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## **THE DIGITAL BUYING PROCESS AND CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT**

A study for a case company in automotive sales

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A study for a case company in automotive sales

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## ABSTRACT

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The thesis is commissioned by a company in automotive sales. The case company is one of the largest Finnish car dealerships, with a large variety of services including new car sales and used car sales. The commissioner of the thesis has identified a need to develop customer engagement and after discussion the focus was decided on the digital sales channel specifically the chat.

The goal of the thesis is to discuss how customer engagement can be improved in the digital sales channel and answer the three supporting research sub-questions. The objective is to find information about communications in digital sales and apply these to the communication with customers online. Further, to analyze the targeted messages and data from the case company's chat provider.

Since the field of digital sales is constantly changing, a variety of digital sources was used to get the most relevant and current information. The theoretical background enabled to understand the customers process when buying online. The thesis process began with a look into automotive sales and the customer buying process. To find out how to communicate with and engage customers, the buying process and where the customers' needs come was to be understood. From these, the communication and process of buying was compared to the process that customers would go through when buying a car in-store.

Based on the conclusions made from the targeted messages and current situation, the final goal is to suggest improvements regarding digital communication and customer engagement in the chat. From comparing the previous and current chat providers' messages and processes, results were drawn and analyzed. Conversion from targeted messages was used to analyze which messages were successful in engagement and suggest further research approaches. In addition to this, the aspects that affect digital sales were shown.

The result of the thesis is an analysis on the buying process of customers and the effects of the current targeted messages for customer engagement. From the results we have determined that a change in chat provider was successful, but further research needs to be done to validate the results. Although digital sales is quite a new topic, many competitors in the field have been moving with digitalization to increase sales and keep up with the changes.

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Keywords: digital sales, automotive sales, communication, customer engagement, chat, sales triggers

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, the commissioner is a company in automotive sales. The company will be referred to as the case company due to confidentiality issues restricting competitors' access to the information that will be gathered. The case company is one of the largest Finnish car dealerships, with a large variety of services including new car sales and used car sales. The case company's business consists of car sales, maintenance, and spare parts as well as a heavy equipment side. The case company has multiple offices around Finland. The case company created a digital sales unit specifically for online sales.

The topic of this thesis is to look into customer engagement in the case company's chat. From an initial discussion with the commissioner and the supervisor of the thesis, we eventually decided to focus on the company's digital sales process and customer engagement in the digital sales channel, as this felt to best meet the needs of the case company. The case company has identified a need to improve customer engagement and the quantity as well as quality of the chats. The main objective of my thesis is to find information about communications in digital sales and apply these to the communication with customers online. The focus of the thesis will be on communication in the chat platform that the case company has on the website, through which we contact potential customers.

This is a current topic for the case company because this information is needed now to develop digital sales. The digital sales process in the case company is at the beginning and was fully started in the spring of 2021. The challenge appeared to be that the approaches that we have for customer engagement right now are simple and there is not much data about the effectiveness. Therefore, we decided to analyse the data we get from the customer engagement so that the process can be developed as well as have possibly find new ways of approaching customers.

## **1.1 Research problem and objectives**

Nowadays, customers are contacting sales representatives online and the quantity of purchases made in the digital channels is increasing. The research problem of this thesis is to find information about customer engagement and the ways of approaching customers through digital channels. The case company has realized the need for information about digital sales, chat communication and customer engagement.

The research problem can be summarized in the following question: “How can customer engagement be developed through chat communication?”. This follows into three supporting questions: “How can the sales process online be compared to the process in-store?”, “What should be taken into consideration in customer engagement?” and “Can sales triggers be used to improve customer engagement?”.

## **1.2 Thesis process**

The process of the thesis consists of the theoretical, practical, and applied stages. The thesis begins with the theoretical stage in which we look into the literature and internet sources to create a comprehensive background. After this, the practical stage of the thesis is conducted, focusing on customer engagement and the specific ways we approach. Eventually the applied stage of the thesis, the results from data collection are analyzed, conclusions are drawn comparing them to the research questions as well as the thesis writing process is examined.

## **2 AUTOMOTIVE SALES**

In this chapter of the thesis, the theory of automotive sales is defined, and the current situation described. In addition to this, the customer's buying process and steps are shown.

### **2.1 Automotive sales – current situation**

Automotive sales is fast changing, with new innovations coming frequently, new models being launched and old one being updated. The technical innovation behind cars is quicker than ever before (Jaala 2015.) Although the demand in automotive sales for new cars has almost returned to normal since the pandemic, delivery delays put pressure on companies. Because the orders are backed up, delivery is taking long and making car registrations in autumn substantially lower. Delivery delays are caused by the shortage of components, which therefore has led to the reduced production on new cars. This does not affect specific types of vehicles, although different brands' production times may vary. (Autoalan Tiedotuskeskus 2021.)

“This year, 78662 new passenger cars have been registered for the first time, which is 7.2 % more than at the same time last year. In September, 6534 new passenger cars were registered which is 22.4 % compared to September last year” (Autoalan Tiedotuskeskus 2021). In the used passenger car sales, 59,895 cars have been sold in September, which is 2.4 % more than the average figure for September in the last five years. A total of 490,000 used cars have been sold in the months of from January to September. It is in total 0.4 % higher compared to the previous year. (Kallio & Rissa 2021.)

The effects of the emission reduction targets are becoming more evident in automotive sales. To achieve these targets, it requires the development of new solutions from manufacturers as well as the adoption of these new solutions by customers. Rissa (2021) found that the registration of electric cars has been moved to October of 2021, because of the removal of car tax for electric cars starting from 1.10.2021. This change in car tax will change the price of electric cars by about 3,500 € when reducing car tax and adding purchase support. This purchase support is given so that more and more electric cars can be purchased and therefore increases the number of elec-

tric cars in 2022-2030 by 35000 cars. Through this there is estimated to be about 75000 tons decrease in CO2 emissions by 2030. (Kallio & Rissa 2021.)

Through the changes in automotive sales, the customers that would normally purchase new cars, are moving to buying used cars. This is due to the impacts of lengthened delivery times. Although companies in automotive sales have used digital sales for a few years now the pandemic going on has forced all industries to change methods to be able to contact potential customers. Enam (2021) states that with the impacts of the pandemic, companies need to be able to adopt their ways of making products and services available for customers remotely.

The pandemic has affected all industries and demanded companies to reinvent the methods that they use to contact customers, engage as well as adopt technologies, for example for online sales. Although digital sales is a topic that has been taken into consideration for a while already, the pandemic has increased the time accuracy and need. This means that companies need to find ways of engaging and contacting customers on their customers' terms. This became a factor, when countries went into lock-down and customers were not available to go visit car dealerships in-store. (Forbes 2021.)

## **2.2 Customer's buying process**

The customer's buying process begins with a need and the reason behind the purchase is satisfying these needs. Often, the needs are developed through a period of time and customers have awareness can be divided into three different groups, which affect the purchasing process, reasons for buying or not buying. Identifying this, makes the sales representative aware of how to approach the situation with a customer and provide the customer with help.

The first group of customers is the unconscious need level. In this level, the customer is aware that they want to purchase something, but do not know why they want to purchase. In this case, the sales representative must communicate with the customer to find their needs and give them the correct recommendations. For example, a customer does not go to the store to browse at cars without having an unconscious want to purchase a car and the sales representative might be able to find the customer's needs. (Futrell 2007, 87.)



The second group of customers is the preconscious need level. In this level, the buyers might not be fully aware of their needs and these needs might not be developed in the conscious mind. This means that they might have an idea of the general type of product they want but might not be fully ready to communicate their needs to the sales representatives. For example, the customer might want to purchase a BMW car because of the image but might not want to communicate this to the sales representative. In this case, if the customer does not want to purchase, they might falsify the reasoning behind it rather than revealing the actual reason behind it. (Futrell 2007, 87.)

The third group of customers is the conscious need level. In this level, the buyer is fully aware of their needs. In the conscious need level, it is very easy to sell to the customer because the buyer knows which product or service they want to purchase and are willing to communicate their needs. For example, a customer might come to the store and tell the sales representative, "I'd like to purchase a used car for under 20,000 €, preferably a Toyota. What can you show me?". (Futrell 2007, 87.)

### **2.3 Customer's buying process in automotive sales**

The customers buying process in automotive purchases can be a fairly long process. Compared to other types of purchases, it is more expensive as well as requires more maintenance and service even after the purchase (Futrell 2007, 102). This makes the process of deciding the right car and when to make the purchase more extensive, because it is a long-term investment (Joas & Nienhaus 2018).

A customer's buying process begins with a customer having the need, in this case it being the need to buy or change their car (Futrell 2007, 8). Companies are able to analyze customers purchasing process to help understand how customers find your company and how they become a customer for your company. People's needs are a result from a lack of something. Wants on the other hand are the needs learned by a person. For example, a person has a need for transportation, but some want a Volvo, and some prefer to have a BMW.

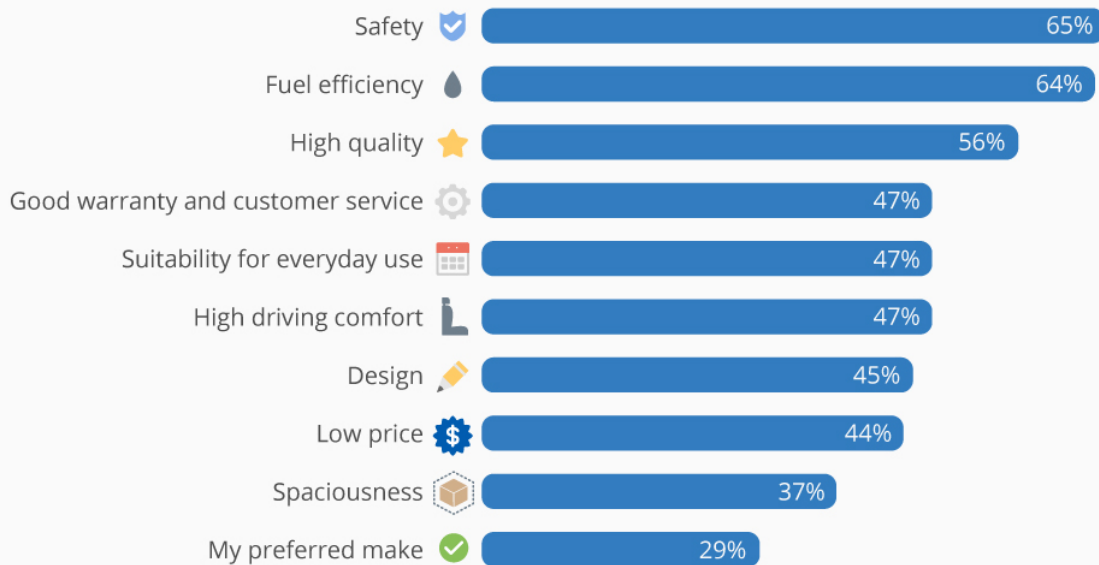
When a customer starts doing research for the car, they already have some sort of budget in mind making it easier to look at specific options. This starts with either contacting their bank about finance options or contacting car dealerships financing options. Car financing refers to the options

for finance available for customers to allow people to purchase cars with other ways of arrangement other than purchasing the car in full cash (Market Business News, 2021). Car finance can be acquired through a bank, a financial institution or even through dealerships own financial services. For example, car dealership Rinta-Jouppi as well as many others, potential customers can calculate the monthly installment, considering the establishment fees, processing fees (per month) as well as the financing rate (Rinta-Jouppi.com 2021). The customer can modify this by choosing options like the funding period, the cash amount of money and the last larger installment.

After this, the customer has already come up with the idea of what kind of car they need. This is when they start to look for options of potential cars. (OP 2021.) The car that the customer is buying needs to fulfil a customer's needs, wants and lifestyle demands. Information can be provided to customers through advertisements, in-store displays and brochures. In addition to this, customers draw from the previous experiences of their family or friends, as well as observe products being used by others. (Kassarjian & Robertson 1991.) The customer usually starts by figuring out the features they want in their new car. For example, if the customer has young children, one important part is to look for a car big enough for children's car seats. According to Global Consumer Survey (2018) two characteristics are the ones that potential customers look for in their car – safety and fuel efficiency. The picture under shows the most important factors when buying a car for potential buyers.

## Most Important Factors When Buying a Car

"Which of these characteristics are especially important to you when you decide on a new car?"\*\*



\* Multiple responses possible  
n=2,027 U.S. adults (internet users aged 18 to 64). Conducted November 2017 to January 2018.



@StatistaCharts

Source: Statista Global Consumer Survey 2018

statista

FIGURE 1. The Most Important Factors When Buying a Car. Cited 14.10.2021.

When a customer has found a car with all the characteristics they want, they contact a dealership to talk with a sales representative. In this part of the customer and the sales representative work closely together to build the car with the specific accessories they want. The same car is sold with several different equipment levels. In addition to this, the customer can add additional accessories to the car depending on their budget and needs. All new cars come with standard accessories from the manufacturer, which are made to be safety-enhancing. These are usually stripped versions of the cars, making it easier for customers to build onto the manufacturers basic model. Recently, different model names have been added to price lists of cars, which show their equipment packages and the scope. For example. Volvo has four different equipment levels, which are at different price points listed from the least to the most comprehensive equipping: Kinetic, Momentum, Summum and R-Design (Volvo Cars 2015).

Some of the manufacturers factory equipment are for example anti-lock brakes, stability control system and Isofix brackets. In addition to these, most customers opt for accessories such as a lane keeping support system, a reversing camera, a collision warning system, and an automatic emergency braking system. (Jaala, 2015.) Because of Finland's geographical location, it is nec-

essary to have some winter accessories. This can be a heated windshield and heating system - either a block and interior heater or an auxiliary fuel heater. (Kamux 2021.)

In the decision process, customers can get overwhelmed with the amount of information available. The customer has to compare different options and choose which features they need. This is when a sales representative can be helpful. They should determine all the reasons that the customer is interested in the car. After this, they should provide only the information that the customer needs to decide, in a straightforward manner. The final decision and their attitude towards a product is based either on psychological or rational reasons. (Futrell 2007, 51.)

When the decision about the car they are choosing has been made, the customer and sales representative build the car together and negotiate terms. When this is all done, the car is ordered for the customer from the manufacturer. Delivery for can be different lengths depending on the choice of accessories and color etc. The factory orders can be around 2 weeks to 6 months, but recently due to component shortages, some can be up to 9 months. According to Lahtinen (2018), "With Toyota factory orders, if you go for a factory order, then delivery depends on which factory the car comes from".

The buying process does not end after the car is handed to the customer. Purchase satisfaction comes from receiving benefits that that customer expected or even exceeding them. Sales representatives need to be realistic about the product, which lowers the level of dissonance. Dissonance is the customers thoughts about whether they made the right decision or not. It is important for sales representatives to follow up with customers and get feedback from them. If a customer is satisfied after the purchase, they are more likely to purchase from the company in the future – the key is building a relationship with them. (Futrell 2007, 123.)

The buying purchase for new cars is longer compared to used cars. With used cars, the customers should be quite aware of the cars condition beforehand. Customers often get in contact with a sales representative or approach the company online to get this information. The most important questions are usually about the car's maintenance history, condition of tires and the general condition. (Futrell 2007, 123.)

## **2.4 The digital buying process**

The customer's digital buying process in car sales is similar to the process of buying instore. The digital buying process begins in the chat. A customer visits a company's website, and a chat window pops up on the screen with a greeting. The customer begins their conversation based on the greeting and starts talking with the sales representative. In this the sales representative starts to survey the customers' needs and the reason that they have contacted the company.

When contacting a company, either has no idea what they are looking for, or have found a car, which they want to change to. With the first, they need help of finding the right car for them, so the sales representative must work with the customer to find their needs. With the latter, the customer is certain about their decision and move fast, when they get an offer that is good for them. Customers prefer advantages such as convenience and transparency in online sales but lack parts such as trust or physical experience. (Joas & Nienhaus 2018.)

With using a digital channel to purchase cars, the most important factors to take into consideration are speed, transparency, and expertise (McKinsey 2018). These are factors that should be considered in in-store sales as well but are highlighted in online sales. When customers are doing research, there comes a time where they need more information than what the website can provide. This can be through a company's contact form or by calling one of the sales representatives on the company's website. This means that for example, a chat being open for longer hours than the stores, makes it possible for more customers to contact regarding information or purchase. The importance of this relies on the fact that when a customer is ready to purchase, they will complete the transaction fast. When a customer is contacting a company about wanting an offer or to make a deal about a car, there should be someone available to help them. When customers are ready to purchase, the process should be quite quick since if the process is taking long, customers start to doubt their decisions. In addition to this, customers might have a few options of cars and contact multiple companies at the same time. If a competitor can provide the service quicker, this might lead the customers to purchase from them instead of from you. (McKinsley 2018).

Transparency is important for customers. It implies openness, communication, and accountability. This means that things such as openness about the process of purchasing cars, information about buying products digitally and pricing are important to the customers (McKinsey 2018). An

example of this can be digital tools in which customers can compare financing through the finance calculator on the customers website. In this, all the variables of the calculation of the monthly fee should be explained to the customer. "94 % of all consumers are more likely to be loyal to a brand, when it commits to full transparency, and some said that they would even pay more for a product with full transparency" (Inc Magazine 2020).

Digital tools can help support sales representatives and increase their expertise when communicating with a customer. The technological advancements in car sales enables that information is transferred faster than ever before. Specific computerized decision support systems have been created to help sales representatives. This is a critical part in making it possible for sales representatives to gather leads, gather information, reduce paperwork, report new sales in the company and service customers after a sale. (Futrell 2007, 33.) Digital sales can enhance the process of digital sales-providing customers with information and increasing transparency. This relies on the importance of up-to-date information, improving processes as well as technologies to benefit sales representatives, therefore being able to provide the most accurate information to the customers. (Hauer, Naumann & Harte 2021.)

According to Gomez (2020), the older generation of buyers are retiring, and millennials are moving to key decision-making positions. This means that the digital channel of sales will become a normal way of purchasing product compared to in-store sales. (Gartner, 2020.) Therefore, companies need to cater to these needs and put the processes in place, to be ready for this transformation. Although because of the pandemic, the older generation has moved to have chat sales be an option for when purchasing. Especially with new cars, customers might not need to test drive, so the whole purchase can be done online (Rinta-Jouppi 2021).

## **2.5 Digitalization in automotive sales**

Digitalization refers to integrating and improving digital technologies into business and social processes (Gartner, 2021). Therefore, it improves the processes that are present without transforming them. Digitalization enables more efficient business operations, business growth and new business opportunities (Sen Gupta, 2021).

The internet and online platforms have enabled huge impacts to many areas of business and have driven these to transformation. Through digitalization, there has been an effect on a number of areas including digital sales and marketing. Companies can get specific data to see how customers are affected and the impacts of marketing compared to the amount of money they are spending (Scrive, 2021.)

Digitalization changes a company's and their customer's communication and is necessary for companies to compete with competitors. It helps companies reach their customers in a wider range and creates opportunities in growth. Through digitalization companies can gain a competitive edge. With being able to sell products and services online companies can cater to a larger number of customers without the restraints of geographical or physical location. With digital channels, companies can create a larger amount of direct traffic toward their website (Bluetick 2021). Companies can increase the number of opportunities for generating leads and building relationships with customers.

Although digital channels have been used for promoting products and services for long, the importance of it is being emphasized. Before products were only available to the people that would be able to visit the store in person. Now because products can be seen online, customers are able to find products that they might be interested in without the locational restrictions. Improvements in deliveries enable customers to purchase products straight to their front doors. Furthermore, companies can increase their sales.

People who research digital sales often talk about the disconnect in online sales. Although many people do their research online, far less contact the dealerships through online sources (Joas & Nienhaus 2018). A large automotive dealership recorded over 1,2 million visits from customer for one year. Out of these about a fifth continued with their purchasing process by making a calculation for financial rates. Although the number of potential customers was high, only 1% made a request to be contacted about the purchase of product. This shows the potential of automotive sales in a digital format. With for example, having digital sales as a part of this process, the potential customers online can be turned to buying customers.

Digitalization is a topic that has been discussed on a large scale since it has been current. Next, the advantages and disadvantages of digitalization will be shown for the customer point of view. The main advantages are the possibilities of digital payments, optimization of processes, acces-

sibility of data, increase in productivity and improvements in customer experience. Through digitalization customer can retrieve data through any of their devices, to get the most current information about products and services that a company provides. In addition to this, customers can fill out digital forms for financing decisions, which makes the process faster for customers and sales representatives. The customer experience can improve with the use of digital channels. Through online processes, the companies can analyze the customers digital patterns to provide them with the experiences that are personal and specified to their needs. Furthermore, customers and companies are able to communicate effortlessly in many digital channels. (Empirica 2021.)

The disadvantages of digitalization are that technology eradicates human error, the ease of communication makes it possible to only communicate online and there are increases in information misuse. The risks of information use are that the original use of process gets changed and can lead to customers being skeptical about the institutions and digital media. With technology being used in many companies' processes, information that is available for customers can be misleading. For example, information added to one place is transferred to many places, possibly making it so that customers on the website receive false information. In addition to this, the risks of cybersecurity are always there for customers although companies take serious actions regarding this. (Empirica 2021.)



### **3 CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT**

This chapter of the thesis focuses on customer engagement and how companies can use different approaches to increase it. In addition to this, sales triggers and how these can be used to engage customers are shown.

#### **3.1 Customer engagement for companies**

Customer engagement is the connection between a customer and the brand/company, where a company interacts with their customers and build relationships. Greenberg (2014) claims that customer engagement is defined as the ongoing interactions between company and customer, offered by the company, chosen by the customer. This effectively describes the point behind customer engagement, the company simply gives customers the opportunities for engagement and customers have the choice to engage or not.

Customers engage with companies in four different ways – by buying a company's products or services, by referring the company to other prospects, by influencing other customers online or by providing feedback to the company (Kumar 2013, 4-7). In this case, the customer can be someone, who has not purchased from the company, but someone who has engaged with the company. With customer engagement, companies need to look into the larger scale, engaging with potential customer who can become customers in the future, in the early stages of the relationship.

Customer engagement has a possibility of shortening a customer's buying cycle. When customer engagement is done successfully, customers can be informed and the company has a chance to cater to various audience segments, therefore standing out from competitors (VWO 2021). Customer engagement can be done online on the company's website, as well as on social media platforms, email, and customer service. Basically anything, where a customer can reply or interact with the company itself. With increased customer engagement, companies get more people on their digital channels, people talking about their brand and further increase the number of potential customers.

Through customer engagement, companies can gather information about their current and potential customers. Customer engagement relies on having communication with marketing to increase traffic. The content from marketing should be aimed at the customers and their needs and desires. This gives increases the possible opportunities for them to engage with the company's content, being aware of the company and heightens the possibility of them being a loyal customer in the future. (Service Systems 2020.) With the success of customer engagement, customers can talk about their own experiences and recommend companies, increasing potential customers through communication.

To better customer engagement, companies need to listen to customers. This means that there should be contact with them, feedback, and a follow up with the service the customer received. An example of customer engagement is offering services for customers even after they have bought products. Although the buying cycle for the automotive industry is around 2-5 years, there are ways to engage customers throughout this and lead them to further purchasing from your company. This way after it is time for purchasing a new car, they would gravitate back to the company that they have previously bought from. An example could be providing a service such as informing a customer that it is time for their yearly car maintenance. This way the customers gets value from the company and both benefits. (Futrell 2007, 88.)

A part of customer engagement is building a brand identity. With a distinguishable brand identity, future potential customers will gravitate towards the brand once they know that they want to purchase their products (VVO 2021). The company's potential customers become aware of you brand and usually follow the company on social media and have engaged with their webpage. This is when a company needs to use different channels to provide contents for their interests and the base for future customer relationships in the future (Iterable 2021).

### **3.2 Sales triggers and approaching customers**

An emotional trigger is an occurrence that causes a reaction for someone. It can be used in marketing to emotionally influence the customer. This means that emotional triggers produce responses to events, based on feelings. Emotional triggers, make the customer to act first and think later. (Goodman & Helin 2009.) Emotional or psychological reasons can influence customers

decision making. For example, the desire of owning a car that is luxury can influence customers to purchase a Mercedes Benz (Futrell 2007, 86).

Getting a customer's attention on the website can be difficult. The process of getting the customer to engage with the content on your website and getting the customer to react is the challenge for most companies. The chat opening to customers can be compared to pop-up advertising. The chat being available for the customer should offer value to the customer. Value is defined in this context as the perception of what a product or service is worth to a customer versus the possible alternatives (Merriam-Webster 2021.) The importance is in what kind of value you can provide to the customer. Referring to this, the chat should be a place where you can provide a customer with extra value, by for example, being able to help them find a specific car. Chat pop-ups are effective because they cannot be ignored by customers. This means that the customer has a choice to either engage or close the opened chat window. When the chat pops up, there should be something that a customer gains value from, so they are more likely to engage. "Ultimately, the reason that a pop-up is effective is because it delivers relevant value when the website visitor wants it" (Wordsteam 2021).

To engage customers on the company's website several efforts can be taken. These are some ways customers can increase customer engagement:

1. Increase the clarity of your offer
2. Increase the relevancy of your offer to your audience
3. Improve your value proposition
4. Reduce anxiety
5. Add urgency to your offer

Firstly, increasing the clarity of your offer can be a relevant way in the steps of getting a customer engage. This is a process of getting feedback from your customers, to be able to make changes for the future. This way the wording behind approaches can be made more specific. For example, changing a few words to make the line more approachable. Secondly increasing the relevancy of your offer to the audience is important. The choice can be between tailoring your offer to your audience or tailoring your audience to your offer. This can be done by using analytics to specify from where the traffic is coming to the company's website. Thirdly, is to improve your value proposition. Value proposition is defined as the value a company promises to deliver to customers should they choose to purchase their product or service (Investopedia 2021). It can be a strong

headline and should communicate to the customer the benefits of the product. It does not necessarily mean that more products should be added to the offer, but that the customer gets the most from the product or service provided. If the value of products exceeds a certain point, there is an increased amount of associated effort for each customer to be able to extract the value. For example, this means not giving the customer an offer that they think they need with lots of unnecessary products but providing them the ones that are useful. This also means that it should be specified the relevance of an offer, the specific benefits (value) and why they should purchase from you and not a competitor (differentiation). Fourthly, reducing customers' anxiety, in a way increasing their trust in the company. More often than not, customers usually have anxiety when purchasing products, which usually relies on the logical and emotional brains having a dilemma. For digital sales, it is important to have a website be secure, easily approachable and have all the necessary information. For example, having a frequently asked questions section for customers on the website, where they can get more information about the process of purchasing a car online and promoting the 14-day return policy, so that customers can purchase the car can reduce purchasing anxiety. (Taylor 2019).

The final element of this list is increased urgency. All the four points that have been listed before are precursors to make urgency an effective means to increase customer engagement. Here is either real or implied urgency. Real urgency is for example having an offer which, expires after a specific time and usually more effective for customers. Implied urgency on the other hand is using words like "now" or "today" to try and make the customer engage and act now. Urgency can be divided into quantity limitations, time limitations and contextual limitations. For example, in automotive sales, there can be quantity limitations "A limited amount of people get 1000 € extra on their used car in exchange", time limitations "Campaign ends this Sunday" and contextual limitations "Get a new keychain when purchasing a car". (Taylor 2019).

Customers will interact with companies that have rewards or benefits. "Various financial stimuli may increase customers' participation in online brand communities and encourage their engagement" (Stepankov 2015). A way to get customers to engage with the company is to make limited time offers to customers. For example, day or week specific campaign could be effective for companies to make, to get customers to make a decision or at least start the buying process. In addition to this, brand-related events can be a good way to connect with customers and make them aware of a company's products and services. A customer should identify and feel connected with

a brand. With events that showcase products, the company provides customers with an opportunity to communicate and engage further. (Stepankov 2015.)

Trigger words are the words and phrases that trigger a user to click a website or post. For example, a customer on is looking for “pricing” and they find the company’s link including “pricing”, they will click on it. If people can’t find what they are looking for, they can leave to a competitor’s website. In automotive sales there are a lot of competitors for the case company, customers will spend time browsing on multiple websites. This means, that the same trigger words as competitors should be used, because customers might subconsciously be searching for these specific ones. (Taylor 2019.)

The specific types of pop-up or triggers on the company’s website should be linear to their brand image. A brand is defined as the accumulation of emotional and functional association. It is a name, term or other feature that identifies a company’s products and the way these are perceived by the customer. Customers identify brands and recognize them when making purchasing decisions. Brand image is defined as the view that a customer has about a brand, the associations that customers make and the perception they have of the company’s products. For example, the Volvo brand image is associated with safety and Toyota is associated with reliability. This means that the customers are not only purchasing the product or service from the company but also purchasing the image that the brand is associated with it. In these triggers, the brand image should be showcased and should include things such as products appeal, functionality, overall value etc. (Management Study Guide 2021.)

There are ways to make the chat an easily accessible and engageable channel for customers. Using colors is a way to capture the attention of a customers, having something that stands out can draw their eyes to it. For example, contrasting from the lightness of the page with something more vibrant or a little darker to stand out. Although you want to engage with customers, the chat should not be interruptive to the user experience that the customer is having on the website and balance is key. If the chat pops up too many times, it can disrupt the customers buying process. When customers use mobile devices, the chat should be tap-friendly. There should be defined buttons for entering and exiting the chat as well as a clear message with the pop-up. (Lorincz 2021.)

## 4 DIGITAL SALES AND MARKETING

This chapter of the thesis focuses on digital sales and the communication in the digital channel. The difference in communication in-store compared to the process in the chat is shown as well as the importance of functions in the chat channel.

### 4.1 Digital Sales

“Sales is a transaction between two or even more parties in which the buyer receives tangible or intangible goods, services or assets in exchange for money” (Investopedia 2015). In short, it is a contract between a buyer and a seller about a good or service. Digital sales is sales that happens through digital channels. It involves the use virtual channels to find potential customer, provide information and offer solutions for customers.

These days photos and descriptions of cars are available on companies' websites, customers can browse these and find products that suit their needs. This is where companies need to find ways of catching their attention by communicating in such a way that they would when they come to the physical store. With digital sales, customers can search a wider variety of different products, therefore being able to find the one that is the best choice for them and their needs.

In-store sales locations usually have specific opening hours for example from 09:00-18:00. With digital sales the opening hours can be decided in a way that is more accessible to customers. For example, opening times from 08:00-21:00, leaving more opportunities for leads to digital sales representatives. With digital sales, online tools allow an individual digital seller to have multiple conversations with customers at the same time (Wetteri Oy 2021). According to Korpela (2021), the demand for chat is growing especially for people that have busy schedules or work shift. The hours of opening might not normally be optimal and for people looking to purchase a car from a different city, the chat can be a good place to make the first contact.

According to Jarmo Rinta-Jouppi Oy (2021), the pandemic has moved the older customers to online sales, leading them to trust the internet sales channels for communication. Right now, customers are purchasing cars often through online channels, completely completing the order

online (Jarmo Rinta-Jouppi Oy 2021). The Finnish market has potential for digital sales and retailers. Jarmo Rinta-Jouppi has specific information to compare to this since they have been operating in digital sales since 2017.

Although digital sales is quite a new concept, it is slowly increasing and becoming a more used channel and other companies in this field have been using it for years. According to Smile (2021), a medium sized car dealership has about 500 conversations with customers online every month. Out of these, about 20 % of the chats lead to hot leads, in which customers ask questions about a specific car, give the information of their car or their contact information to talk further.

Out of these leads, about 70 % lead to customers getting an offer from the sales representative. This means that there is about 70 opportunities in a month to get sales. Statistics from Rinta-Jouppi's (2021), show that there is about a 30 % conversion from these offers. This means that with the number of outbound messages sent to customers, about 1/3 of these lead to sales through the digital sales channel.

Digital sales have changed customer behavior. According to Happiest Minds (2021), more than 92 % of all car purchases begin online and when doing so, the customers visit an average of three dealerships sites. This means that with digital sales, potential customers can bid between dealerships to get the best offer for the car they are purchasing, the car they are exchanging or for the offer as a whole. When competing with other companies, equipment levels and bringing out the best features of the cars can make the potential customers turn into customers.

## **4.2 Marketing**

"Today, marketing must be understood not in the old sense of making a sale – 'telling and selling' – but in the new sense of satisfying customer needs" (Kotler et al. 2016, 5). The goal of marketing is to attract new customer by promising value and maintaining customer relationships (Kotler 2016, 29.) In most companies, the sales and marketing teams are seen as two separate teams, but the importance of the relationship between these needs to be emphasized.

"Multichannel marketing is a marketing strategy based around the idea that customers are more likely to buy when they use their favorite channel" (Livechat 2020). These channels can include

the company's website, social media, chat, email, and catalogs etc. This relies on the fact that a company has a consistent brand story and customers can move between channels, having the format be the same. By being consistent, the customers are more likely to make purchases since they have different ways of connecting with the company and sales representatives. In addition to this, customers want to be aware that there is a person behind the chat and not a robot, making it possible for customer to approach the situation like they would when visiting the company in-store. This means, that in the digital channels and marketing for example, it should be emphasized who the team of sales representatives is and contact information should be provided.

### **4.3 Communication in sales**

Communication is defined as a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through common system of symbols, sign, and behavior (Merriam Webster, 2021). "It is the act of transmitting verbal and nonverbal information and understanding between seller and buyer" (Futrell 2007, 122). Salespeople need effective communication to reach their desired impact on customers, and therefore close sales deals for the company.

With the case company having a chat available on the website and a digital sales team working in this channel, the focus should be on interaction with customers. When we find ways to engage with people on the website, the same type of customer service can be provided as customers would when they come straight to the store to visit. In-store communication happens face to face, with a combination of verbal, vocal and facial messages. Verbal and nonverbal communication combined makes it possible for the sales representative to get the message across. Two-way communication is essential for a sales representative and buyer to communicate effectively. This also enables for the sales representative to present the product, its benefits, receive feedback from the customer and answer questions. (Futrell 2007, 123.)

Nonverbal communication is used in person and is an important part of the total communication process. This begins with a handshake between the two (or more) people in the situation. A salesperson should be able to make observations about the customers body language. These can be acceptance signals, caution signals or disagreement signals. Whereas smiling and giving the sales representative can signal to acceptance, being tense and little eye contact can signal disagreement. (Futrell 2007, 129-131.) With the chat conversation, the communication can only



be verbal, so this needs to be effective. The same steps in the communication should be applied to written conversation beginning with the first contact and greeting the customer, the most important part being reacting to them being there.

A significant part after the initial contact with customers is to determine their buying needs. When determining the customers needs, you need get an idea of what are the most important preferences for them. With this, the sales representative can provide them with the ones that match their needs. A way of determining needs is using the acronym LOCATE. This acronym stands for listen, observe, combine, ask questions, talk to others and empathize. The sales representative needs to listen to how the customer is responding to the topics they are discussing seeing if the customer is giving indication of something they are interested in, asking questions that might get them to gravitate towards something that would be a need for them as well as look at the situation in the customers perspective. This can be done by asking questions about for example their family to determine if they have needs for a bigger family car or if a smaller city car is sufficient for their situation. (Futrell 2007, 91.) This is the key to helping them and being able to find the real reasons for wanting a specific product. With these methods, the sales representative is able to find cars that might be potential options for the customer and are able to highlight the products benefits for the customer. "Selling is about determining needs and skillfully relating your product's benefits to show how it's purchase will fulfill the customers' need" (Futrell 2007, 92).

When selling to a customer, truthful conversation is the key. Often when talking to a sales representative, customers might not tell them what their actual feelings towards a car you are offering are. When beginning to close the sale, if the answer is no or an unsure response, the sales representative has not found the real reason why the customer says no (Futrell 2007, 92). The trial close, is a way of uncovering the customers need and selling them the right products. It is used to check the customers attitude toward the presentation that the sales representative has made. The object of the trial close is to find out their opinion and then being able to decide if you want to move forward or change the direction. This can be through questions such as: "How does that sound to you?", "Are these the features that you are looking for", "That's great – isn't it?" and "It appears that you have a preference for this model. Is this what you had in mind?". This should be lead in way that gives the customer the option to respond positively, being backed up by the benefits that the sales representative has described. One way to incorporate this is by using the SELL sequence, so that you show the feature, explain the advantages, lead into the benefit, and then let the customer talk by asking a question about the benefit. (Futrell 2007, 93.) For example:

A customer needing to purchase a car: This car has is a hybrid [feature], which means that you can drive about 100km before having to use gas [advantages]. The real benefit being that you can charge it at home, so it is cost effective and saves you money [benefit!]. That's what you are interested in – right [trial close]? The trial close asks for the customers opinion, it is a trial question, to determine if it is the right time to close the sales. Thus, the main point, is to get feedback from the customers, towards your observations of their needs.

#### **4.3.1 Written chat communication**

It is important to look into written chat communication to find effective ways of communicating in the chat. Written communication is defined as a communication tool where the message is formal. It is the most reliable method of communication and is popular in the business world due to it's formal and sophisticated nature. Written communication is used for letters, email, newspapers, SMS, reports etc. It is used because it is easy to refer to in the future, it can be edited, the message is usually clear and has minimal risk of misinterpretation. Oral communication is defined as the process of transmitting or receiving messages using spoken word. Comparing written and oral communication, oral communication is more informal and used in personal conversation and group communication. (Futrell 2007, 121.)

Phone calls are the next step after discussion in the chat, but this should be discussed in the chat beforehand. When making a calling appointment with a customer, the sales representative should always ask if a specific time is suitable for them. "Would 09:00 work for you tomorrow morning?", this way the customer is able to respond if the time is suitable, if not they can suggest a different time. (Futrell 2007, 219). The person calling should plan out what they are going to say and be prepared for the call.

#### **4.3.2 Chat as a digital sales channel**

Chat is one of the most important functions that a company's website can have. It is the channel that is the most easily accessible for customers. Although chats have been apart of websites for long, companies have been forced to digitalize customers' needs and communication through this platform will continue to be important. (Cha 2020.) Customers and company buyers estimate that

about 60% of their interactions with companies will be online in 2021, which is 42 % higher than in 2019. In addition to this, 32 % of customers said they use chat, which is 67 % higher than those, who were using chat as a channel in 2018. (Salesforce 2020.) The chat can be used to understand, empathize, and engage with customers, in a way that is similar to the way that they would when they come to visit the store in person. The object of chat conversation is to help customers, analyse their situation and needs as well as get their contact information to further discuss the topic. Customers who contact the digital sales representatives can be described as hot leads because they have showed interest towards the company, a specific car and have made the effort to contact the sales representative.

Using chat makes it possible for customers to get their needs addressed effectively and quickly, with also being able to give high quality service (Cha 2020). Customers may have questions when browsing a company's website and looking at car options. These customers want to choose the option of communication which is most convenient for them, and chat can be an option for them. With the chat companies can get the customers contact information or answer their questions immediately, which increases customer loyalty as well as the possibility of increased sales conversion.

Livechats, chatbots and other messaging apps enable companies to have conversations with customers online. "Any form of two-way communication, like phone and email, can be apart of conversational marketing strategy" (Giosg 2021). The chat should be used as the earliest part of the company's sales process. When the customer lands on your website and decides your company to be the one they want to engage with and this is an opportunity that should be used.

Although chat is usually used for the beginning of the conversation, the chat is not often used to complete the whole purchase. The sales representative needs to contact the customer through other means to create a personalized experience. This can be through either phone call or email, where you can talk with the customer and find out their actual needs as well as when completing the purchase exchange personal information (McKinsey 2018). Figure 2 represent the sales process in online sales. This means that the beginning parts of prospect, qualify and analyse should be done in the chat conversation. After this, the sales representative can move the conversation to some other channel of communication for proposal, negotiation and closing.

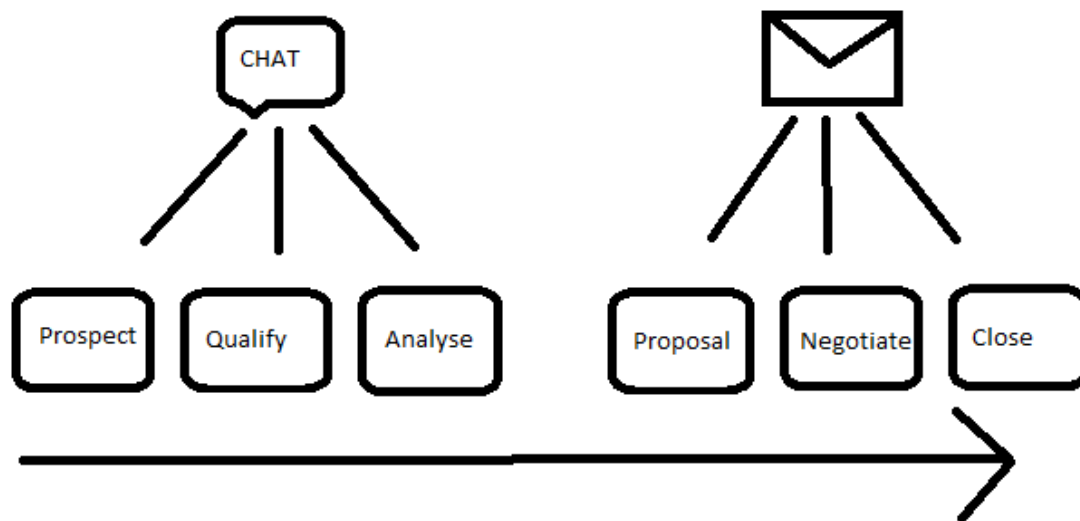


FIGURE 2. The Sales Process in online sales. Cited 13.11.2021.

Customers often know which car they want to purchase, when contacting through chat, so it is an easy way for them to get additional information, answers to their questions as well as get an offer for the car straight to their email (Iiskonmäki 2021). Having actual people in the chat, instead of robots, is a vital part of the chat experience. This way the company can provide the customer with the correct information and recommendations like they would when a customer steps into the store. Because it should be the same kind of interaction they would have in-store, real people can provide customers with offers and have the same type of negotiation in the chat platform, which a robot cannot provide (Korpela 2021.) Buying through the chat is easy and risk-free for customers since, when selling products online, all companies must follow a 14 – day return policy, written in the legislation. This means that the customer can return the product within 14 days if it is not how they have presumed. These give customers better terms than when purchasing in-store. This applies to all car that have been purchased for private use, either purchased in cash or in installments. The difference in legislation comes from the fact that a customer in-store can test drive the car and see for themselves the condition. (Wetteri 2021.)

When communicating in the chat the sales representative should talk as a way that is relatively informal, within the limits of the company's boundaries. People want to talk to real sales representatives and informality gives a better representation of talking to a person, comparing to the same kind of experience you would in-store. The aim when chatting is to get the information out in a short and simple way. The chat should be about one or two sentences long, to keep the cus-

tomers from not getting overwhelmed with information. In addition to these, multiple messages back-to-back can make the situation unnatural since that would not be the same kind of conversation as in-store. (Vaughan 2020.)

When connecting with customers through chat, the company needs to be able to target the right people. The target should be in interacting with people that are interested in the products the company offers. This can be for example, actively trying to contact people who have viewed 3 + pages on the website (Livechat 2020). With customers, the average time visited on pages should be taken into consideration. If a customer has been on the page for a long time or if they have been switching between different options, it is the correct time to engage with them and ask if they need help. This should begin from somewhere and with adding tags, the data can be analyzed, and the company is able to see which approaches are working.

The chat available can be integrated with other channels, to offer the easiest way to connect and engage with customers. Some of these include Microsoft Dynamics 365, Salesforce, Messenger, WhatsApp etc. The chat that is being used has over 1200 + companies using it to target customers. In addition to integrations, the final product on the company's website can be optimized to get the desired result. There are ways through which the chat can proactively trigger actions in the chat or other integrations, automating the customer interactions. Targeting according to customer intent, customizing for campaigns, and using trigger offers to convert hesitant visitors. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the chat also has AI-powered targeting available. This can provide the most valuable visitors through behaviors and therefore target them. It analyses the visitors on the webpage, predicts their behavior through previous data and targets them with the correct interactions. Network allows the chat of your company to be on the website of the partners regarding your products. (Giosg 2021.) For example, the cars that are on our website, are also available on nettiauto.fi, so customers are connected straight to the correct sales representatives, and they can provide the most accurate information quickly.

## 5 RESEARCH METHODS

In this chapter, the methods to answer the research question is introduced. In addition to this, the process of gathering information, the research methods and the data collection will be explained. The research strategy is a process method for preparing behaviour, which drives efforts and proposals. It makes it possible for the study to be performed systematically.

The target group for our research will be the customers on our website. The research was made to find out how the differences in our targeted messages in the chat correspond to the engagement of customers. During the research process, the case company changed their chat provider. This meant that instead of comparing two weeks and changing approaches, we analysed the difference between the two chat providers by using the same three approaches. We took one week from the previous operator and compared it to a week with the new operator. We have three different targeted messages in the chat, which will be referred to as message 1, message 2 and message 3. The messages will be kept anonymous due to the risk of competitors being able to use the data we have gathered. These messages were chosen because the case company was interested in having three different kinds of approaches to see which ones would have the highest conversion as well as provide the customers with value.

The two chat providers that we had in the research portion of the thesis are both valid companies but have different approaches to the case company's chat. Both chat providers are platforms for customer communication and messaging online in the digital channel. With both chat providers, we had automated customer integrations, and these were targeting customers at specific times. These were dependent on for example, how long the customer was on the website, the number of times cars that customers had browsed, the brand of car that they were looking at as well as if they left the website and returned. Although chat provider 1 targeted their messages, the targeted messages were sent to almost all the customers at a specific pace. Chat provider 2 targets the customers on the website more specifically making sure they are approached at the correct time.

Data collection is performed to conduct the empirical research. For this thesis, a quantitative research method was used to collect data from the case company's previous and current chat operators. Quantitative data is numerical data which can be expressed numbers and graphs. The quantitative data was focused on the amount of greeting sent, the number of chats and the con-

version from these. This method was chosen because the gathered data can be taken from the reports of both chat providers. The focus was further chosen, looking into the differences between the chat providers. We decided to analyse which messages customers engaged with and if there was a difference in conversion. The research was conducted over the course of two weeks (25.11-5.12.2021), one week with the previous chat provider (chat provider 1) and the next with the new chat provider (chat provider 2). This way we were able to gather the same type of data from both chat providers and compare the changes.

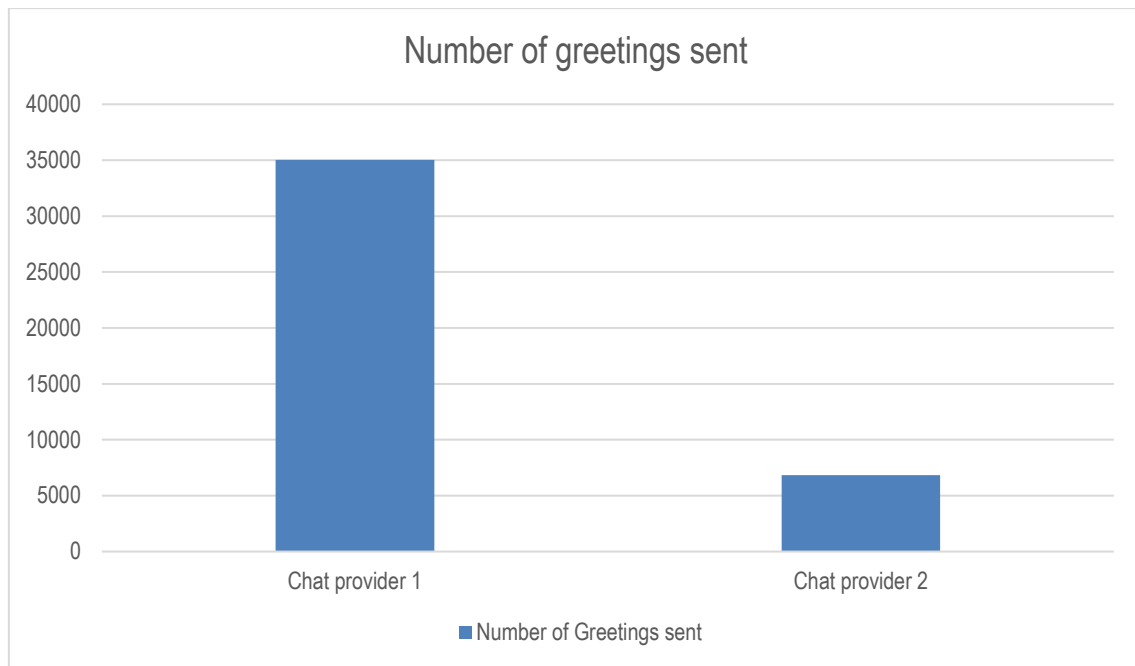
## 6 DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

This chapter shows the process of analysing the collected data by using the theory from the theoretical framework. The results from the data collected will be analysed and the commissioner will be able to optimize their approach to customer engagement from the results.

The data was collected from the results of our previous and current chat operator. Both these chats had the same three types of messages being sent, to engage customers: message 1, message 2 and message 3. This data was collected in a two-week period, with the first week being with Chat provider 1 and the next week with Chat provider 2.

With both chat operators, we had fully automated our outbound messages. Figure 3 shows that both operators had a decent number of messages being sent to customers on our website. Chat provider 1 had a total of 35,109 outbound messages being sent during the week. Chat provider 2 had a total of 6,831 outbound messages being sent during the week. Although chat provider 1 had more chats being sent, through this we realised that there were too many outbound messages sent to customer during the period and we received a negative chat replies to these messages. This indicates that the number of chats sent not being the key factor in engaging customers, but the correct message being targeted to the right person being important. Figure 3 shows the number of messages sent to customers on our website divided into those sent with chat provider 1 and chat provider 2.





*FIGURE 3.* Number of greetings sent comparing chat provider 1 and 2

There are three different targeted messages that are sent to customers. These will be discussed as message 1, message 2 and message 3. These are sent to the customer at different times on the website depending on what they are searching for. Message 1 can be described as an opening which allows the sales representative to help the customer. If the customer is interested in getting information they can engage with this message. Message 2 gives the customer additional value and with this they can ask for example, for an offer etc. Message 3 gives the customer even more value from the digital sales representatives but is something that a customer just browsing on our website can search for. The three messages are quite basic and formal, these are good starting points in improving customer engagement.

Now we will focus on the actual conversations that we were able to have from these outbound messages. We will be focusing on the conversion from the chats. Conversion is defined as an action taken by a website visitor, that is considered profitable for the website's owner. In this case, this means that when a customer engages with one of the messages on our website. With chat provider 1 the outbound messages to customers lead to 163 conversations with customers. This means that from these 35,109 messages being sent, there was a 0,47 % conversion. With chat provider 2 the outbound messages to customers lead to 55 conversations with customers. This means that from these 6,831 messages being sent, there was a 0.60% conversion. This means that even though the chat provider 2 sent less outbound messages to customers on the

website, the conversion was better compared to the ones of chat provider 1. From this we can draw the conclusion that with chat provider 2, there is a significant increase in customer engagement. Figure 4 shows how the number of messages sent, number of conversations and the conversion comparing those from chat provider 1 and chat provider 2.

	Chat provider 1	Chat provider 2
Number of messages sent (outbound)	35,109	6831
Number of conversations	163	55
Conversion	0,47 %	0,60 %

*FIGURE 4.* The number of messages, conversations and conversion comparing chat provider 1 and 2.

Looking into the distribution of the chats during the weeks, with both operators the number of chats was quite evenly divided during the week. Comparing to the chats per day from chat provider 1 and chat provider 2, the number of chats per day decreased towards the end of the week. This means that the change in operators did not affect the distributions of chats per day. With both operators the start of the week was the most active and on Thursdays were the days with the least number of chats. With this, it would indicate that increasing the number of outbound messages towards the end of the week and in the afternoon might increase opportunities for sale. The following figure show the similarities between the distribution of chat throughout the week with figure 5 showing the chat provider 1 and figure 6 showing the chat provider 2.

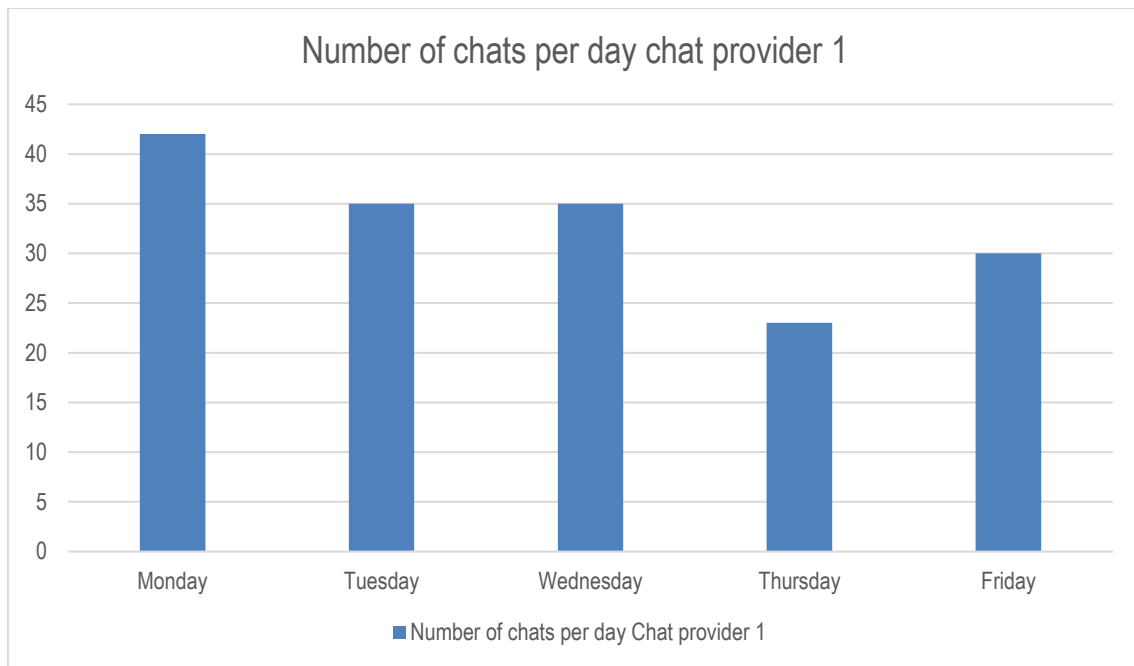


FIGURE 5. The number of chats per day with chat provider 1.

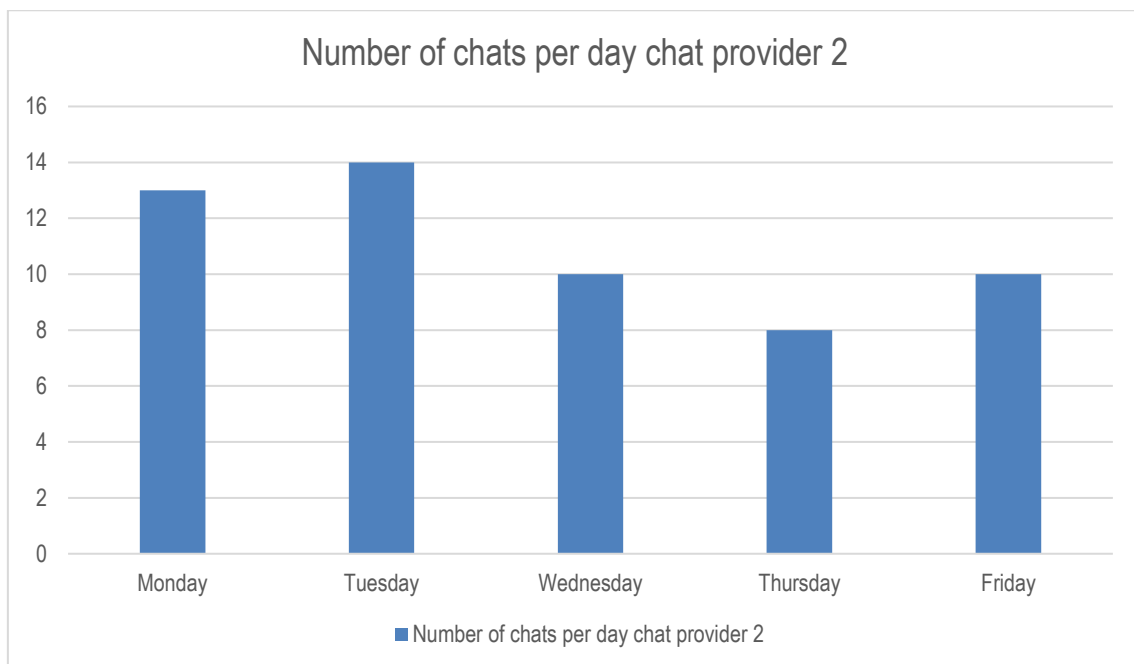


FIGURE 6. The number of chats per day with chat provider 2.

As previously described, we have three different messages on our website automatically targeted towards the customers. With chat provider 1, we had all these three messages sent to the customer. Although all of these were sent to customers, around 94% of customer responded to message 3. This means that with the only message that engaged customers with chat provider 1 was the message 3. With chat provider 2, the three same targeted messages were sent to customers.

With this the customer engagement to messages was divided more evenly between the three messages. With message 1, customers began 17 chats with our digital sales representatives. With message 2, customers also began 17 chats with our digital sales representatives. And with message 3, customers began 21 chats with our sales representatives. Figure 7 shows the division of chat per message with chat provider 2.

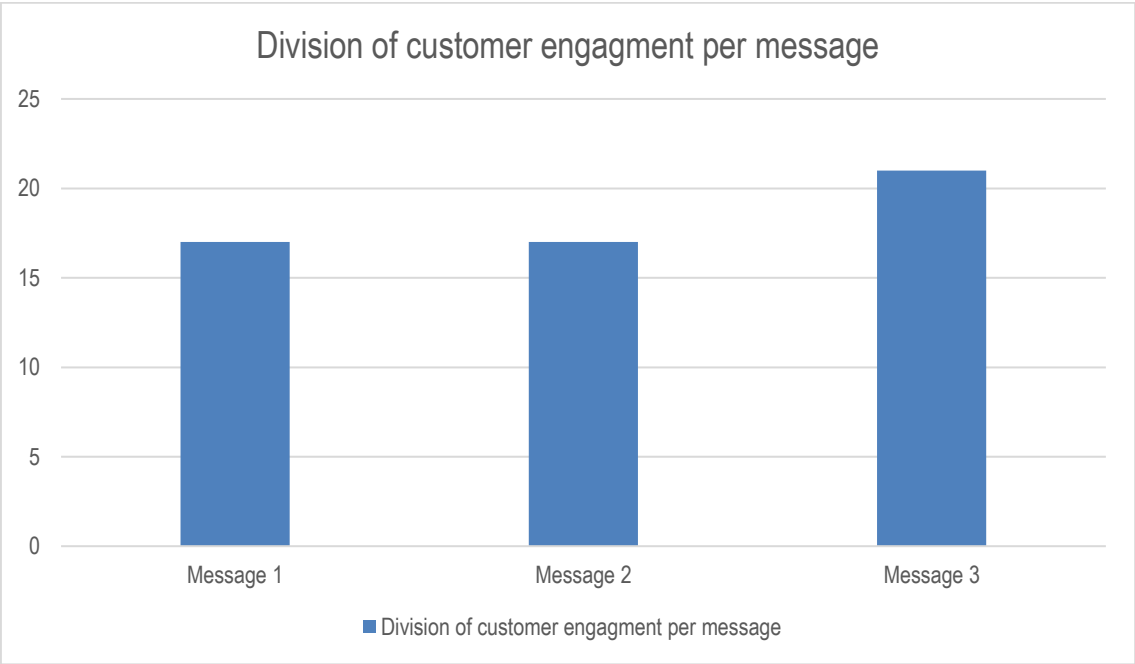


FIGURE 7. The division of customer engagement depending on message.

Although message 3 was still the most popular to engage with, message 1 and message 2 still received engagement from customers. This indicates that with chat provider 2, the messages sent to customers are targeted more accurately, so that customers receive the message at the correct time. This means that customers engage at the right time, instead of just responding to message 3. With message 3 being so broad and approachable, even customers not looking for cars can respond to it, meaning that the people engaging with it might not provide the sales representatives with as many hot leads as with message 1 and message 2. Message 3 also does not show in which part of the buying process the customer is in, because anyone can respond to this.

With chat providers 2, there was more specific data about the number of messages sent to customers and the engagement to these which will be shown by the conversion. With message 1, 2,289 outbound messages were sent to customers. From these there were 17 chats with the

digital sales representatives. This is a 0,74 % conversion. With message 2, 2,225 outbound messages were sent to customers. From these there were 17 conversations with our digital representatives. This is a 0,765 % conversion. With message 3, 2,317 outbound messages sent to customers. From these there were 21 chats with the digital sales representatives. This is a 0,93% conversion. Figure 8 shows what the number of messages and the conversion it corresponds to.

	Message 1	Message 2	Message 3
Number of chats	17	17	21
Conversion	0,74 %	0,765 %	0,93 %

*FIGURE 8.* The average conversation depending on message.

Although, it would be easy to assume that if with chat provider 2 we sent the same number of outbound messages to receive more chats, it is not comparable. Because the number of chats with chat provider 2 is targeted through data, increasing the number of chats might not work because customers would not engage with the messages the same way. Having the messages be sent to customers that might not need them at that time, can make the customers overwhelmed and lead to a larger number of negative chats. Although, the number of chats from in the evening from 16:00-21:00 is lower than those received in the day 08:00-16:00, increasing targeted messages during this time can increase chats during the evening, until there is a better way to engage customers.

## 7 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In the previous chapter, the data collected, and the analysis was presented. The theoretical framework was applied to practice as well as the methods used. In this chapter, the conclusion of the thesis is represented as well as recommendation for the case company are made. In addition to this, the reliability and validity of these results as well as the reflection in the learning process is discussed.

The aim of the thesis, according to the research question, was to focus on the commissioner's digital sales channel and the customer engagement aspect. The objective was to look into the customer engagement in the chat on the case company's website. The research question and sub-questions provided me with a structure to follow and research the topics that were necessary to digital sales. We followed the customer's buying process throughout the thesis, focusing on the customers buying process, buying process in automotive sales, and buying process in digital sales.

The goal itself was to deepen my understanding of digital sales and communication in the chat channel. In my opinion, the work was successful, and the goals set were met. The plan I had set was accurate, although it should have been planned to have more time to work on the thesis according to my deadline of wanting to graduate by December 2021. The thesis process served as a good learning process for me. With a big project like the thesis, I had to work on my time management and challenge myself to work independently. I noticed the challenges in my own work and was able to make changes in my approaches, both in terms of working and scheduling it. I started looking into this topic when I began working in digital sales in the spring of 2021. With writing about the digital sales process and customer engagement, I learned more about the process in general as well as got insights into communicating with customers and surveying their needs. This topic was significant for my professional development because I will be able to use the information that I have gathered in my work. With having work experience in the field, it gave insight into the topic but furthermore, I was able to look at the topic in a different way due to the theoretical framework and addition information.

Although the process of writing the thesis was uncomplicated, finding information for the theoretical part was quite difficult. The due to the changes in digital sales and being able find the most

accurate information, most of the sources that were used were digital. This meant that it had to be looked at objectively and with an amount of source criticism. The process itself was complicated by a change in chat provider in the middle of the writing process. Although this was sudden, it allowed me to make changes to the research part of my thesis and provide more current information. We were able to compare the chat providers and the data that we gathered from the targeted messages. From this, we could tell that changing to chat provider 2 was effective in engaging customers and improving the quality of chats. In addition to this, when looking into the conversion we can see that this has significantly increased.

The topic of customer engagement and how it can be developed in the chat communication was researched. With customer engagement, we found that we need to give the customer the opportunities to engage with us and keep them informed. This need to be done in many different channels meanwhile keeping the same brand image. Things such as increasing the clarity of the offer, increasing the relevancy of your offer, improving value proposition, reducing customer anxiety, and adding urgency to the offer can increase customer engagement.

We compared the sales process in-store to the process in the digital channel. It was found that the process is quite similar, and the same steps should be followed in the digital sales process. Steps such as greeting the customer quickly, seeing what their needs are and further discussing the options that would be optimal for them. With in-store communication there is the possibility of nonverbal communication that cannot be achieved in the digital sales channel. Because of this, we need to focus on the written communication being as effective as possible.

In the theoretical background we research sales triggers and their possible improvements in customer engagement. From this we found out, that trigger words or phrases can help customers engage. Using the same type of words and phrases as competitors makes it possible for customers to find information in our website as well. In addition to this, using color or personalized messages can improve customer engagement. For example, the case company can look into contrasting from the lightness of the page with more vibrant colors that stand out, but still making sure that it goes with the brand image.

In terms of recommendations for the future, this topic of customer engagement in the digital chat channel should be further analyzed. In the beginning, it was hoped that we could further test the different approaches and see which one of the messages lead to quality chats. Further research

and analysis can validate the results and show how accurate the gathered data from the two-week period is. There are many different aspects that influence digital sales including the stock size and need of integrated systems. The stock size affects the sales process, because we are unable to provide customers with a car that matches their needs perfectly. In addition to this, the importance of having systems that are integrated with the sales process increases, so that sales representative can provide customers with information quickly and efficiently. This means that together with maintenance, used car inspection and other sales representatives, we can make the information about the cars in our storage more accessible. For example, information about the car tires and maintenance history is asked about when making offers to customers, so this information should be available for each car. Furthermore, in terms of customer engagement, the aspect of sales triggers and creating urgency to the customer can be factors to take into consideration when continuing experimenting with the messages sent to customers.



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