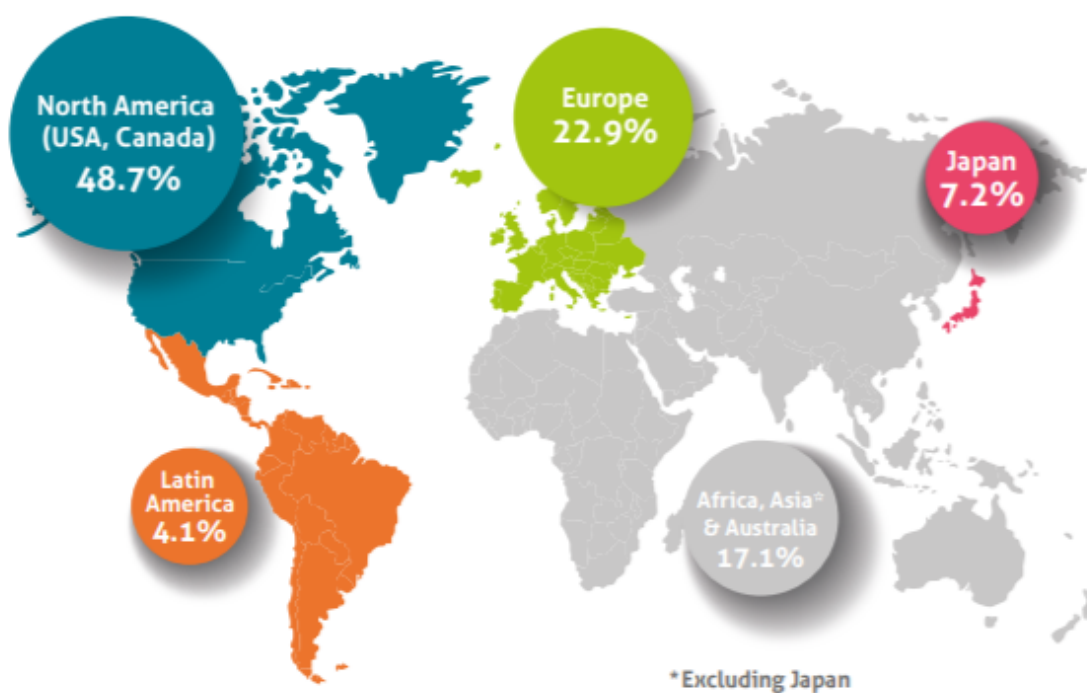


Figure 1. Breakdown of the global pharmaceutical market. (The Pharmaceutical Industry in Figures 2020).

The aim of the pharmaceutical industry is to help healthcare professionals in treating diseases, enhancing the quality of life of the patients while simultaneously trying to reduce the incidence of diseases. This is done through utilizing technological knowledge together with innovative research to meet the demands of ageing populations in the global market. The expected annual

growth rate of the global market for the pharmaceuticals was 4,9% to \$1,3 trillion by 2020. (Nead n.d.).

COVID-19 pandemic has caused pharmaceutical companies to set their focus and interest in securing the research & development, digital and cyber transformation as well as supply chain efforts. Great examples of the value of partnership in these challenging times have been the development and approval processes of COVID-19 vaccines. In these processes the regulatory authorities and biopharmaceutical companies have worked relentlessly together to secure the vaccine development and review processes. Hopefully, the learnings from these processes will remain and lead to further enhancement of the processes and business models. (Ford, Blair, Naaz & Overman 2020).

Pharmaceutical industry works in close collaboration with the healthcare professionals to improve the patient outcomes and lives of the patients. This collaboration is highly regulated and based on sharing knowledge to each other. The knowledge sharing can consist of providing insights related to unmet medical need, highlighting new therapeutic possibilities as well as sharing data and experiences of treatment usage in clinics in everyday setting. The outcome of pharmaceutical industry and healthcare professionals working together in close collaboration has led to significant benefits. A great example of these benefits is the fact, that life expectancy in Europe has increased by nearly a decade within the past half-century. (Understanding the working relationship between the pharmaceutical industry and healthcare professionals n.d.).

Despite their good profitability and global growth, pharmaceutical companies struggle with several challenges, like increased competition from generic companies and patent expires. Both of these elements can have an impact on the success of the industry through causing slower sales growth rates. Currently, one of the biggest challenges for pharmaceutical companies is finding and using optimal and appropriate medium in delivering promotions and right information to its customers i.e. physicians. (Nead n.d.).

### 3 Operating Environment of the Pharmaceutical Business

Pharmaceutical business is highly regulated. According to the European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations (EFPIA) the interactions between the pharmaceutical industry and healthcare professionals are governed by EU Directive 2001/83/EC on the Community Code relating to medicinal products for human use, the EFPIA Code, as well as EFPIA's Member Associations' own national ethical codes and other local policies, companies' internal standard operational procedures and different laws. (Relationships & code – Healthcare professionals (HCPs) 2021).

Ojasalo et al. (2015, 29) state, that it is highly important to understand the field of industry and its specifications, to be able to develop solutions which are not only theoretical models, but reflect the reality of the company and its daily operations. Therefore, the following pages of this thesis describe briefly the most important documents which set the ground rules to pharmaceutical marketing in Finland. The purpose of all the rules mentioned is to develop healthcare, emerge medical innovations and ensure drug safety in cooperation between the pharmaceutical industry and healthcare professionals while simultaneously building up the overall trust for healthcare (Pharma Industry Finland Code of Ethics 2019).

#### 3.1 Finnish Medicine Act

The Finnish Medicine Act (L 395/1987) states, that pharmaceutical companies cannot market medicines which require prescription directly to consumers. For this reason, only prescription free medicines are advertised in television and magazines. The medications which require prescription, can only be marketed to healthcare professionals who have rights to prescribe or dispense medicines. (L 395/1987). Usually doctors are the prescribers of medications for the patients and therefore majority of the marketing interactions organized by the pharmaceutical industry are directed to them and not to the whole treatment team (Arsene 2019).

The marketing of medicines must be focusing on the correct and rational usage of medicines and should be based on the latest summary of product characteristics evaluated and recommended by the European Medicines Agency and marketing authorisation approved by the European Commission (L 395/1987; Authorisation of medicines 2020). The marketing efforts directed to those healthcare professionals who have rights to prescribe or dispense medicines must be handled

either via pre-booked medical sales representative visits, through magazines and publications directed to them or in electronic channels which are protected in a way, that general public cannot have access to those. All the marketing efforts have to include relevant information of the medication and its use. (L 395/1987).

The Finnish Medicine Act gives disciplinary rights to the Finnish Medicines Agency (FIMEA). FIMEA can forbid any company to continue or renew their marketing efforts in case of a breach of the medicine act. Ultimately the agency can even apply for a fine for the company which has committed the breach and continued its actions despite the given notice. (L 395/1987).

### 3.2 EFPIA (European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations) Code

European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations (EFPIA) is the representative of the biopharmaceutical field of industry which operates in Europe. It consists of 36 national associations, 39 pharmaceutical companies and a number of small and medium-sized enterprises. It's mission is to establish an environment which helps its members in providing new medicines for people in Europe while simultaneously contributing to the European economy. (About us – Who we are 2021).

The collaboration between pharmaceutical industry and healthcare professionals is based on information exchange which aims to benefit patients through innovative medicines. The activities within this collaboration can vary from attending on clinical researches to sharing experiences of clinical practice and thinking on the best possible positioning of new medicines in patient pathways. The pharmaceutical companies can support healthcare professionals in attending congresses and educational meetings whereas healthcare professionals provide their expertise and insights through consultancy activities, such as lecturing in educational meetings. Since 2016 EFPIA has acted with great transparency and published on a yearly basis the payments made to healthcare professionals. (Relationships & code – Healthcare professionals (HCPs) 2021).

EFPIA aims to encourage fair competition between pharmaceutical companies and therefore the focus of the EFPIA Code is not to hinder or limit the promotional efforts and interactions among the companies. Instead, the EFPIA Code focuses on ensuring truthful, conflict of interest free and compliant collaboration where the general public can trust, that the decisions related to their medications have been made purely based on the scientific merits of the product and according to the patients' needs. (EFPIA Code of Practice 2019).

### 3.3 Pharma Industry Finland's Code of Ethics

Pharma Industry Finland's Code of Ethics are jointly created, constantly renewed ways of working procedures which the member companies of the association have mutually created. The Code of Ethics is followed by the member companies and is stricter than the requirements stated in the Finnish Medicine Act. There are two inspection boards and an independent supervisory commission for the marketing of medicinal products who monitor and guide the optimal and compliant following of the Code of Ethics. (Pharma Industry Finland Code of Ethics 2019).

The Code of Ethics set in-depth ground rules related to marketing of medications to consumers and healthcare professionals. The definition of marketing in the Code of Ethics is broad; it consist of all the efforts which purpose is to increase the amount of prescriptions, usage and buying of medications. The commercial efforts must not be hidden and all the actions performed by the pharmaceutical companies must be clearly identifiable as marketing. (Pharma Industry Finland Code of Ethics 2019).

In the current digital era, patients are more and more interested in taking part on their own health and disease management discussions and even in decision making. Due to these reasons, the healthcare professionals need to have detailed and appropriate medical information received from the pharmaceutical companies which they can then share to the patients in order to secure the optimal and desired outcome of the chosen treatment. The Code of Ethics document is regularly renewed to secure that the requirements and expectations of the surrounding society are taken into consideration. (Pharma Industry Finland Code of Ethics 2019).

The Code of Ethics applies to all the information shared via any communication channel; this means, that both personal discussions as well as any communication via any electronic channel, including social media, are in the scope of the code. The pharmaceutical companies are responsible in securing, that all the interactions performed by any third party vendor also follow the Code of Ethics principles. (Pharma Industry Finland Code of Ethics 2019).

Pharmaceutical marketing differs from regular marketing significantly. All the pharmaceutical marketing materials and product claims must be based on the latest approved summary of product characteristics as well as on published clinical trials. Marketing efforts may not refer to any clinical study in a way which might give a false impression of the clinical outcome of the study. Therefore, any claims stated cannot include words like "safe" since all medications have some adverse events or "best" unless all the competitive brands have been studied in the same study

and one of the brands has been clearly identified to be better than the others. Pharmaceutical marketing should not contain any visual or verbal claims, presentations or other elements which may be misleading. Also, using active and directive recommendations from celebrities or scientists is not allowed in pharmaceutical marketing. (Pharma Industry Finland Code of Ethics 2019).

Any pharmaceutical advertising or other marketing efforts must not be directed to persons who have stated that they do not want to have it. If any pharmaceutical company, which is a member of the Pharma Industry Finland, fails to adhere the Code of Ethics principles, the consequences of the breach can vary from corrective measurements to sanction payments and even to contractual penalty which can be up to maximum of 300 000 euros. Even though the restrictions for pharmaceutical marketing are tight, the purpose of the Code of Ethics is not to prevent medical and scientific information exchange. (Pharma Industry Finland Code of Ethics 2019).

#### 3.4 Companies Own Internal Standard Operating Procedures

Usually companies have their own internal standard operating procedures which describe in detail the recurring operations. Main purpose of a standard operating procedure, or SOP, is to provide and secure, that different consistent actions are carried out correctly and in the same manner to secure high-quality work. Usually, SOPs are text documents containing detailed step-by-step instructions, but can also include images or videos to visualize the matter. (Gartenstein 2019). Based on the experience of the author, the SOPs in the pharmaceutical companies vary and some companies might have considerably stricter internal interpretations of the regulations compared to others. This may hinder the success of implementing new interaction channels and ideas into daily practices.

#### 3.5 Playfield of the Pharmaceutical Marketing

The playfield of the pharmaceutical business has many restrictions and guidance which aim to limit potential pitfalls and secure the trustworthiness of the business. The key points of the regulations mentioned earlier have been gathered in one table on figure 2. On the other hand it is very good, that the rules of engagement are clear, but at the same time, these restrictions narrow down the possibilities of utilizing wild ideas and social media marketing to its fullest extent.

		 The Finnish Medicine Act			 Standard Operating Procedures
K E Y  P O I N T S	1	Marketing is allowed only for prescribers (physicians) or dispensers (pharmacists)	Transparency through yearly published reports of the payments made to healthcare professionals	Mutually created rules for engagement with healthcare professionals, stricter than the Finnish Medicine Act	Describe the recurring operations in detail
	2	Marketing must be based on the latest summary of product characteristics	Focuses on ensuring truthful, conflict of interest free and compliant collaboration	Applies to all communication channels	Secure that consistent actions are carried out correctly and in the same manner to secure high-quality work
	3	The general public should not have access to marketing materials or resources	Aims to encourage fair competition between pharmaceutical companies	Breach of the code can lead to sanction payments or contractual penalty	Step-by-step instructions, can include images or videos

Figure 2. The key points of the regulations and guidance for the pharmaceutical business. (Illustration made by the author).



## 4 Omnichannel Marketing

In the modern digital era, customers are channel-independent and increasingly mobile. Omnichannel marketing consists of integrated experience of the customer regardless of online or offline touchpoints. This means, that whichever channel the customer chooses to interact with, they all should offer seamless and integrated experience. Omnichannel marketing does not mean having lots of different channels, instead the main idea of omnichannel is to secure consistent experience along the customer's journey where mobile devices serve as a connecting bridge between the channels. Basically, omnichannel marketing means an approach where focus is to shift consumer behaviour from traditional multichannel shopping to a shopping experience which makes no distinctions between physical and digital interaction channels and is accessible "anytime, anywhere". (Kotler, Kartajaya & Setiawan 2016, 86, 144; Murray 2016, 65, 67).

At its best, the omnichannel process towards a customer is seamless, device agnostic experience, where different platforms are in sync with each other and there is little or no variation in the user experience. A great example of this is Spotify, which has web, mobile and desktop applications with similar outlook, usability and continuous sync when the customer has them open at the same time. (Fontanella 2021).

### 4.1 Challenges and Problems of Omnichannel Marketing

According to an analysis conducted by Brightpearl and Multichannel Merchant (n.d.) almost 90 percent of the retail companies which responded to their survey have an omnichannel strategy in place or have plans to invest in it. Almost the same amount of respondent see omnichannel as critical or very important element for the company. Despite having a strategy in place, many of the respondents see, that mastering the omnichannel approach and having the right technology in place has not been successful. (Figure 3).

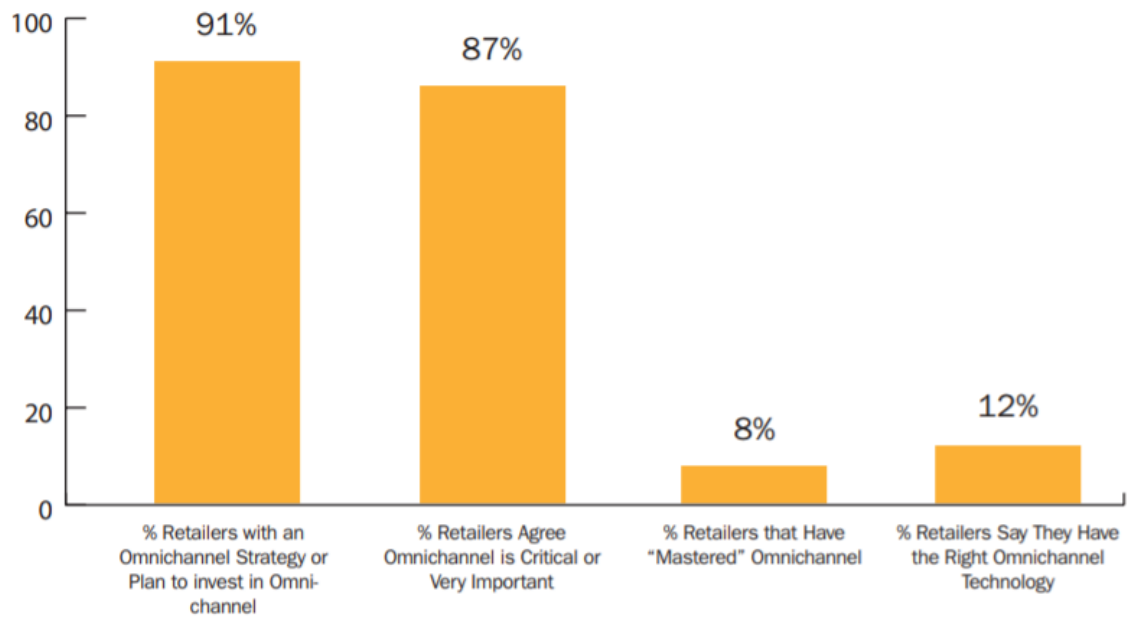


Figure 3. The importance of omnichannel compared to the execution of it according to an analysis conducted by Brightpearl and Multichannel Merchant (The State of Omnichannel Retail: Survey of Leading Retailers n.d.)

One of the biggest problems in creating a consistent and seamless customer experience through omnichannel marketing is, that the different touchpoints of the customer journey are handled by people who have different budgets and goals as well as expectations within the organization. Especially in big organizations virtual and digital customer touchpoints might be managed differently versus the physical ones and these silos can lead to conflict of channels and lack of successful integration of the channels. (Kotler et al. 2016, 86; The State of Omnichannel Retail: Survey of Leading Retailers n.d.).

If different channels within the customer journey are segregated with their own goals and strategies, meaning that the journey is not consistent, the missed opportunity can be huge and might lead to unfinalized purchase. Ideally, the customer should be able to finalize the purchase at any touchpoint during his/her journey. (Kotler et al. 2016, 139-140).

The other problem identified in suboptimal omnichannel marketing is the fact, that there seems to be lack of understanding of the definitions and meaning of omnichannel which leads to delay in implementing the approach. The possibility to solve these gaps is to invest time in education and agreement on basic definitions. (The State of Omnichannel Retail: Survey of Leading Retailers n.d.).

## 4.2 Examples of Customer Touchpoints

The customer path consists of multiple possible touchpoints and channels as well as various combinations of those. In order to be successful in omnichannel marketing, companies need to identify the most popular combinations used and focus on those which matter the most. A touchpoint can include and involve one or multiple channels and similarly a channel might serve multiple touchpoints. A channel can be any offline or online approach used by the customer while interacting with the brand. Channels can be divided into two categories, which are communication and sales channels. Communication channels serve as means of information and content sharing, whereas transactions can be made through the sales channels. These channels should be closely linked with each other to secure the optimal experience throughout the entire customer journey. (Kotler et al. 2016, 145, 147-148).

The approach in mapping the customer touchpoints can be managed through the five A's method, which is a method describing the customer interactions in each stage of his/her journey. The A's are: aware, appeal, ask, act & advocate. (Kotler et al. 2016, 145-146).

In *aware* stage, the customer is learning about the product. In this stage, the channels can be for example different kind of printed or digital advertisements. The next stage, *appeal*, attracts the customer to seek for more information of the product. In this stage the initial learning from aware stage turns into a call-to-action. The used channels in this stage can be for example QR codes on printed advertisements, clicking banner advertisements or contacting contact center. In the *ask* stage, the customer desires to know more about the product and its possibilities. The channels used at this point can be for example contacting contact center or salespeople or utilizing digital content sites. When entering into the *act* stage, the customer makes the purchase, uses the product and services it. The channels used in this stage can vary from digital platforms to meeting salespeople. In the final stage, as an *advocate*, the customer recommends the product to others through social media channels or via word-of-mouth. (Kotler et al. 2016, 145-147). (Figure 4).

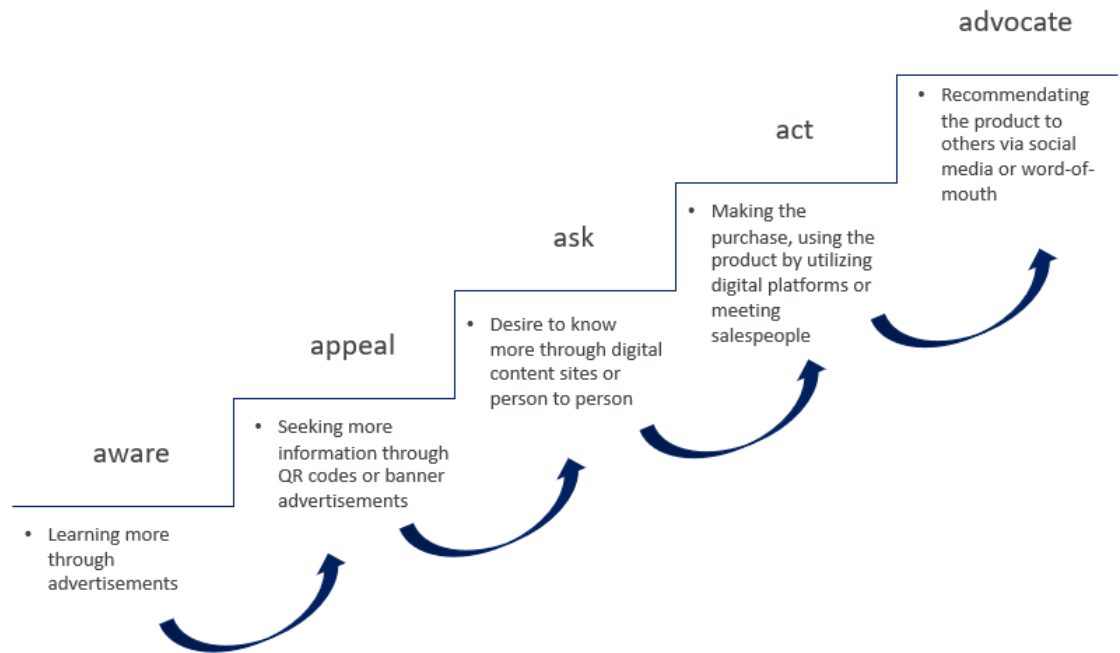


Figure 4. The five A's. (Illustration made by the author based on Kotler et al. 2016, 145-146).

To be able to successfully deliver the desired omnichannel experience for the customer, the organizational structure of the company must fit into the strategy. This means, that all the internal teams which are responsible for the different channels as well as the marketing team should be merged with their goals and budgets or the alignment between different teams should be secured in some other way to ensure that everyone shares the same goal. Sharing the same omnichannel goal within the company will ensure and drive seamless cross-functional work in finding out the best ways to deliver consistent experience for the customer. This approach helps the company in getting the most sales out from its omnichannel strategy. (Kotler et al. 2016, 149).

### 4.3 Customer Centricity

To succeed in the implementation of the omnichannel marketing approach, companies need to adopt customer centric organization culture, where the focus of the company should be on the needs of its customers instead of company's own products or sales results. The customer centric organization culture can be built through identifying the customer's emotional needs, understanding the reasons behind the needs as well as responding to the needs with appropriate and effective way. The customer centric organization culture should be implemented and adopted

throughout the whole organization, not only certain functions and every person within the company should have a focus on understanding and thinking about the customers and their needs. (Yohn 2018; Pemberton 2018; Houghton 2019).

The amount of overwhelming customer data with problems in segmenting and profiling the customers together with potential lack of well-functioning processes and operational capabilities might cause challenges to the companies in creating the optimal customer centricity. If the company is not successful in adopting the customer centricity, the personalized communications and experiences do not happen optimally and can lead to less satisfied customers with lower customer loyalty. (Yohn 2018; Houghton 2019).

#### 4.4 Benefits and Success Factors in Omnichannel Marketing

In order to be successful in omnichannel marketing, company needs to focus on some crucial elements related to its customers. First, the company needs to know its customer segments. Necessarily older customers do not actively demand electronic channels, nor use the available digital solutions. Secondly, the company needs to know its competitors and identify, whether there are some of them that are capable of reaching and serving key customer segments better through digital channels. Third element is to consider, how online presence can improve and increase the customer experience. Fourth focus area for the company is to consider the potential effect of omnichannel to its product selection and decide whether some products should be left aside from omnichannel marketing or should all, otherwise non-marketed products be visible in online channels. Fifth consideration for the company is to think whether digital channels can drive for customer engagement increase. (Murray 2016, 70-72).

At best, successful omnichannel marketing can increase company's sales and profitability as well as the number of served customers. Simultaneously, the company can learn more about its customers by collecting data related to their behaviour and attitudes. This data management can be conducted through following the customer navigation through the site, how much time is consumed in different elements on the site and what choices they make. The gathered data can be used to develop the customer service and digital environment even further to be able to increase the customers value and, ultimately, their willingness to talk positively about the company, its service offering and products. (Murray 2016, 73-75).

#### 4.5 Differences Between Omnichannel and Multichannel

As mentioned earlier, omnichannel marketing aims to deliver consistent, integrated and highly personalized experience for the customer regardless of the used channel or device. In principle, omnichannel marketing is driven by the customer, not the channel. The goal of the omnichannel marketing is to make the customer experience as smooth as possible no matter where or how the customer interaction happens. The messages delivered to customers through omnichannel marketing should be device agnostic and customized based on browsing behaviour. (Pruett 2017). In short, omnichannel marketing is an approach where company promotes its services and products by using unified messages and visuals across different channels, platforms and devices ensuring, that the customers are reached with relevant brand offering wherever they are (Fontanella 2021).



Figure 5. Example of an omnichannel approach (Mockus 2020).

Figure 5 illustrates the approach of omnichannel marketing where the customer is in the middle of the strategy and the different channels which the customer decides to use have unified messages to secure the best possible customer experience. The channels are connected to each other with similar style creating consistency and trust. Omnichannel marketing in-builds customers' ability to connect with a brand via any of the channels building convenience and providing potential time and money savings for the customers. (Mockus 2020).

Multichannel marketing utilizes different channels which are independent and separate from each other with their own strategies and goals. Since the channels are not integrated, the experience of the customer can be confusing and impersonal. (Pruett 2017).

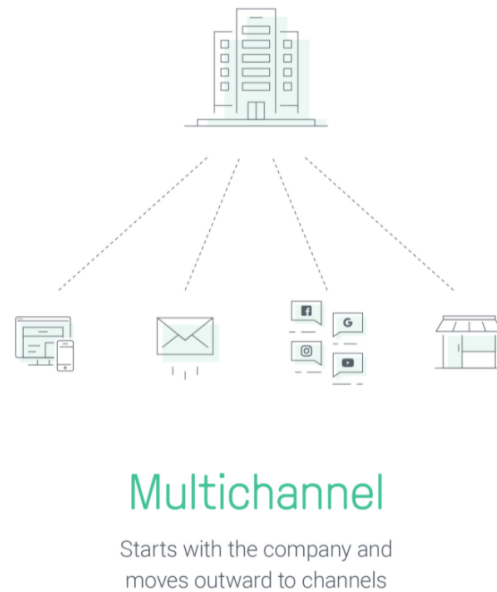


Figure 6. Example of a multichannel approach (Mockus 2020).

Figure 6 illustrates the idea of multichannel marketing approach where the company itself is at the center of the strategy using several different channels to communicate the same message to its customers. This methodology lacks the possibility for personalized communication since the channels work separately. The lack of integration with separate channels forces customers to go to specific channels to find the desired information causing frustration. (Mockus 2020).

#### 4.6 Omnichannel in Pharmaceutical Marketing

With the COVID-19 pandemic, the pharmaceutical companies have been forced to shift their focus on digital marketing and targeting their customers in a more personalized manner. Due to the strict regulations of the pharmaceutical industry and the complexity created by the regulations, the digital marketing approach was not applied to its full extent earlier. (Apprendi 2020; MediaRadar 2020).

Digital marketing plays an important role in effective omnichannel approach. The customers of the pharmaceutical companies, physicians, are continuously facing time pressure. Therefore,

every opportunity to interact with the physicians, either online or offline, needs to be relevant, value-adding and correctly timed providing insights which help the physicians in treating their patients as well as ensuring the brand standing out versus the competitors. (Apprendi 2020).

The optimal and coordinated omnichannel approach with the right and meaningful data leads to high conversion rates and cost effectiveness. At best, the omnichannel approach is data-driven, where brand messages are customer-centric, dynamic and based on physician's browsing behaviour. Providing relevant brand-related information to the physicians can ensure patients getting on the right treatment faster. (Apprendi 2020).

The similar omnichannel experience, as mentioned earlier in the Spotify example with continuous sync between platforms and devices, is difficult to manage and cannot happen in a same way in the pharmaceutical business due to brand-related colours, fonts, visuals and messages being perceived as promotional elements which should only be directed to persons who have the right to prescribe or dispense medicines. Since the interactions between pharmaceutical companies and physicians need to happen in secure and closed platforms, the user experience is not as good as with consumer-solutions without similar tight restrictions.



## 5 Use of Different Interaction Types in Pharmaceutical Marketing

There are multiple different interaction types which pharmaceutical companies can use with their customers. According to Snyder Bulik (2016) the communication between pharmaceutical companies and physicians is becoming increasingly digital with brand promotional emails, websites and portals for healthcare providers as well as webinars with key opinion leaders seen to be the preferred channels. From the pharmaceutical companies' point-of-view key opinion leader webinars are seen as the best channel from the aspect of return-on-investment generation.

The interaction types most valued by the physicians are face-to-face meetings followed by online detailing. Face-to-face interaction either with sales representative or medical representative is a meeting where the pharmaceutical representative details and promotes one or multiple products to one healthcare professional or in a group meeting where multiple healthcare professionals are present at the same time. (van Tongeren & Capella 2019).

Other, more traditional, interaction types can be for example phone calls from pharmaceutical representatives, e-newsletters, mobile applications and direct mailings with product information, attending on congresses with exhibition booths, social media posts with company or disease awareness related information as well as advertisements in medical journals. Medical education events in live, recorded or online setting are also commonly used to increase knowledge of the diseases and therapy areas for which the promoted medication belong to. (van Tongeren & Capella 2019; Arsene 2019).

As the channel offering is broad, the challenge is to reach the individual physicians via the channels they prefer. Luckily, according to Wasserman (2016), the physicians have stated, that they want to be approached by pharmaceutical companies at least once a month via any channel.

The interaction types mentioned above are illustrated in figure 7.



Figure 7. The different interaction types which pharmaceutical companies can use with the physicians. (Illustration made by the author).

### 5.1 Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on the Interactions Between the Pharmaceutical Companies and the Physicians

Due to COVID-19 pandemic there has been a significant decrease on face-to-face interactions between the pharmaceutical companies and the physicians. According to a research conducted by Indegene, a pharma and healthcare consultancy company, the amount of face-to-face meetings held in-person dropped from 78% to 15% during the pandemic and only less than half of the respondents expect those interactions to continue in the post-pandemic era. At the same time

during the pandemic, remote sales meetings with the physicians increased from 11% to 47% and one third of the respondents expect to continue those post-COVID. (Snyder Bulik 2021).

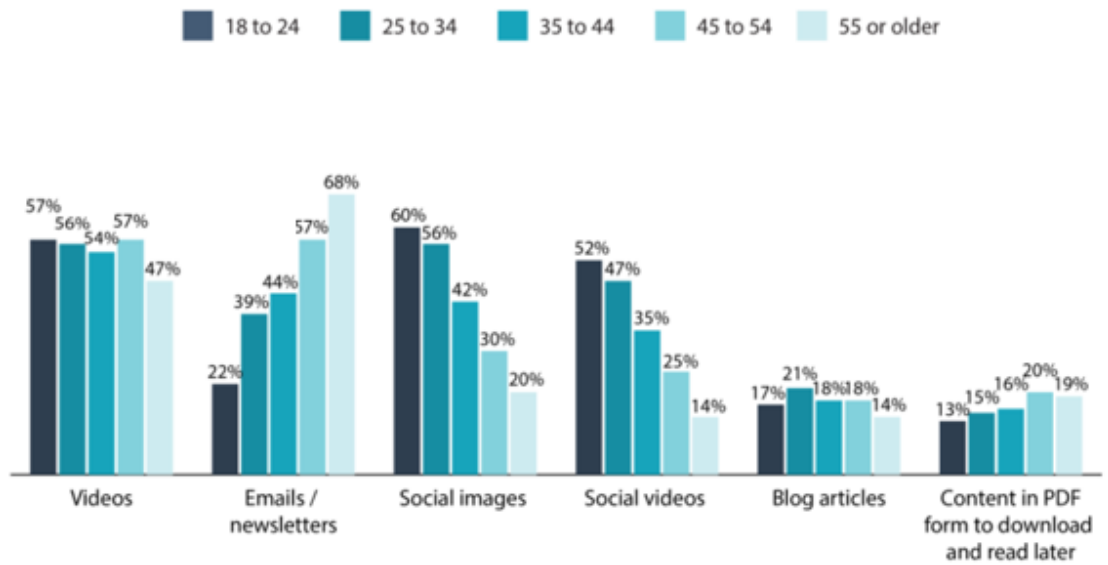
The change in the operating environment has forced the pharmaceutical marketing activities to concentrate on digitally focused approach which itself has caused uncertainty on message resonance due to nuances getting lost in virtual engagements compared to face-to-face interactions. Even though the usage of virtual engagements has increased rapidly, there is an ongoing struggle in maintaining the overall promotional volume compared to pre-COVID level. (Impact of COVID-19 on the Pharmaceutical Market – EU4 & UK 2021; FirstWord Perspectives 2020).

According to a research conducted by Indegene, a pharma and healthcare consultancy company, physician's dissatisfaction towards pharmaceutical companies digital interactions across channels has risen during the pandemic and up to almost 50 percent of the physicians are not satisfied with the pharma's digital interactions. One possible reason for this development might be the expectation level set by consumer companies and services like Netflix. The pandemic forced pharmaceutical companies into digital, virtual and remote engagements with the physicians, hence the newly built services and solutions do not necessarily offer same level of experience compared to consumer companies. Especially relevancy and easiness to discover content seem to be the main causes of dissatisfaction among physicians. (Snyder Bulik 2021). The key in solving the issues in the digital landscape is to develop smart multichannel and omnichannel strategies to reach the relevant stakeholders. (Nead n.d.).

## 5.2 Possibilities and Challenges within Different Interaction Types

Bryant Brown (2020), a healthcare marketing agency, highlights in their blog article, that 98% of the healthcare professional are searching for information online, whereas in a report conducted by Indegene, 45% of the responding physicians state, that they like to watch marketing videos of the pharmaceutical companies (Wasserman 2016). In their blog article Bryant Brown (2020) state, that utilizing video as a content is the user-friendliest and most engaging way to reach the physicians. This creates massive opportunities for interaction with the physicians for the pharmaceutical companies, as according to Streaming Media (2020) by 2022 82% of all internet traffic will be video viewing.

*What kind of content do you want to see from a brand or business you support?*

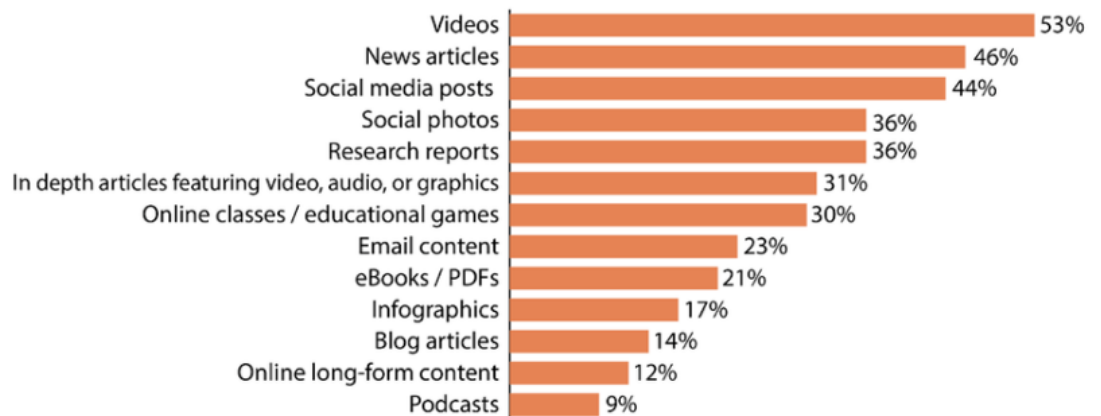


Base: 3,010 consumers in the US, Germany, Colombia, and Mexico  
 Source: HubSpot Content Trends Survey, Q3 2017

Figure 8. Consumers’ content preference based on age categories. (An 2017).

A content trends survey in figure 8 describes and illustrates nicely the dominance of video as a preferred content among consumers in different age groups. An (2017) states that with a video individual’s full attention can be achieved and that the consumers want to see even more videos in the future (Figure 9).

*In general, what content types do you want to see more of in the future?*



Base: 3,010 consumers in the US, Germany, Colombia, and Mexico  
 Source: HubSpot Content Trends Survey, Q3 2017

Figure 9. Consumers’ content type desires. (An 2017).

According to An (2017) there is a difference on content type responsiveness between different age groups. Figure 10 shows, that video is a preferred content type especially among younger age groups whereas articles and email content is preferred by middle-aged consumers.

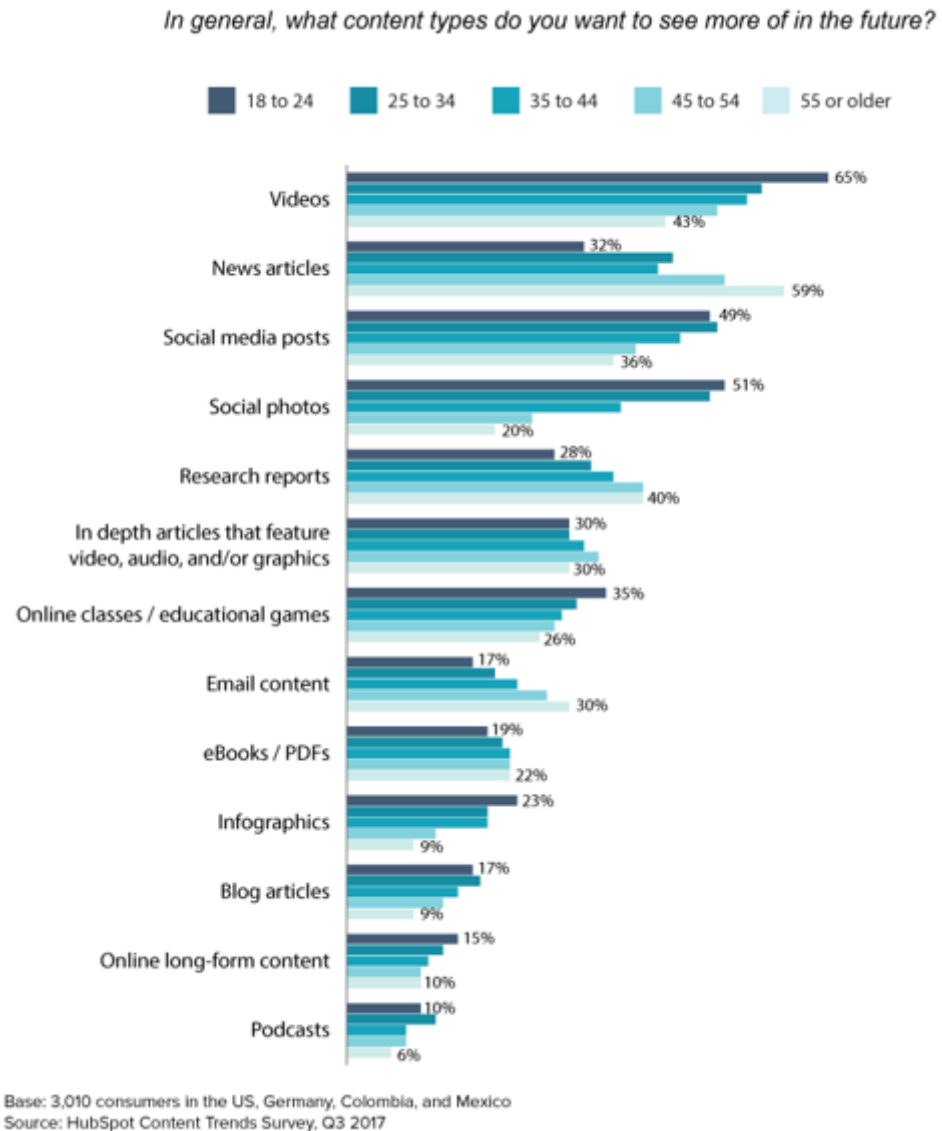


Figure 10. Consumers' content type desires based on age categories. (An 2017).

Some of the challenges in coping with the interaction types mentioned earlier in this thesis are the need to have e-consents received from the healthcare professionals to be able to approach them via e-newsletters and emails and securing, that all the activities directed to them in electronic channels are protected in a way, that common citizens cannot have access to those. Also, if companies want to provide recorded or live virtual events to healthcare professionals, they need to secure, that the content included in those events only consist of the information which

is based on the latest summary of product characteristics. (L 395/1987; Authorisation of medicines 2020; Wolford 2021).

## 6 State of Physician Interactions in the Pharmaceutical Business

Back in the days healthcare was a straightforward process where physicians diagnosed the patient, chose the appropriate treatment and guided the patient in the treatment initiation and follow-up (van Tongeren, van Rooij & Reeves 2017). As the physicians are the ones making diagnosis and prescribing the medications, the focus of the pharmaceutical companies' marketing interactions has usually been directed to them. According to Fickweiler, Fickweiler & Urbach (2017) majority of the physicians have at least one interaction with pharmaceutical companies in a month. These interactions are perceived positively by the physicians and seen as an important source of education and a way to enhance their scientific knowledge. Especially younger physicians value the teaching role of the pharmaceutical representatives.

### 6.1 Customer Experience in the Pharmaceutical Business

In order to be able to serve their customers better through value-creation, pharmaceutical companies have had to adapt the mindset of development. This has led to efforts in integrating customer experience and design thinking into the business and placing the customers at the centre of the business. At best, these methodologies could help the companies in differentiating themselves from their competitors through individualized interactions with a focus to meet or even exceed the expectations of the customers. To be able to be successful in this, companies need to anticipate the user needs and interactions linked to the customer journey. (van Tongeren et al. 2017).

The customer journey consist of multiple different interactions, where an individual interaction can be highly successful, but still the entire journey unsatisfying. Therefore, companies need to understand, that their customers might utilize multiple different channels or devices during their journey. The best possible customer experience has been proven to happen when companies include and utilize external partners on top of their own channels. To be able to deliver the best possible customer journey, companies need to know their customers, understand their needs and identify potential problems in their interactions. After this, companies can generate ideas, test them and eventually select the best one to solve the problem. (van Tongeren et al. 2017).

## 6.2 Expectations and Outcomes of Interactions Between the Pharmaceutical Companies and the Physicians

According to FirstWord Perspectives (2020) the expectations of the healthcare professionals towards the pharmaceutical industry have changed. The change has lifted up the need to offer personalized and right content to the right person via the channels which are preferred by the individual. This means, that all the available communication and marketing channels will most likely remain, but the digital channels will be supplemented with more tactical and transactional content which has earlier been shared by a representative during face-to-face interactions.

A Fierce Pharma article (Snyder Bulik 2019) highlights that for the first time in the past four years digital communications of pharmaceutical companies were valued higher as a preferred form of communication compared to the sales representatives. The reason for this change is the increased administrative work for physicians leaving less time to see the representatives. As the new complex medications require more education, the limited time of the physicians is spent with digital channels such as medical journals, brand websites and marketing emails.

According to a survey made by DT Consulting together with Aptus Health (van Tongeren et al. 2017), the key expectations of the healthcare professionals during the interactions with pharmaceutical companies are trust, relevance and simplicity (Figure 11).



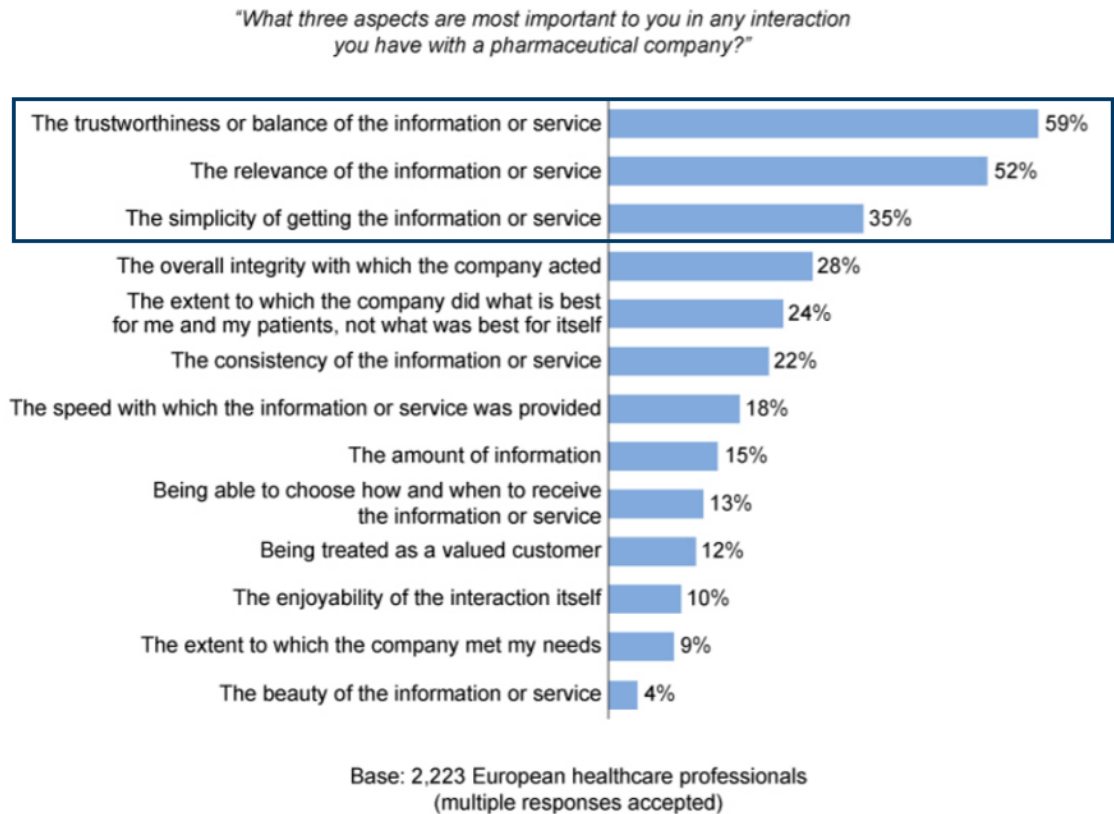
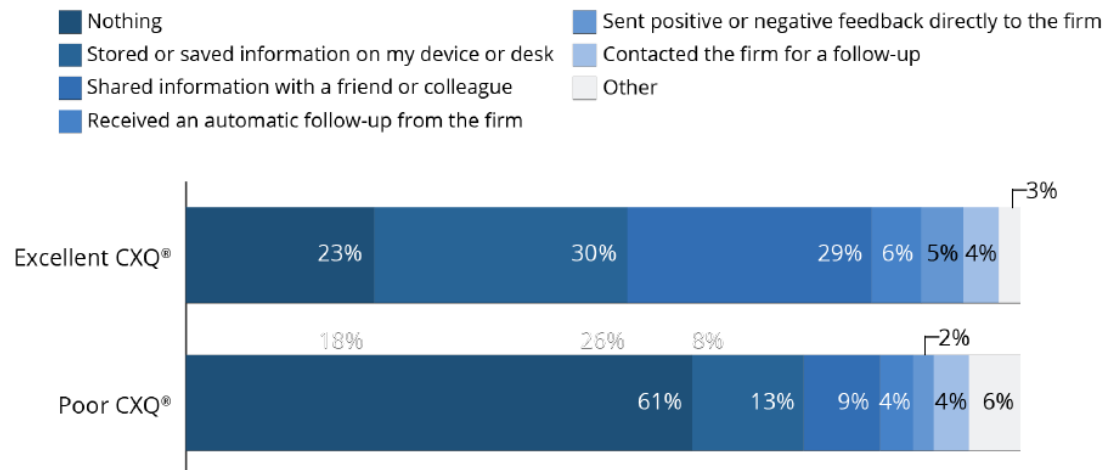


Figure 11. Healthcare professionals view of the most important aspects of the interactions with pharmaceutical companies. (van Tongeren et al. 2017).

Based on the same study, the results showed, that pharmaceutical companies are able to create satisfactory, and even good experiences to majority of their customers, but simultaneously at least fifteen percent of the customer engagements seem to deliver poor experiences. Poor experiences during the customer journey can hurt company's reputation for example through unwillingness to promote the company or its brands to others. (van Tongeren et al. 2017). On the other hand, great customer experience with a company drives the likelihood of continuing to do business with the company and increases the likelihood to recommend it. This leads to increased growth of customer revenue and therefore focusing on the customer experience should be a business decision to invest in. (Manning 2016).

A recent study related to the interactions of the pharmaceutical companies with the healthcare professionals (van Tongeren & Capella 2019) showed, that excellent customer experiences more than doubles the likelihood of further engagements with the brand. Satisfied customers tend to save materials for later use and are three times more likely to share the received information to others. (Figure 12).

*“What did you do as a result of your most recent interaction with a pharmaceutical company?”*

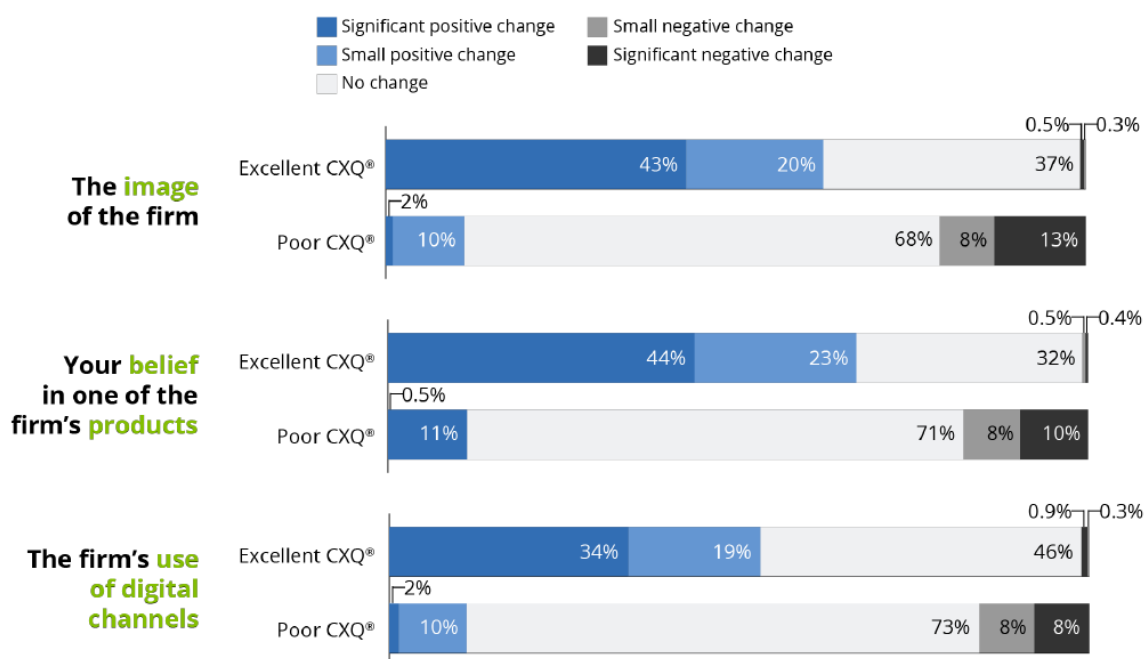


Base: 3,312 interactions between 2,653 European and US healthcare professionals and pharmaceutical firms (percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding)

Figure 12. Healthcare professionals' actions as a result of interaction with a pharmaceutical company based on customer experience outcome. (van Tongeren & Capella 2019).

According to van Tongeren & Capella (2019), those healthcare professionals who have experienced excellent customer experience seem to be more willing to interact and engage with the company via digital channels, which opens up new opportunities for the usage of the firm's communications channel mix. The study also showed, that if a customer interaction was rated as great, the opinion of the brand improved significantly. (Figure 13). This positive brand positioning can have an impact on the healthcare professional's prescribing habits both in a current situation and also in the future.

How did your most recent interaction with a pharmaceutical company affect your view of the following?"



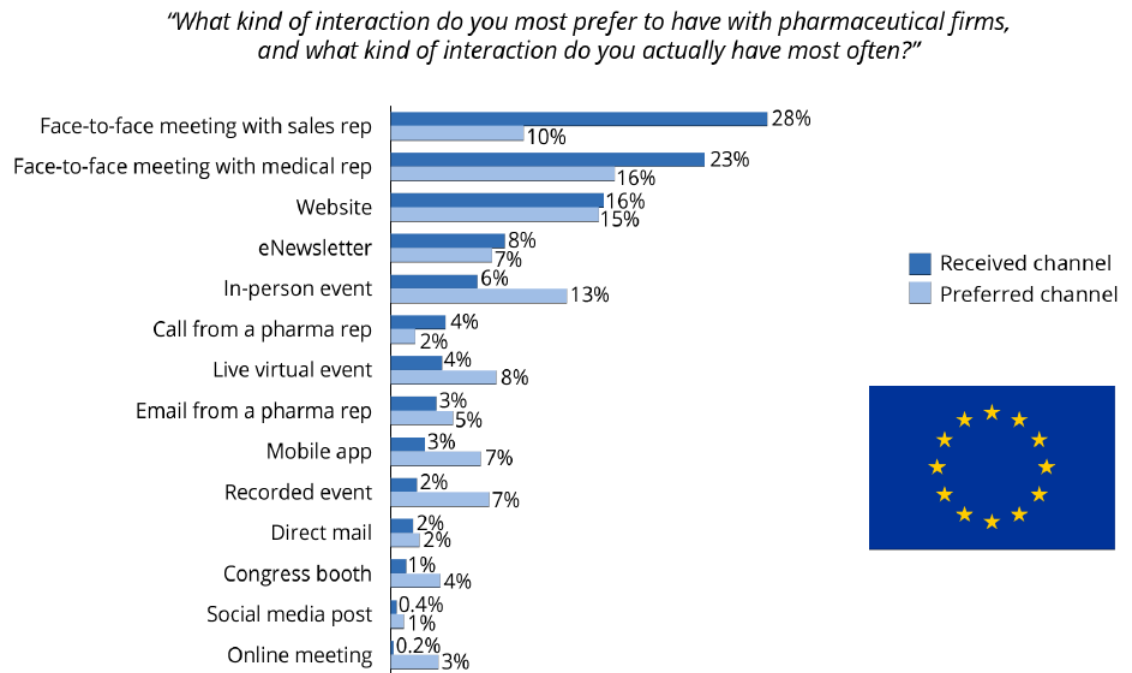
Base: 3,246 interactions between 2,653 European and US healthcare professionals and pharmaceutical firms (percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding)

Figure 13. How does interactions with pharmaceutical companies effect on healthcare professionals' view of the company and its products based on customer experience outcome. (van Tongeren & Capella 2019).

### 6.3 Challenges and Risks in Interactions Between the Pharmaceutical Companies and the Physicians

According to van Tongeren and Capella (2019) there are clear benefits in driving for excellent customer experience, but still majority of the pharmaceutical companies deliver irrelevant content to their customers and do not fully take customer preferences into account in their plans. Based on the study, general practitioners and specialists wanted to have education related to clinical practice, but instead pharmaceutical companies mainly offered promotional information about their products. Also, companies rely on using sales or medical representatives, but instead healthcare professionals would have wanted to have more digital interactions. This shows, that the usage of digital channels was underutilized at the time when the study was conducted. (Figure

14). Both of these gaps on matching the companies' actions to customers' expectations can lead to lower customer engagement and dissatisfaction.



Base: 2,826 interactions between European healthcare professionals and pharmaceutical firms

Figure 14. Preferred versus received interaction types with healthcare professional and pharmaceutical companies. (van Tongeren & Capella 2019).

The authors (van Tongeren & Capella 2019) state, that companies should focus on complementing their sales representative interactions with digital experiences. Still, it is notable, that many of the available digital channels did not manage a good rating from the physicians. The proposed solution to tackle these inconsistencies was to match the customer needs and expectations with the companies' interaction design to be able to ensure, that the right message is delivered at the right time and via right channel. This approach should be based on planning and insights either through research data or by asking from the customers directly. With the gathered insights the companies should be able to define different customer profiles with information of their content consumption habits and channel mix usage hence leading in driving the business forward with thorough customer understanding.

#### 6.4 Situation in Finland and Healthcare Professionals' Attitudes Towards Digital Interactions

From the Finnish perspective, in March 2020 COVID-19 pandemic changed the working landscape of the pharmaceutical industry literally in one night. The restrictions and remote working guidance set by the Finnish government forced companies to seek for and conquer new digital sales channels and ways to do business with the healthcare professionals. With the new digital landscape, the need to offer personally tailored added value to customers became more important than ever due to the fact that the healthcare professionals became very conscious of their time usage. (Krok 2020, 38-41).

A Finnish company, Successclinic, has conducted multiple surveys for the Finnish healthcare professionals. The purpose of these surveys has been to gather information of the best forms of cooperation between healthcare professionals and pharmaceutical companies. The survey made in 2019 shows, that trainings, congresses and symposiums are the best forms of cooperation. The same survey showed, that meetings with representatives and trainings offered by the companies are the most used cooperative forms between the healthcare professionals and the pharmaceutical companies. (Survey on physicians' service needs 2019).

The healthcare communication research (2020) showed, that the attitude of the Finnish healthcare professionals towards virtually held remote presentations has changed to more positive. Reasons for this change are the COVID-19 pandemic and more efficient time usage, but also environmental aspects as pharmaceutical sales representatives do not have to drive to the healthcare centers or clinics to meet the physicians. The same research also showed, that almost 50 percent of the respondents believe, that their usage of remotely held meetings with the pharmaceutical representatives will increase in the future.

## 7 Research Methodology

This chapter presents the research methodology of the thesis. The section describes and justifies the research strategy, research approach as well as the data collection and analysis methods used in this research.

### 7.1 Research Strategy

Traditionally the classical research does not actively aim for a change, instead it aims to understand, explain and describe the phenomenon. Traditional research along with the outcomes of the research usually ends up on the level of conclusions and statements. This means, that the status quo and the factors effecting to the subject matter are defined, but there are no actions or experiments to change the situation during the research period. (Kananen 2017, 7-10, 36).

The research which aims for a change and actively seeks for solutions for problem removal can be called with a hypernym interventionist research. Action research, design based research and constructive research are interventionist researches. A ground rule in traditional research is, that the researcher cannot influence on the studied phenomenon. This ground rule must be broken in the interventionist research strategy. (Kananen 2017, 7-10, 36).

The interventionist strategy, more specifically constructive, used in this thesis aims for a change. The objective in a constructive research is to seek for a solution for an existing problem and remove the problem. (Kananen 2015, 76; Kananen 2017, 14). The interventionist strategy aims to solve real-life problems which also have some scientific meaning, but can also focus on improving an already existing solution related to the subject matter (Oyegoke 2011 in Kananen 2017, 33). Constructive research as a strategy is close to service design and innovation production (Ojasalo et al. 2015, 65).

The interventionist research consists of three different phases, which are: preparation, field work and theorization. In the preparation phase the researcher chooses a relevant real-life problem to be solved and familiarizes himself with the theories related to the subject matter. The second phase focuses on finding the causes of the problem and providing, testing and implementing the solution for the problem. The final phase consists of generalization of the solution and referring it back to theory. (Kasanen, Lukka & Siitonen 1991 in Kananen 2017, 33).

Familiarizing oneself with the theories related to the subject matter helps the researcher in finding the causes of the problem and an intervention to remove it (Kananen 2017, 34). According to Eskola & Suoranta (2008, 79-81) theory can be utilized in either clarifying the purpose of the research or as a means to conduct the research by producing information of the subject matter. Kananen (2017, 63) states, that creating a construction which removes the existing problem can be easy, if what needs to be changed and how is known.

The intervention can be tested through a pilot project, but if the pilot project is considered risky, then triangulation can be used in the functionality assessment of the intervention. The causality assessment of the intervention can sometimes be challenging, but if the intervention can be referred back to theory after causality verification, the intervention can be considered as a new generalization. (Kananen 2017, 34). The underlying processes of the research problem cannot be found only through observations and interviews, therefore the interventionist research approach demands action to fulfil the process (Kananen 2017, 35).

The aim in the constructive research is change which needs to be verified. This can be shown by comparing baseline and after intervention measurement results. The problem in this approach is to be able to secure, that the outcome is truly a result of the intervention and not caused by any external factor. (Kananen 2017, 64).

The researcher is an active participant in the constructive research process working closely together with other participants who represent the practical aspect of the subject matter. Successful testing and piloting of the construction demands commitment of the personnel in the studied organization. The construction itself can be appropriate, but if the ones whom the construction has an effect on are not committed to it, the construction might fail. (Kananen 2017, 37). Therefore, it is advisable, that the end users of the construction are integrated into the process as early as possible. The researcher in a constructive study can be seen as a change agent who acts as a supporter in the learning process inside the organization. (Ojasalo et al. 2015, 68).

## 7.2 Research Approach

Research approaches can be classified in multiple different ways, but are usually divided into two main categories which are qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative approach is usually used in situations where the studied phenomenon is not thoroughly known in advance and there is a desire to understand it better. Qualitative approach uses words as its main data form and focuses

on understanding the meanings. Quantitative approach is suitable in situations where there is a need to test whether some theory is correct. Quantitative approach consists of numbers and focuses on explaining numerical patterns and interlinks. Combination of these approaches is called mixed methods approach where data can consist of both words and numbers. (Kananen 2017, 13; Scribbr n.d.; Vilkkka 2021, 66-67; Ojasalo et al. 2015, 104-105). This thesis utilized qualitative research approach with observations and interviews as data collection methods.

### 7.3 Research Methods

According to Vilkkka (2021, 38) methods are consciously and justifiably chosen means to conduct the research. The problem in the interventionist approach is solved by using different kind of gathered material, which can vary from video recordings to different kind of documents and observations. The common nominator in interventionist research is using qualitative research's data collection methods with the aim to accomplish deep understanding of the research problem and different factors affecting it. (Kananen 2017, 42-43).

Especially with diverse and broad research problems the researcher can utilize triangulation which means multimethod approach (Kananen 2015, 327). Triangulation has different types, which are data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation and methodological triangulation (Denzin 1978 in Kananen 2015, 327). For example in methodological triangulation data can be collected via several data collection methods such as observations and interviews (Kananen 2015, 327). Triangulation can also be used as means to increase the reliability of the research – for example, if the data collected via several different methods support the same conclusion, the results can be considered reliable. (Kananen 2015, 359). According to Kananen (2015, 361) the most usable types of triangulation in qualitative research are data and methodological triangulation.

The data collection methods in qualitative research can be divided into primary and secondary materials. Secondary materials are already existing documents linked to the subject matter, whereas primary materials are the ones which are produced through observations, interviews and questionnaires and are addressed to the studied phenomenon. (Kananen 2017, 44). The interventionist approach utilizes pluralistic data and does not limit data collection methods (Kananen 2017, 43). According to Ojasalo et al. (2015, 40, 68) it is advisable to utilize multiple different data collection methods to secure the reliability behind the decisions made while creating the



construction. The typical methods for data collection in constructive research are observations, group discussions, queries and interviews.

The secondary materials used as sources in the theoretical framework of this thesis were articles, books, research publications, videos and websites. The empirical part of this thesis used observations and interviews as data collection methods generating primary materials. The following subsections describes the chosen data collection methods in this thesis briefly.

### 7.3.1 Observations

According to Kananen (2017, 45) based on Paul et al. (2014, 80) the researcher can form an overall understanding of the subject matter through observations. Observations provide information about the external elements of the problem, but do not necessarily provide explanation to the cause of the problem. Therefore the observations are usually complemented with interviews. The purpose of the observation is not to evaluate the current actions of the organization, but rather to understand the phenomenon and the problem.

Observation can be executed via general (unstructured) or structured observations. The structured observation can be used, if the focus of the observation is clear, otherwise the observation process is unstructured. (Kananen 2017, 45-47). The benefit in participant observation, where the researcher is integrated into the daily activities of the participants, is, that the researcher can get deeply included into the studied phenomenon (Kananen 2015, 137).

### 7.3.2 Interviews

Interviews are situations where the researcher discusses about the subject matter with persons who are familiar with it. During the interview the interviewer asks and collects the data and the interviewee replies and passes over information. (Ojasalo et al. 2015, 108). Interviews can be used in different phases of the research process to fulfil the findings of the gathered observations. Usually, the researcher interprets the observations, but to be able to limit the possibility of false interpretations, asking detailed questions through interviews is advisable. (Kananen 2017, 48-49).

Interviews can be conducted in different ways. The strictest approach in interviews is structured questionnaire with fact-based questions, whereas the opposite of it is unstructured, open interview with only a topic for the discussion. Open interview is suitable for the situations where profound understanding of person's thinking or behavioural drivers want to be understood. (Kananen 2017, 49-50; Vilkkä 2021, 123-127; Ojasalo et al. 2015, 41). The interviewees are chosen either based on the theme or the researched topic and they need to have expertise or experience of the subject matter (Vilkkä 2021, 135).

#### 7.4 Data Analysis

The data analysis in qualitative research requires that the gathered data is converted to textual format after which the content can be analysed and categorised into segments. The interviews need to be transcribed and based on the need, the transcription can be conducted either word to word or as a standard language. Standard language approach can be used if the interest of the researcher focuses only on the found matters. If the words and the selection of words have meaning in the research, then the transcription needs to be performed word to word. (Ojasalo et al. 2015, 110).

The researcher needs to combine all the data available into a logical entity with a "red thread". (Ojasalo et al. 2015, 119). Especially with limited amount of content, reading and familiarizing oneself with the data content can be sufficient in finding the solution for the research question by finding structures, processes or patterns from the data (Kananen 2015, 83, 89, 129, 163, 177).

During the interpretation phase the researcher aims to point out something new about the subject matter with the help of prior theory and research. Interpreting qualitative data requires imagination from the researcher for him to be able to form meanings of the subject matter. The possible tactics in forming the meaning for the subject matter are for example: seeing plausibility, building a logical chain of events and making conceptual or theoretical coherence. (Ojasalo et al. 2015, 143-144).

The outcome of the data analysis phase are synthesis which gather the main results together giving clear and justified answer to the research question. The conclusions or recommendations are then set based on these synthesis. (Ojasalo et al. 2015, 144).

The direction of the research can be from theory to practice (deductive), from practice to theory (inductive) or combination of those (abductive). In deductive reasoning an existing theory is applied to practice through testing, whereas inductive reasoning aims at developing a theory from specific findings to generalizations. Usually, interventionist research utilizes features of both deductive and inductive reasoning approaches and is therefore called abductive reasoning. (Kananen 2017, 68).

Interventionist research utilizes abductive reasoning in a way, that theoretical knowledge is gathered to understand the phenomenon at the first phase of the research. The gathered knowledge is utilized to develop a construction to solve an existing problem. The construction is then tested in practice. If the construction works and can be generalized, the outcome is development of a new theory or solution. (Kananen 2017, 68).

#### 7.5 Methodology Used in This Thesis

This thesis used constructive strategy with abductive reasoning due to the reason, that the new construction was seen as the best option to solve the research problem. The aim in this thesis was to provide a solution for the research problem, not only explain and observe the status quo. Another focus area was to test the construction in practice and provide development proposals moving forward in case of a need for further modifications.

The data collection in this thesis process utilized methodological triangulation and the data used was gathered via observations and interviews. The observations were conducted as semi-hidden observations by the author of this thesis because the outcome of the construction process could have been biased, if observations would have been known to happen widely in the organization. Semi-hidden observation is defined here as the author being open about the thesis process, but not reminding co-workers of observations being carried out continuously. By utilizing semi-hidden observations, the researcher did not knowingly influence on the persons being observed.

Chapter 8 of this thesis describes the empirical part of the research and the constructed model in detail, explaining the rationale behind the decisions made and the outcome of the construction. The section is classified due to including company restricted information and details which are not to be shared to anyone outside the company.

## 8 Omnichannel Marketing in the Pharmaceutical Business, the Model and Its Development Process

This part of the thesis is confidential.

## 9 Conclusions

The topic of the thesis was generated based on a real-life need caused by COVID-19 pandemic and remote working recommendation set by the Finnish government. The aim of the thesis was to support the company's strategy, while simultaneously being an interesting topic for the author. The process of the thesis work started after a quick here and now analysis in January 2021 which showed, that the company's omnichannel marketing concept was not on a desired level as the pandemic continued. Based on the status of the digital and virtual marketing efforts back in January 2021 the mission became clear – there is a need on creating, modifying and testing a model which could work on reaching the physicians in the situation where majority of the interactions with them was held through virtual channels.

The research material in this thesis was obtained through observations and interviews with the collected material being stored on a cloud drive and in a note book where only the author had access. Some of the observation findings were written in the meeting minutes which were securely stored in the company's Teams folder with restricted access. The names of the interviewees or other information which could reveal their identities were not needed in this study, as the outcome of the research was a model which was created based on the insights received from the interviews. The insights were tied together with the findings of the observations and other knowledge of the physician's expectations obtained from the research familiarized within the literature review.

The research itself does not use any documents requiring confidentiality. The company, for which the construction has been developed and tested has not been described in any detail, the model itself has been described in detail in chapter 8 of this report, but the chapter has been declared as classified. Even if the model itself would be revealed, the content used in the model on customer interactions has only been described on a superficial level referring to those only as "Video" or "Article". Therefore the report does not reveal any corporate secrets.

The research outcome of this thesis will not be publicly available due to the construction being classified, hence no other company can fully utilize the results nor there is a will for the company to share its construction to its competitors. However, the research will be at the disposal of the company, which allows the company to utilize the results of the research in the future development and enhancement work of the model.

This research, along with the final construction, cannot be transferred as such to another companies as the whole research and the outcome of it is strongly tied to the researched company and its channel offering on customer interactions. However, the approach and methodologies could be used as a basis for the model construction of another department or function within the company. Basically, the ideology behind the model itself can be replicated in another department or function, but the content needs to be created based on the needs and desires of the customers relevant for that department.

The thesis process has helped the author in developing deeper knowledge of the omnichannel marketing and its needs from the customer's point of view. With this knowledge, the strengths and weaknesses as well as shortcomings of the constructed model can be further developed to be able to match the current and future desires of the physicians. As the society is currently dismantling the restrictions set during the COVID-19 pandemic, the model needs to be adjusted to fit the hybrid collaboration with the company and its customers instead of focusing mostly to virtual interactions.

A learning from the thesis process was, that all the employees need to be included in the process as early as possible for being able to get them fully onboard. The omnichannel marketing ideology was clearly understood by the team members, but the benefit of the model for the individual itself was perhaps unseen and therefore not all persons tried out the rep-triggered emails as a way to reach their customers in another way.

In the thesis process one of the biggest challenges was the schedule and how the writing process can be fitted into the hectic life of the author who has been responsible of the business franchise with multiple brands, being a line manager for a cross-functional team as well as being a husband and a father for three underaged children. For these reasons, the research work along with writing was mainly done during the weekends.

The research itself was proven to be useful for the company, although there is always room for improvement. As the constructed model was proven to be functional and sufficient at a virtual setting, the further development of it for the future as a long-term solution on customer interactions needs to continue to be able to serve its purpose even better.

#### Reliability and Validity of the Research

"Reliability and validity measure the quality of the research" (Kananen 2017, 69). Reliability of the provided construction in an interventionist research can be assessed through the functionality of

the outcome. This approach aims to show the trustworthiness of the results and that the results are permanent and not caused by chance. If the provided construction works as it should by removing the existing problem, the expected outcome has been reached. (Jönsson & Lukka 2005 in Kananen 2017, 69).

Validity of a research means the ability of the chosen methods to measure the desired outcome of the research without any systematic errors occurring during the research process (Vilkka 2021, 193). Validity of the interventionist research can be examined through the reliability of the whole research process. The process itself can be valid and fulfil the demands of a scientific research, but still the construction does not necessarily work. The research outcomes should be so reliable, that any decision made based on those is based on truthful research results. (Kananen 2017, 69). According to Eskola & Suoranta (2008 208-210) the researcher must evaluate the reliability of the research in every made decision.

While examining the reliability of this research, it can be stated that the research problem was solved by the construction which was created based on the research results gathered through observations and interviews. As the research question **“What kind of an omnichannel solution model could work for a pharmaceutical company?”** got answered, it can be stated that the research problem was correctly set and the research methods along with data analysis were carried out properly.

The testing phase of the construction was successful from those parts as it was implemented by the seven representatives. The analysis data compared to existing knowledge of average data on email marketing supports the functionality and reliability of the construction. The research problem and questions were answered, so it can be concluded that the research is valid.

The reproducibility of the research might be difficult since the operating environment of the pharmaceutical industry is currently changing as clinics and hospitals are re-opening after a long lockdown period caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, for some time moving forward, physicians might expect more face-to-face meetings instead of virtual collaboration. Still, the construction can and will be utilized within the company with new and impactful content which aims to support the business moving forward.

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