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MARKETING RESEARCH FOR POLUNMUTKA OY – BUILDING
VALUE-BASED CO-OPERATION

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Abstract

Small- and medium-sized companies are always on the edge of finding innovative ways to improve their services and customer experiences. Polunmutka Oy provides private, personally customizable service for home dwelling elderly. This thesis was conducted to develop providers' services and provide potential for new market entry and build value-based business operations. The thesis aim was to form theoretical bases for a marketing mix in the presented form of the 4Ps model. A marketing mix was suited to meet providers' needs to enter business to business and business to government market segments.

The research methods consist of mixed methods. This includes a survey to receive field information from the target market about desired services and aspects that affect the choices of the service providers. This shines light on the business purchase behavior and the business buying process. International benchmarking was used to give a broader range of scope in service design and development. This compliments the survey by providing an innovative approach to form the marketing mix for the provider.

The research results yield the strategy bases for a new marketing mix. In addition, the research gives means to expand the providers' operations and ways to build innovative value-based co-operation in the operation area.

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Marketing research, Marketing mix, Benchmarking, B2B and B2G market entry

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Appendix 1 Marketing research survey for Polunmutka Oy in Finnish

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1 INTRODUCTION

Aging of the population is widely addressed in Europe, and shift from the older generations in the working life has considerable impacts from an economic standpoint. The demand of services for elderly people is rising higher each year, and for this reason companies are creating more innovative ways to provide goods and services for the rising demand, as a Global Coalition on Aging (2018) report states. To fulfil such demand, a family company Polunmutka Oy was found in the year 2020. The company is located in Eastern Finland, and it provides personally customizable home delivered assistance services for the home-dwelling elderly people. The service consists of personalized assistance during the customers' daily activities, shopping, chores, cleaning and providing customers meaningful experiences, such as musical performances and live theater and movie theater visits for, example. The purpose of the service is to help the elderly to get involved and be active in society by respecting their limits and interests. Even though Polunmutka Oy targets mainly the business to customers market it is notable to consider the business to business or business to government market potential. The company belongs to the supporters of the home care service provides register. This aids the company in providing services for those people belonging to home care services in the Joensuu area. The provider also has acquired the necessary documents and contract papers in order to provide its services through governmental institutes.

The purpose of this thesis is to gather information through a survey of business to business and business to government customers regarding the target market need for the service. To support the survey elements, benchmarking is used to find international academic research data according to the subject and providers' interests. This mixed method is utilized to gain a better understanding of which kind of elements in an international perspective are being used and to gain a competitive advantage from business to business and business to government sectors. The chosen methods suit Polunmutka Oy, because as a micro-sized company it needs to establish a stable income and customer base and cooperate with different partners and find innovative ways to avoid the growing competition within the field.

1.1 Aim of the thesis

The aim of this bachelor's thesis is to discover the possibilities of introducing Polunmutka Oy to the business to business and business to government markets in its operating area, which covers the Joensuu Municipality, the city center area of Joensuu, as well as the towns of Eno, Kiihtelysvaara, Tuupovaara Pyhäselkä and Kontiolahti. Within Polunmutka's operation area there are in total 26 potential nursing and care homes and home care units. Many of the nursing homes are owned by the public health care group in Eastern Finland called Siun Sote, which provides healthcare, nursing, and home care services for the Eastern Finland area. The operation area also consists of several privately owned nursing homes which are a part of the potential target group. Before diving deeper into the topic at hand, one must define the development task to define the problem that forms the core of the research.

The thesis problem of entering the different market segments, again in this case business to business and business to government segments, requires in-depth knowledge that one must be able to form a corresponding marketing mix to reach optimal results. The reason why the provider has chosen the development task comes from the need to forming the bases to enter the business to business and business to government segments. The provider currently serves only consumer customers. Thus, increasing market segment would provide possibilities for development opportunities and increasing the growth of the business activities. In addition, to improve the providers' already existing services and further prepare them to meet the demands of the target market, the international research of the given development task at hand should one provide solid foundation to provide more in-depth solutions for the Polunmutka Oy's development task.

Polunmutka Oy has named following development task of the thesis to carry out the foundation of the theoretical bases of an effective marketing mix which is represented in the form of a 4P model. Thus, the model is constructed in order to provide a strategy to give means to the company's target market. In addition to the marketing mix, international benchmarking research is conducted to improve the Company's already existing services and prepare them for the future market. The thesis will be limited to only gathering and providing the information data for the provider. The implementation of the information bases is conducted by the provider. In this manner the thesis serves as a foundation for

the provider to engage business activities for the new target market and offer more tailored solutions through the international aspect and information research. Furthermore, the development task area of focus remains within the providers' operative area and thus bringing international research aspect to the company's local level and applies the information to be acceptable in the providers' case. Polunmtuka Oy is not asking for an international development plan but rather to bring international data and apply it to the development task at hand by Polunmtuka Oy's services to improve the expansion to the business and government markets.

1.2 Thesis provider

Polunmutka Oy provides supporting services for homecare, music services, digital support, and janitorial services for elderly people. These services have already been sold to consumer customers, but the company wants to expand and target other businesses and organizations in order to carry out the company's strategy, called the service cycle model. The purpose of the model will be further explained in more detail. The main service that Polunmutka Oy provides have to be marketed thoughtfully to the target organizations by providing solutions to suit the organization's needs but at the same time to provide purchasing organizations' customers activities and meaningful experiences. This may give assistance to the organizations' personnel by providing them with break time and easing their workload during their daily activities.

Polunmutka Oy's previous studies began with a deeper understanding of its customer segment. Pirjo Pulkkinen, the CEO of Polunmutka, made deeper research of the customer segment in the thesis *Kyllä me ikäihmisetkin kaivataan kuulijaa* (2020), which is available in Theseus. This thesis' author has taken that work into consideration. Pirjo Pulkkinen's thesis focuses on understanding the core customer base to which the services of the company were to be initially offered. Pulkkinen (2020) points out the different needs and problems that the core customer segment is facing, and further gains an understanding of the kind of services that are required to satisfy the needs of the elderly consumers. The most important concept of the thesis is the foundation of the business model canvas. This serves as a starting point of the business idea and a guide of the various kinds of services and actions the company has to take in order to operate nationally as well as which actions the company should take in order to reach its potential customer groups. The thesis lacks

a strategy to enter to the business to business and business to government markets, which is the main driver for this current research. In this regards, continuing the study so as to investigate the possible solutions to expand the market is relevant in order for the business to reach its full potential.

The previous study also serves as a benchmark for future studies regarding Polunmutka Oy. Pulkkinen (2020) had gathered research data and provided a deeper level of understanding from the customer and co-operator bases. The result of the thesis was an innovative business model canvas. It serves of Polunmutka Oy as a guideline for value driven business concept. For this reason, the company should consider limiting unnecessary operations and focusing on the right customer and co-operator base by using Kim & Maugbourne's blue ocean strategy to complete the model. The author is allowed to present the services of Polunmutka for the study as a whole and to research the possible market potential in business to business and business to government area. This includes the service cycle model designed to make a theoretical frame to serve and maintain quality regarding the service for home-dwelling elderly. The model also focuses on the co-operation between the private, government and associations relationships. These form a cycle of services for the home-dwelling elderly. The service cycle model brings together companies, government sectors and associations service providers to keep up with an increasing number and proportion of elderly citizens. This will ease the working load across the elderly service providers, thus giving customers more choices in services and service providers from private companies, public sector and association alike. (Pulkkinen 2020.)

2 THEORETICAL BASIS

2.1 Marketing research

Kotler, Armstrong, Harris and Piercy (2017) define the meaning of the 4 Ps of marketing. The 4Ps model can be defined as a key factor in order to form effective marketing structure for a product or service. These 4Ps are product, place, price, and promotion. According to Constantinides (2006) even by today's standards, 4Ps services are a as stable standard marketing management framework due the high usage and coverage in business education. As the history of the marketing mix has developed over time, starting with Borden

in the 1950s and soon to be followed by McCarthy, who gave it the name 4Ps in the 1960s. (Grönroos 1994.)

Purpose of the 4P's model is to separate and differentiate the competitors from each other by differentiate their goods and services to aid customers to choose the right products or service to suit different needs. This forms the basis of marketing when using it in the business to business and business to government marketing. Kotler et al. (2017, 170) prefers this as b-to-b and b-to g-markets. On the other hand, Wisesa, Adriansyah and Khalaf (2020) prefer the terms B2B and B2G. These terms are preferred in this thesis as well. Customer acquisition is hard in B2B and B2G markets, and forming long term relationships is mandatory in order to operate in such markets. Due to this marketing is needed to form a clear picture of the company's services and benefits for the customers. All the key aspects are needed to explain the difference within the service that the company provides. (Kotler et al. 2017.)

To understand the preferred method with which to study the topic, one must first understand the theory which the marketing research is based upon. Mäntyneva, Heinonen and Wrange (2008) prefer marketing research as a part of a company's marketing knowledge, which aids to bring the customer and their audience to marketers' awareness. Through this a data marketer should be able to analyze the most effective methods of marketing and use them in their respective areas. In understanding the marketing process, a marketer can create individualized and customizable marketing material for the right customer group and target them in the right channels. The marketing research as a subject of research can be further extended to several areas of interest such as branding, product or service innovation, pricing, segmenting, and market position, just a name a few. It is effective and central to use in order to compete and analyze rapidly changing markets and competition within them. (Mäntyneva, Heinonen & Wrange 2008, 9–11.)

As stated by Bergström and Leppänen (2011) more often B2B service is done in conjunction with the buyer. Regarding this, measuring the price for the service can be difficult, especially when the service is custom made for the buyer. For this reason, productization of the service helps the customer to choose and purchase the right starting price point on which service is built. Bergström and Leppänen continue that when companies are entering to the B2B and B2G markets, their external marketing have to indicate direct and

strong messages for whom to offer and how payments and payment methods are organized but most importantly what the offers and what values they bring to the buyer are. Strategies for example sales must be strong to get past the competition and possible gate keepers before the decision phase can be reached. (Bergström and Leppänen 2011, 15–26.)

Kotler et al. (2017) also mentions the value of position and benefits for the customer. For Polunmutka Oy ideal value position is to offer the same price but offers more in return. This strategy would compensate Polunmutka Oy's position as a micro company and offer more specialized services for the customers. Strategies from Kotler such as the 4Ps can be used to scan the market and its potential customers and their need for the service. Continuing the thoughts of Bergström and Leppänen (2014) in order to reach the organisation and business customers, a crucial factor for success lays on the given message and the clearness of what the company can offer another. A B2B market exchange happens on the needs of something that the other does not have or cannot provide efficiently enough. On this note, a complex system of the organisations can come closer to reach if seller can recognize even small potential to offering its service and reach a win-win situation for buyer and seller.

To support the theory of Bergström and Leppänen (2014), authors Ali, Li, Yang, Hussain, Latif (2021) describe the importance of an export strategy which states the importance of the knowledge that companies should know when entering a new market. Even though Polunmutka Oy is entering the B2B and B2G market the same principles are in effect. Through a careful adjustment to the marketing strategy, namely the core services or products that the company offers, who the key partners are in order to enter the new market and what the relevant changes to the core service which will be offered to other companies are.

2.2 Business markets and business purchase behavior

Regarding to Kotler et al. (2017) business markets relatable to the consumer market counterparts involving needs that are recognized by the people within the company's buying decision making department. Need recognition further expand into purchase decision and solving company's problem or need that must be fulfilled. However, similarities are few

in numbers as stated by Kotler and others business market structure, demand and over all purchase decision process lays within more complicated system that first can be seen. (Kotler et al. 2017, 170.)

Business purchase behavior can be presented by using the Kotler's 4Ps model which represents the available choices of products, services, place, price, and promotion within the market. A supplementary factor that influences buyers are economic, technological, political, cultural, and competitive stimuli. Within the business market buying decisions are more often done cautiously but in larger quantities. These resulting buying units become more scarce but larger than in a consumer market. On the other hand, the elasticity and fluctuation of the demand is considerably more unlike to change in short time. The demand within the business market is mostly driven from the demand to produce goods and services for the end users and consumers; this demand is described as derived demand. (Kotler et al. 2017, 170–172.)

Gil-Saura, Berenguer-Contrí and Ruiz-Molina (2018) stated that forming such relations requires a long term strategy and patience from both negotiators and buyers. Establishing stable long-term relationships is key to avoid increasing competition in the market. Thus, the article suggests building and connecting through similar values such as trust and commitment which lead to customer satisfaction. According to the article, customer satisfaction is key to succeeding in professional markets where purchase decisions are taken with care. According to Kotler and others the nature within business market environment is mostly handled by professionals in the field. Selling and purchasing operations are handled by the professional because of the more complex decision-making process and negotiations regarding the purchase. This leads to more defined customer understanding because sellers are working in closer relationships with the buyers to aid and define the customers' problems and thus provide the right solution for it. This will be made possible if a seller is aware of the key decision makers within the organization. Different roles are needed to be identified from the users to influencers and beyond gatekeepers and deciders. (Kotler et al. 2017, 170–174.)

Bergström and Leppänen (2011) mention similar matters regarding the business buying process. The buying process is often engaged by the needs of the organization to solve a problem. This further leads to the evaluation and negotiation of the solution and further

solution providers being taken into consideration. The buying organization decides and chooses best solution provider to fulfil the need which will lead to the purchase decision. Continuing along the thoughts of Constantinides (2006) the focus is on building separate marketing and sales strategies for B2B and B2G markets due the fact that the purchase process is longer and demands differ from the consumer market.

Bergström and Leppänen (2011) mention a few important factors that influence the purchase decision within the business buying process. These factors consist of products or services problem-solving capabilities and over all service or product design, changeability and the ability to tailor a service or product for the customer's needs, price compared to the added value proposition, service or product delivery stability and capability, customer service and interaction and after purchase service.

This will lead to the evaluation of the purchase which further can impact buying organization, either rebuying and promoting the service provider or the product, or then reconsideration, i.e., finding more suitable service providers or products. Within these points an image of the business to business purchasing process can be created. Figure 1 follows the business buying process in its core form. (Bergström and Leppänen 2011, 145–149.)

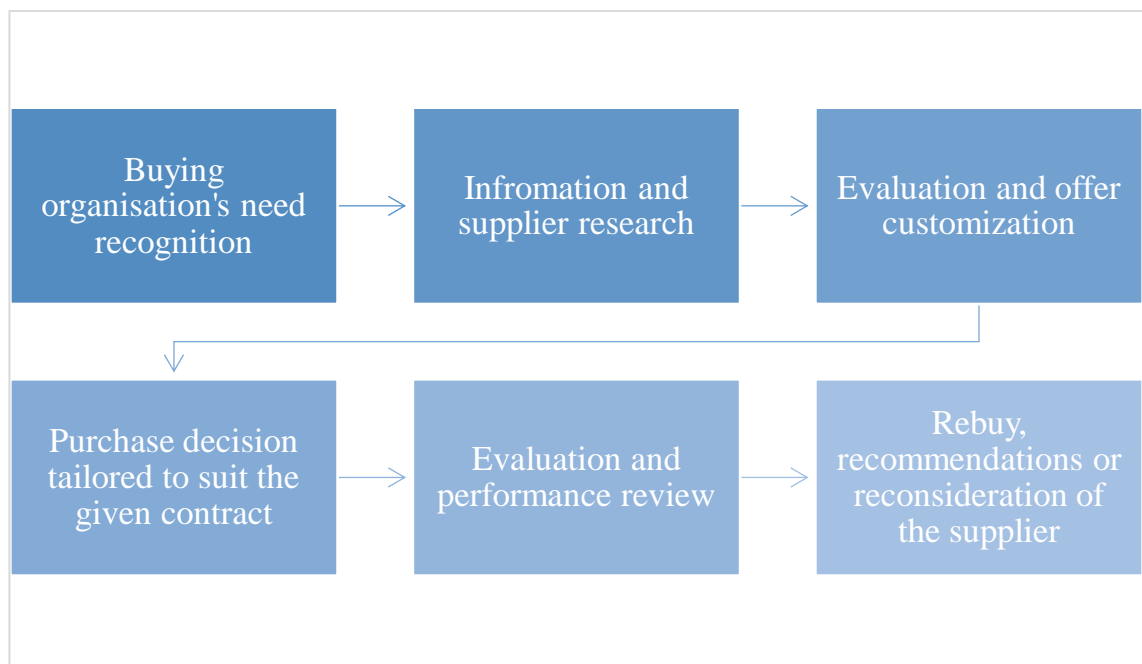


Figure 1. Organization purchase decision (Bergström and Leppänen 2011, 149)

Regarding the theoretical framework, it is important to understand the subject matter at hand. Thus, one must be aware of the framework behind the development task. Mixed methods research is mostly bound to this fact in benchmarking. This gives meaning to the theory that supports the development task. Furthermore, a questionnaire provides the field research data with which to analyze the subject. According to Kananen (2015) Kotler's 4P-model is suitable for solving the theoretical problems. The model consists of product, price, place, and promotion. The model has been later expanded to suit more organizations that are competing in the service field rather than a product driven market. The model is refined further to the 7Ps model, which includes the previous four and additionally people, process, and physical evidence. (Bergström and Leppänen 2011, 145–149.)

When contrasting the 7P-model to the 4P-model and the development task at hand, clear estimations can be made to fit the model's theoretical framework to the research. According to Kottler (1990) the marketing mix is a more focused aim on the marketing research at hand. Thus, these added factors in the 7P-model can be difficult to contrast even with their added benefits. Poturak and Duman's (2014) study suggests similarities in the choice of the marketing mix model. The additional benefits of the 7P-model benefit more companies with a larger operation area, where additional marketing elements are beneficial due the increased performance and adaptation of the marketing strategy. In addition, the realization of the micro and macro environment are connected to the company's overall marketing mix. These additions to the marketing mix are regarded by Kottler as a strategic decision of positioning that the company will take place in the market to compete and offer their products and services and differentiate from others. (Kottler 1990, 62–73.) Figure 2 explains the theoretical concept of business purchase behavior following the thoughts of Kananen (2015), Bergström and Leppänen (2011) and Kottler (1990). Through the theoretical model the basis of the marketing research form will be done.

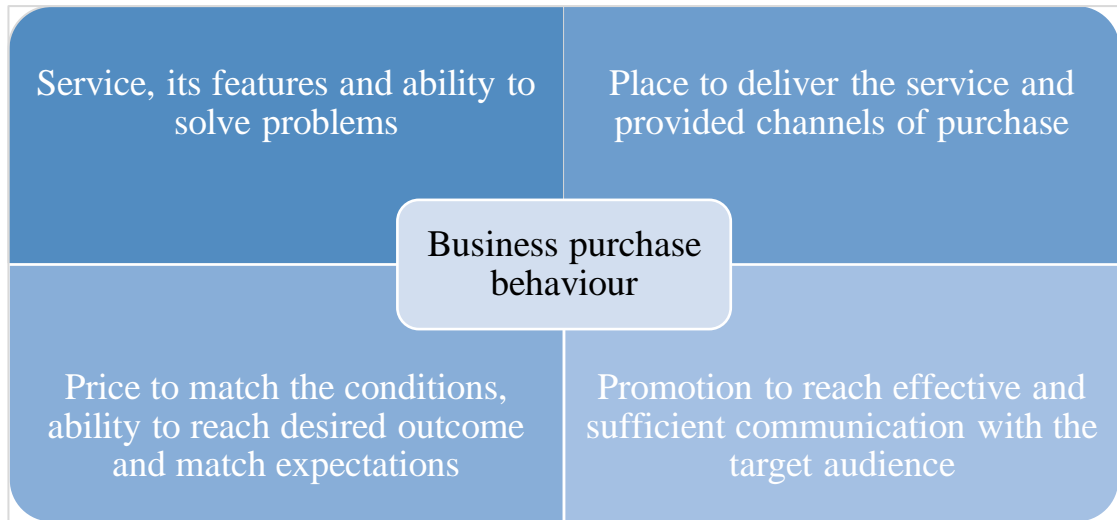


Figure 2. Business purchase behavior model (Kananen 2015, Bergström and Leppänen 2011 and Kotler 1990)

Koob (2021) states that while crafting the suitable marketing mix to reach the desired customer segment the crafting of a standardised content marketing strategy is a key element to reach desired results. The article states that this can be seen as an increase in customer acquisition due to the increase of the marketing communication, thus offering solutions and content value for the target audience. According to Keller (2001) marketing communication serves a key role in the marketing mix by allowing the target audience to see and hear the inherent differences and solutions that a service can provide. In addition, Shabbir, Bashir, Batool and Abrar (2020) have stated the importance that appearance in social media and media presence has when reaching the target customers. Social media is mostly considered a tool to reach out the target customer segment but, in this case, it is equally as important when dealing with B2B and B2G customers. It serves a clear purpose to engage with the customer and dynamic customer channel in order to effectively exchange information and form relationships with the buyer and seller. On the other hand, it serves as a platform to gather companies around it and form a stable customer base which within companies exchange their services and information regarding their customer demand.

2.3 Benchmarking for value

According to Broderick, Garry and Beasley (2010) benchmarking for small and medium sized companies' constant cycle of innovative learning and improvement over the existing services. The study suggests various methods: one is a survey that can be implemented

into the benchmarking process to provide data for the ongoing process. To ensure the benchmarking is tailored more towards small- and medium-sized companies, a survey method with added qualitative questions would reveal insight for deeper analysis on a more strategic level. Ojasalo, Moilanen and Ritalahti (2014) consider benchmarking to be effective when comparing and learning from other organizations, units within them and even competitors. Benchmarking forms around the idea of innovating and further improving and developing one's own business structure and its functions. Benchmarking is started by choosing the part of the company which will be the focus of the development. When a development area is chosen, the next step is to choose an organization or unit within them which will be benchmarked. The focus is to learn the methods and reasons why a benchmarked organization is performing better within a certain area of action.

Information from the benchmarked organization is gathered through various ways such as from the internet or visiting and mystery shopping. The goal is to learn and observe the organization and find suitable solutions for the own organization in order to develop a suitable and cost-effective method to improve actions in the benchmarked area. This increases the speed of development and improves the ability to adapt and develop in the ever-changing market. Benchmarking must be done within legal limits and must keep sensitive information from leaking. (Ojasalo, Moilanen and Ritalahti 2014, 180.)

To support the benchmarking further the concept of benchmarking model is needed in order to create a complete picture of the needs regarding what areas affect the service the most. Van der Roest, van Eenoo, van Lier, Onder, Garms-Homolová, Smit, Finne-Soveri, Jónsson, Draisma, Declercq, Bosmans, van Hout, and IBenC project (2019) that a theoretical benchmarking model was created from using the data sourced by nations in the European area. A theoretical benchmarking model's key aspect was the quality of the care and cost of the service but also the character of the organization. In this study the benchmarking model as a preferred outcome was benefiting home care service providers, who were able to reach high and efficient quality and low-cost ratio either by being a private or governmental organization. In a home care study, a service is customized to meet certain demands and co-exist alongside bigger home care service providers. (Van der Roest, van Eenoo, van Lier, Onder, Garms-Homolová, Smit, Finne-Soveri, Jónsson, Draisma, Declercq, Bosmans, van Hout, and IBenC project 2019.)

Shah and Kleiner's (2011) study approaches benchmarking for small and medium sized companies as an improved method to learn and adapt from established companies. Such a benchmarking approach was mentioned by Shah and Kleiner (2011) as a "step-by-step continuous approach". The authors presented the benchmarking model as a benchmarking wheel that consisted of a five-staged plan: plan, find, collect, analyse and improve. Zhang, Nasir and Haas (2017) similarly suggest that the benchmarking model is like a cycle which allows the subject of benchmarking to be in continuous improvement. These help to research better productivity, more efficient working hours and better workflow. Benchmarking regarding the study is aimed at being continuous. This means that the benchmarking data is evaluated by the benchmarking matrix which then is further brought to productivity evaluation to terming it to be either standard or targeted data. From there it will be studied and improved to suit the needs of a new purpose and finally implemented into the practice. If the data failed to reach the expectations, the benchmarking process is started again. The study conducted by Wind and van Harten (2017) suggest the use of benchmarking in a more collaborative way which is taken in steps towards the improvement of the service. The most important factors are defining the subject and partners of a benchmark. Furthermore, the indicators and used methods add to the value of the benchmark, which translates to success and improvement factors to the given benchmarking subject. Reponen, Rundall, Shortell, Blodgett, Juarez, Jokela, Mäkijärvi and Torkki (2021) suggested that the benchmarking model suggests four levels of benchmarking, which are intra-organization, regional, national and international levels. These levels aim to increase effective knowledge and measure the best practices within the given level and thus bringing better performance. These four levels considerably increase the scale of measurement and the factors on the given benchmarking subject. Such a wide array of detail should be scaled to serve a minimum number of subjects that are benchmarked. Figure 3 presents the benchmarking model following the guidelines of Zhang, Nasir and Haas (2017).

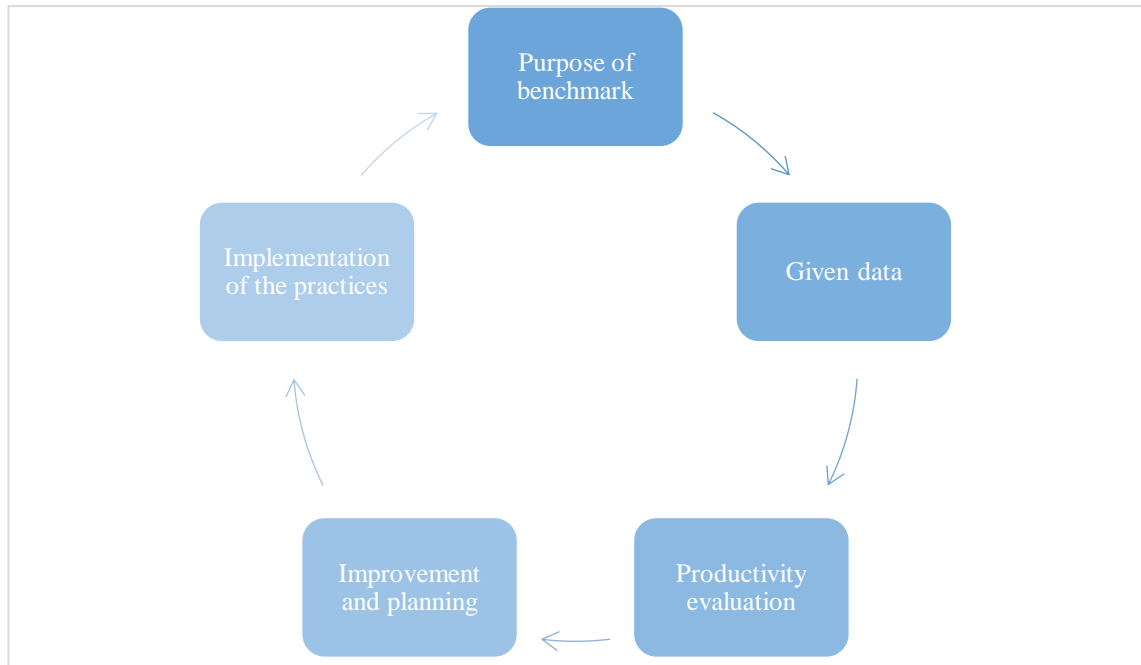


Figure 3. Benchmarking cycle model (Zhang, Nasir and Haas 2017)

In order to evaluate benchmarking, the model is required to match the providers' services to suit the B2B and B2G market. Thus, the conceptual benchmarking model is used as a tool to evaluate the current services that the provider is offering and to bring new dimensions and interests to improve the services. To support the theory of the private home care support services that Polunmutka Oy provides, benchmarking was considered a good choice.

Data was gathered from academic articles which focused on similar business ideas of private home care and supporting services in the European Union. Research data varies between different European countries such as Netherlands, Germany, Great Britain, and Poland. Data from specific countries are compared and observed in their respective areas to provide a more broad range of view of the target field of operation. Gathered knowledge from the benchmarking process provides solid foundation data to the conceptual benchmarking model. Data for the model is provided from the providers' existing service base and compared to the findings throughout the benchmarking process.

3 METHODS

3.1 Approach

Information research for the thesis was collecting by mixed methods combining quantitative and qualitative methods. Regarding information gathering and research, the author decided to use two methods for information gathering and the research. Methods used in the thesis are a survey and benchmarking. These two methods combine the main needs for the information research. As survey provides more immediate information on the subject and benchmarking completes the information by providing data that enables the survey to be tailored to reach more effectively to the possible B2B and B2G customers. According to Segarra-Cipre's, Escrig-Tena and Garcí'a-Juan (2020) this combination of methods has been tested and used to great effect, such as that the study suggests the use of findings from the academic articles and combining them in field research data such as surveys. The research will rely on quantitative means but also will add elements of the qualitative methods in order to provide more detailed views and answers regarding which services are most prominent for the other businesses and organizations in Polunmutka Oy's operating area. Field research data will be gathered through a survey, which will be sent to the target customer group as a web survey. Furthermore, data gathered by the surveys will be implemented with benchmarking elements to give a wholesome picture of the target market, suitable services for sale and needed modifications for them.

According to Mäntyneva, Heinonen and Wrange (2008) marketing research can use several research methods but mostly one is preferred to suit the purpose of the given research and thus provide a suitable outcome for the development task. Consideration of the quantitative and qualitative research also has to be acknowledged. For this research quantitative research is used in order to provide the focused raw data from the given market that the commissioner is about to enter. Often such research is subject to larger focus groups that are many in number and provide more of an overview of the market's current situation. Continuing the thoughts of Hirsjärvi, Remes and Sajavaara (2009) points of purposes had been divided into mapping, explaining, describing, and forecasting. These points of purposes will be followed by their own set of task and strategies to solve the problem and development task. (Mäntyneva et al. 2008, 28–36.)

However, in this case the commissioner is entering a rather narrow but complex target market that consists of private and public nursing homes for the elderly in Joensuu and Kontiolahti municipality areas. Within the target market, the only way to reach the target group is to form a select focus group which will comprise a sample. To evaluate the decision, it must be mentioned that the commissioner's target customer group consists of elderly people and their closest family members. The target market which the commissioner is about to enter consists only of the nursing homes that host housing, living and care for the elderly. There are other nursing homes in the target area, which are for people living with disabilities or require assistance in drug and mental health issues. For this reason, nursing homes that are neither private nor public are selectively left out from the research group. (Mäntyneva et al. 2008, 37–46.)

3.2 Information research

As stated by Ojasalo, Moilanen and Ritalahti (2014), a survey is a useful tool of information research. A survey can be modified and sent easily to the target group in a cost-effective way by using either e-mail or a web survey. An ideal survey to gather information regarding the subject is to consider how long and how specific the questions are and how easy for the receiver it is to answer the questions. A survey should be ideal in length, but it has to cover all the needed areas in order to receive the necessary amount of information and to reach the desired outcome. (Ojasalo, Moilanen and Ritalahti 2014, 40–50.)

Continuing the thoughts of Hirsjärvi, Remes and Sajavaara (2009), a survey is effective, especially in gathering specific information that can be shown as numerical data. Surveys are effective to gather information on repeated phases and thus provide a solid foundation for the end results and answering the development task. The interpretation of the research data is analyzed by using quantitative methods and furthermore written as a report. A survey will not come without its issues, and the most common are how honestly and critically the survey receiver has thought about the answers, if there has been some misunderstanding regarding the questions, and if there are enough answers to receive sufficient needed information for complete and more whole research information. According to the study of Halbesleben, and Whitman (2013) a survey done for the specific group as a con-

trolled survey will more than likely yield suitable results in the case of provider Polunmutka Oy. In such a case limiting nonresponse bias and providing more stable results is important, because a survey is targeted only at the focus group residing in a provider's operation area. This means it limits the overall response rate but on the other hand provides more accurate responses.

The survey was done by using a Webropol survey program. The survey is tailored more for the home care service providing companies and government-owned homecare providing units. The survey was provided for the focus group in the native language, meaning the survey was done in Finnish language in Appendix 1. In addition, the survey and the results were translated in the analysis phase to provide the research tools for non-Finnish speakers as well in Appendix 2. Survey design and the structure were done according to the instructions of the Hirsjärvi et al. (2009) by using five-way Likert scale to provide the ability to choose most correct answer for them and including open-ended questions. The survey was conducted in Finnish with the purpose of saving time and effort of translating. These will decrease the overall effort to answer and thus leads to more precise answers to the development task. (Hirsjärvi, Remes and Sajavaara 2009, 198–204.)

Distribution of the survey was done by applying for a research permit from the organization Siun Sote. As it was stated surveys, and research in general, focused on the healthcare sector are more strictly controlled. This is due to the high-risk information that move throughout the field, such as names, addresses and other social information. This information will not be part of the research and thus they are not shown in the final research paper. As for privately owned businesses surveys were distributed through email.

Survey analysis was conducted in the Joensuu and Kontiolahti areas, the providers' main operation areas. The survey was tailored to suite information research regarding Polunmutka Oy's ability to offer their services to private and public nursing homes within the company's operating area. The total number of the units to receive the survey was 16 private nursing homes and 10 within the public nursing homes that receive the survey. The survey was part of the information research and was in conjunction with the benchmarking process. The survey itself was sent as a link via personal e-mail messages to the private sector nursing homes unit managers. On the other hand, public sector distribution

required additional research permits from the author to apply in order to start the distribution for the unit managers for the public sector.

To support the study of the private home care support services that Polunmutka Oy provides, benchmarking was considered good choice of information gathering for the thesis. Data was mostly gathered from academic articles which focused on similar business ideas and services of private home care and supporting services in the European Union. Research data varies between different European countries such as the Netherlands, Germany, Great Britain, and Poland. Data from specific countries are not strictly compared but rather observed in their respective areas to provide a more broad range of view of the target field of operation. Zhang, Nasir and Haas (2017) suggest the benchmarking model. The model provides the necessary means of benchmarking and compliments the survey when coupled together. In order to evaluate the benchmarked research data the use of SWOT is used as a tool to analyze the given data before it is applied into the benchmarked 4P model.

3.3 Data analysis

When gathered data is ready and it has been qualified and checked, it is further analyzed and interpreted. Finally, it yields the results for the development task. Further on into the process, research data must be checked by the researcher. Furthermore, they must check the quality of the answers to decide which surveys are qualified enough to be included on the research. Afterwards the quality check data is processed further and coded to match to the linking factor. When the research data has been qualified and the coded data is ready to be written as a whole and then analyzed to answer the development task.

Most indebt analysis is done after the preparation work, but a smaller amount of data is analyzed throughout the way. Analyzing the research data mainly follows the form of explaining and understanding the gathered results. After the data analysis, an interpretation and deeper analysis with a complete SWOT-analysis will form the conclusion and understanding for the development task and further explain the data and if it can be used to further explain the results. This leads to an analysis of the benchmarked data provided through the articles and contrasting the data to surveys, which provides field research

data. The data is combined within the benchmarking model in order to create a benchmarked 4P model to enter to providers' target market of choice. To ensure the reliability of the research, the validity of the research is kept in the control of the author by using different reliability measurements and ensuring the answers are measurable and presented as such. Reliability will be ensured by using a carefully thought-out survey which is received only by the specific focus group. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2009, 221–233.)

4 RESULTS

4.1 Survey results

The survey focused at private and public nursing homes and home care service providers for the elderly within the Joensuu and Kontiolahti area. In the survey, answer areas were further divided to smaller areas to further present the differences in the providers' operation area. Over half of the given answers came from the private sector and rest from the public sector. Most answers came from the city of Joensuu and other areas such as Kiihtelysvaara, Pyhäselkä, Tuupovaara and the municipality of Kontiolahti. From the focus group Eno was only area that answers were not received. Most of the answers came from the supervisors, and the rest come from operative management, vice supervisors and the management sector. The reason for this was the distribution of the survey and because managers and operative managers were targeted as the potential answer group. Figure 4 indicate how often the providers' service could be required during given times, and over half of the answers indicate the need for the providers' service would be suitable to provide weekly. This is seen as beneficial in case of the provider since it will give the chance to give provide opportunities to hire employees as well as increase the business activities. The results indicate the possibility to build a network around the customer in which case different service provide services in different purposes and times of need. The reasoning for the results must be taken with caution, as fulfilling the increased demand during the time of COVID-19 involves providing a safe working experience and structural safety strategy around the service network.

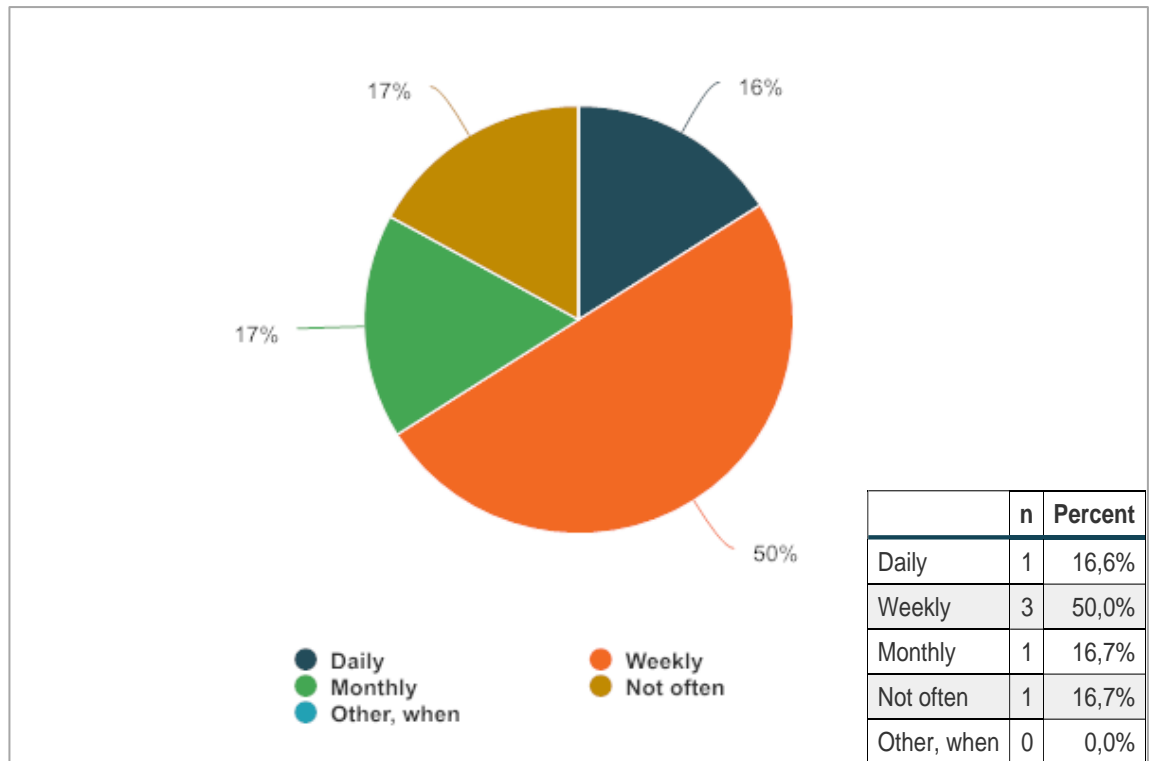


Figure 4. Service demand in given time frames

Results from the survey present valuable points that indicate the importance of the desirable values when choosing the service provider. Figure 5 shows the most prominent values when choosing a service provider. The important aspects were service delivery reliability, service quality, and price. As for the service type results show that contact service was more desirable than distant service. Thus, distant service was not of much interest. This indicates that the effect from COVID-19 and lockdowns within the operation area shows how important human contact in the service is. Further results present the most prominent services that provider offers were outdoor and escorting service, musical events, social interaction, and personal assistance for elderly. This finding is highly important since these services are the cornerstones of the providers' service categories.

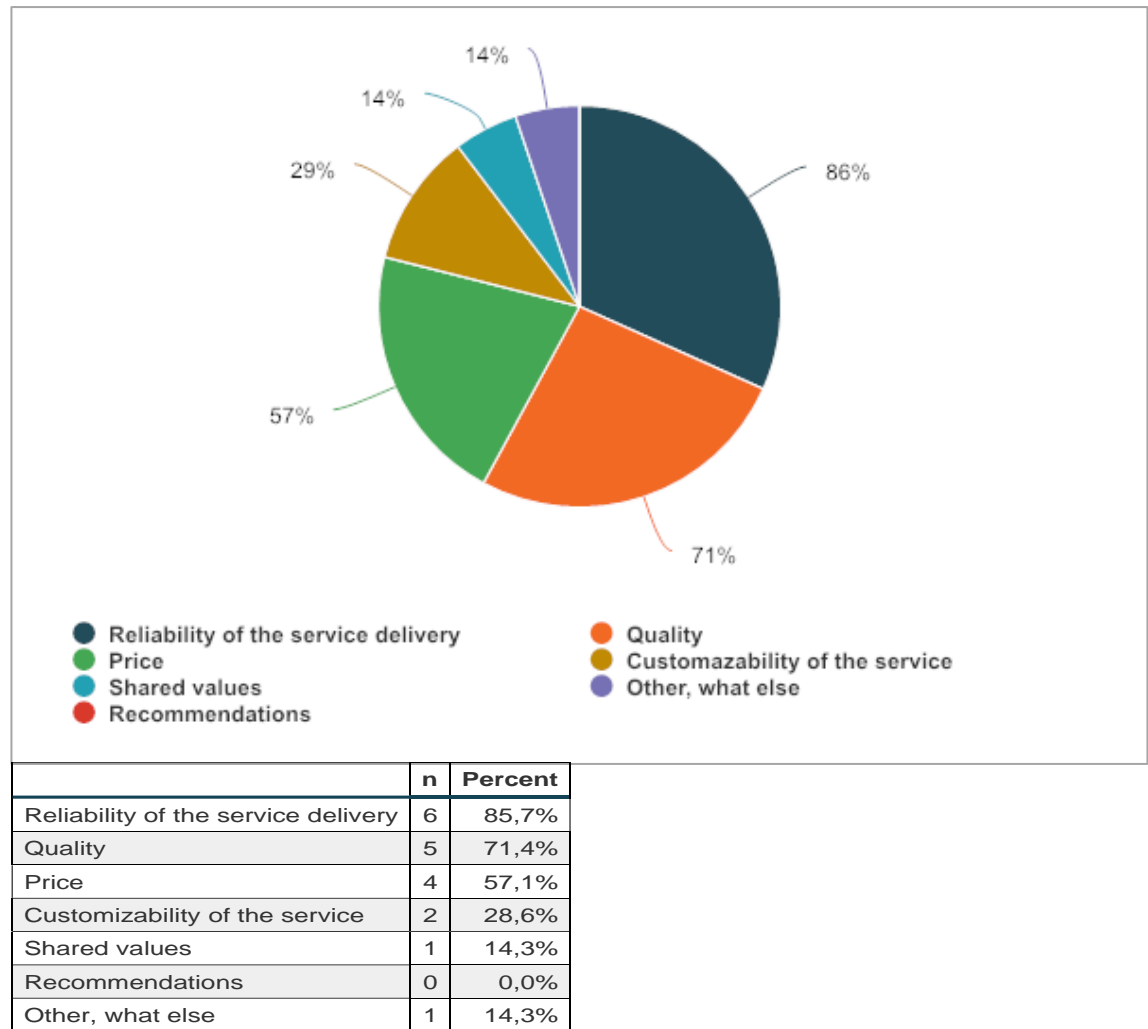


Figure 5. Important values when choosing a service provider

Research shows the importance of price compared to the added value for the service. The median for the answers were showing that it is important to consider the price even though service provides added value for the end user. The survey found that almost half of the respondents thought that the added value is of greater benefit than the price of the service. The respondents also indicated that service provider has to be near, and quality of the service must be good. Respondents gave opinions on the contract time, namely that a fixed term contract was proven to be desirable among the target group. One-time purchases and long-term contracts were not as appealing options.

The survey also concerned B2B marketing communication creation with the understanding of the importance of the correct marketing mix required to reach the target market and targeted results. The question group analysis began with focus on the channels from where a provider could be most likely searched and found. The majority of answers suggested that the provider's website would be the most used tool for information research.

Other answers suggested the use of social media and connections through business partner network. The respondents provided opinions of the overall layout of a provider's website and if the right information can be readily found from there.

The survey brought out the respondents' chosen type of communication channels with the provider. The most suitable channels of communication were direct e-mail messages and phone calls. The provider's website has the ability to leave contact information, but this was preferred only by a minority, and similarly preferences for the personal meeting were not as prominent. The survey indicated that provider's communication and marketing had only reached few of the respondents. This may be a result of the provider not being given enough resources for the marketing communication, or as it is a new business in the field, it can take time to reach the point of recognition. On the other hand, the preferred marketing communication methods were e-mail marketing communication and through social media. A minority preferred marketing communication through the newspaper advertisements and mouth-to-mouth marketing.

Respondents were asked about the most important factors that influence interacting with the marketing communications with the provider which figure 6 presents. Customer service, public image, and the ease of buying the service were favored among the different attributes. Another half of the respondents preferred marketing, brand image and care of the customer relationship. In addition, the survey collected the personal thoughts of the future of such a service that the provider offers. Answers were short but prominent that the growth of the provider's given field of operations is rather imminent. This can be contrasted to the increasing numbers of elderly in the upcoming years. This increases the demand and variety within the service options and providers alike.

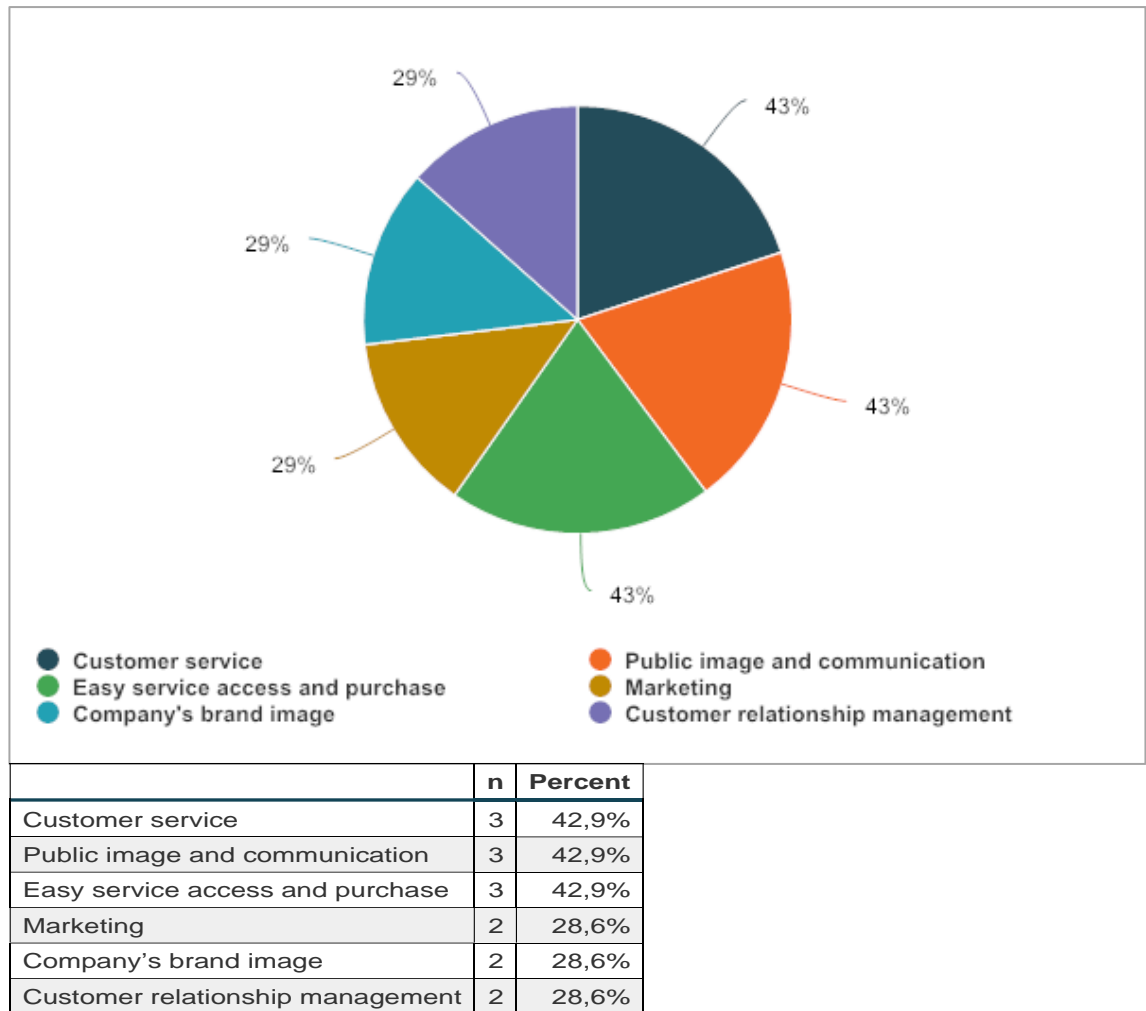


Figure 6. Aspects that affect the interaction with the service provider

The results show differences in how to respond to the demand required from the service provider within the target market. The provider must be prepared for a clear structural change to meet the increase in demand. When comparing the survey data to other aspects such as communication management, shared values and existing service offered, the results in this case are positive. The results indicate that the provider has its own place to offer its services and co-operate among the target market. Due the nature of the target market it might still take time before the provider is recognized and offered services have become unique through the provider's actions. In order to prepare the services to further meet the demand of the B2B and B2G markets, the next chapter defines the findings of benchmarking and prepares the survey data for further analysis and forms the marketing mix strategy for provider entry to the new market.

4.2 Benchmarking data and results

In the beginning of the benchmarking, it must be known which subject the benchmark itself is going to focus on. In this case providers need to enter the B2B and B2G market and provide its existing services to the private and public nursing homes and home care for the elderly within the main operation area. Data provided from the survey and information research through the collection of academic articles provides the foundation in order to start benchmarking by following the Zhang, Nasir and Haas (2017) model.

The first part of the Zhang, Nasir and Haas model of benchmarking considers the recordings and data portion. Data has been provided from the survey and various articles concerning the research subject. In this case the benchmarking is focused on the two main services that were the most valued services according to the survey results. Outdoor and escorting senior service and music event service. These services are compared to the findings regarding the academic article to further help to develop them to fit to needs of the B2B and B2G markets. Kohhelbacher and Herstatt (2011) state the importance of the group-based music services for the units keeping Alzheimer patients. This can be beneficial giving thought to offer such services to the groups within nursing homes in the given operation area. Outdoor and escorting senior services can be supported by the theory by giving thought of the care network around the elderly, which allows for the potential of being offered to nursing homes and home care as an extension service to provide more options and flexibility to the care network. Services that benefit from such flexibility which brings added value and use traditional compensations benefits such as price discounts can be decreased. The survey suggests the importance of service quality and reliability to provide the service at given time. This must be taken with care, because a provider can face problems in keeping up the increased demand as services such as these are needed regularly. This will negatively affect the offered service, which may lead to the cancellation of the contracts within the given market. On the other hand, this can help the operation to grow and over time give opportunity to expand employment.

To create a supportive link between the benchmarking, Kohhelbacher and Herstatt (2011) describe strategies which businesses working with elderly people and homecare services could utilize. Service providers need to have the means to actively communicate which problem the service can solve, whether it be a consumer or a new B2B or B2G market.

This also brings the end user closer. In the case of Polunmutka Oy this is elderly people. This evolves around knowing what the most important needs for the customer are to buy and use the service. The company has to be aware the key roles of the purchase chain in order to activate the decision makers in order to reach sales potential customers. (Kohhelbacher and Herstatt 2011, 283–284.)

Along with the ideas presented by Kohhelbacher and Herstatt (2011), providing a service that is easily manipulated and moveable brings value to the end user. Services such as home maintenance and shopping are important aspect of the service, but in B2B and B2G aspects, customized assistance for elderly people to guide them to use digital devices such as smartphones and computers or let alone music regular music performance for the Alzheimer patients are also notable. This also brings the opportunities to utilize co-operation within the B2B market in order to gain universal benefit for businesses willing to build value-based co-operation to benefit the same customer segment. (Kohhelbacher and Herstatt 2011, 285–287.)

The study by Kemper-Koebrugge, Adriaansen, Laurant and Wensing (2019) suggest the same principles to innovate on elderly segment. The importance of the network is key to perform the actions to share and influence co-operation between the service providers. To summarize the points when entering to the new market area it has be remembered to actively bring out the company's strongest points and offer the solution for the customers problem and find innovative ways not just to attract new customers but also new partners and co-operators. (Kemper-Koebrugge, Adriaansen, Laurant and Wensing 2019.)

The Global Coalition on Aging (2018) report indicated the way in which the report states the importance to form the care giving network around the operation area and create co-operation-based aid for the elderly costumers. By adopting a marketing strategy to support sales of the care network, similar results could be achieved. This is the case in Germany in which such cooperative, highly mobile services for the elderly are provided. On the other hand, the British company Care UK (2021) further supports the results. Being able to offer and form caring services network around the operation area further benefits the whole chain of operations. Designing services around the end user with different operators and institutes brings new opportunities and innovative value to the customer. The elderly service providers closest to Attendo and Esperi, which offer private caring and

nursing services for the elderly. These are ideal places to start to form value-based co-operation. A governmental health care organization such as Siun Sote is recommended to form co-operation in a provider's respective profession.

As Kemper et al. (2018) have commented on the positive impacts of care networks for home-dwelling elderly people. Customer service networks consist of formal and informal support for the elderly people. Informal care network which contains family members and neighbours, and formal care network is handled by government organizations and private companies and businesses. Authors suggest that there is positive impact on health amongst the elderly people who have invested in social capital. This means the number of people and care providers surrounding the elderly. Choose between these service providers determines service for the specific situation to fulfil the elderly customer's needs. Elderly become less dependent on one or two sources of service providers. Thus, giving them instead access to a whole network of care givers for any given time when a home dwelling-elderly needs the service. Elderly people that are not in the care network most likely face barriers that prevent them from even asking for help and this isolates them even more. (Kemper, Adriaansen, Laurent and Wensing 2018.)

Continuing the thoughts of Broese van Groenou, Jacobs, Zwart-Olde and Deeg (2016) an idea of a service network for home-dwelling elderly people is supported, and in addition companies who are participating in these kinds of networks have to identify the key partners within the network. First and foremost, by identifying formal and informal caregivers' companies can more easily adjust to focus on the specific needs of the customer and give full support to the specific type of care the s/he needs. The focus of the care provider is to actively support the customer to find these opportunities to reach the care networks to form a ability to build service options around the customer. (Broese van Groenou, Jacobs, Zwart-Olde and Deeg, 1–10, 2016.)

The study by Wilemse, Anthierens, Farfan-Portet, Schmitz, Macq and Bastiens (2016), consists of qualitative information on informal care in five different countries in Europe. The study supports the fact that informal care is needed to compliment the formal care sector, but improvements must be made. Informal care should be found as easy access services which are easy to customize to a customer's needs. Co-operation between different organizations is needed to improve the connectivity between the providers and buyers.

By following the found statements, it can be said that there is a bond between smaller and medium-sized companies to their larger counterparts. Innovative co-operative ways between different operators on the field can have high impact on the service that an end user receives when collaboration is put into motion. Each caregiver provides their unique profession to benefit the same customer. Regarding the findings, creating a steady caring network around the end user takes time but has its benefits. The provider Polunmutka Oy is stated as an informal caregiver from an international perspective while formal care focuses on nursing and medical care. The high need for informal care is considered as important as formal care due the fact social interactions are often left out from the formal care. This results mostly from the fact that given resources are not enough to offer formal and informal care at the same time.

Abu-Rayya's (2006) study suggested that in 2020 depression will be rising among the home dwelling elderly. This is one of the most common health conditions, especially for the elderly without supportive caring network. Most of the time depression is related to other health conditions such as diabetes, heart diseases, cancer, and Alzheimer's. Life changes, such as loss of partner or dear family members have impacted well-being. Yet still, the Abramowska-Kmon and Timoszuik (2020) study done in Poland suggest the decreased or non-existing relationships with the family members and lack of social network decreases the well-being among most the aged 65 and beyond. Arsenijevic and Groot (2018) state how relatively small changes in the care giving network affect the overall well-being of the elderly. Study suggests that service providers change over time and are affected by different policies, thus decreasing their effective ability to socially interact and share time with the customer. This means that service provides are moving from the social interaction services to those such as cleaning and house care. On the other hand, it is important for service providers to offer specific solutions to the customers' given problems. At the same time, this leaves no room for the social interaction leaving the caring network out from the core service.

Pulkkinen (2020) has presented the service cycle -model for elderly people to support the work of Polunmutka Oy. The theory of the service cycle model is comparable to the care-networks used in European countries. The focus of Polunmutka Oy is to build service networks around the home-dwelling elderly and by focusing the effort on finding suitable partners. Creating the network together with informal and formal caregivers means more

active customers and more health benefits from social interaction for those customers, who do not necessarily have large social capital to relay. In this sense Polunmutka Oy could follow the theory concept and act as a care-network provider and form the network of service around its customer. In this sense the company could provide its services but in addition suggest and organize other private and public service providers for the customers to create more value for the customers. (Pulkkinen 2020.)

Services offered in the caring sector is mostly focused on the quantity over quality as stated from the survey. Findings from the benchmarked academic articles on the subject suggest quality and customer well-being is often valued more than the quantity of served customer. This can be turned into value as the Polunmutka Oy is a small company, with services that are easily changeable and tailored for the customer's needs. This compared to the slower quantity-oriented service providers is advantageous and noticeable when building the benchmark. Another important service from the provider is digital support for the elderly. This service can have the greater benefit within home care and nursing homes. Devices that mainly feel troublesome for the elderly are smartphones, tablets and computers. A provider could offer aid within the B2B and B2G market, because more often service providers focus on the care and daily activities in which case supporting services such as digital aid is left for the others in the care network, including home care support service providers and assistance from customers' family members and neighbours. This market opportunity must be taken with care.

The service that the provider offers for the B2B and B2G markets must be tailored to suit the buyers' needs, whether they are an outdoor or elderly escorting service, music service or social interaction. The quality and time that the providers can offer is more likely to bring customers that value the same ideals and thus create strong connections between the buyer, seller, and the end user of the service. As stated in the business purchase behaviour model (Kananen 2015, Bergström and Leppänen 2011 and Kottler 1990) the importance when offering services in such a market is to offer solutions and bring benefits that would for both buyer and seller and create win-win situations. To introduce improvements for the exiting services, a SWOT analysis is needed. Figure 7 presents the swot analysis for service improvements.

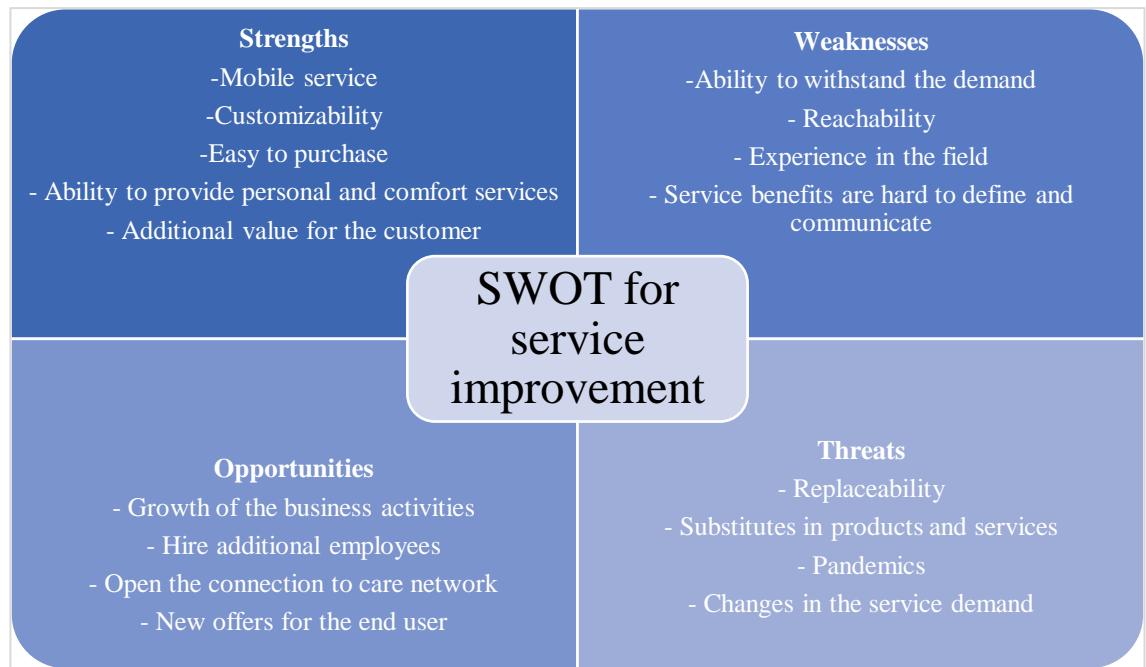


Figure 7. SWOT-analysis over service improvements over existing services.

Through the SWOT-analysis the providers service traits can be seen more effectively. It also prepares the gathered survey data and findings from the international benchmark to be used and to create the benchmarking cycle model. Within it the data from both research methods is mixed and analysed. This creates the foundation to the benchmarked 4P model which will serve as a marketing mix and sales strategy for the provider to implement when entering the B2B and B2G market.

4.3 Benchmarking cycle-model

Benchmarking implementation is reconstructed by using the benchmark cycle model. This is used to indicate the offered services that Polunmutka Oy provides with the survey and benchmarking data results to provider foundation for the B2B and B2G 4P's market segment model. The cycle model follows the findings within the articles and is based on the survey regarding the purchase behaviour of the target market. The benchmark model represents the bases which a provider can use and further develop to suit the changes and needs in the future.

The starting point of the model was to reach a new desired target market, in the provider's case B2B and B2G market in the provider's operational area. These markets consist of

nursing and care homes and home care units. In addition, the provider's services are further considered and evaluated through the benchmarked data in order to prepare a more stable service foundation to suit the target market. Findings from the survey suggest the offered services should be activity-based, such as outdoor happenings and music performances. These services can be group-based which brings added value and provides solutions for the target market. On the other hand, service improvements are considered through the benchmarking process, which indicates offering solution-based service packing rather than the service itself. This can be beneficial for the provider, giving the ability to bring the values upfront and thus providing the ability to differentiate since competition is high in the provider's field of operation. This service cycle can be related to the provider's strategy which connects multiple service providers to operate around the same customer. This is also present in the benchmarked data. Figure 8 presents the benchmarking cycle model.

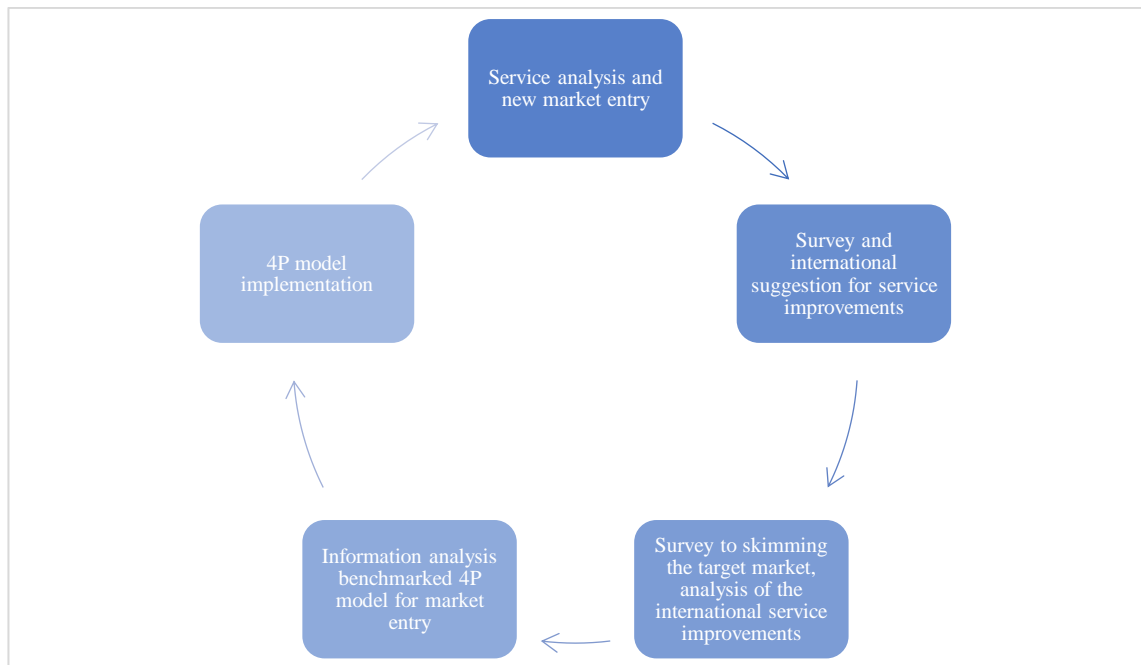


Figure 8. Visualized benchmarking cycle-model for market entry (Zhang, Nasir and Haas 2017), modified by author.

The sales process must be taken with care because the target market consist of multiple persons and points of validation before the sales process is finished. A benchmarked 4P-model is constructed to accommodate the provider's ability to take part in the sales process. The model is a part of the benchmarking cycle which on the other hand has the

ability to develop and the chance to serve another purpose or adapt to different sales strategies such as the benchmarking cycle model. The provider can use and implement the future purpose or development task through the model providing innovative solutions and new possibilities to improve the company's sales strategy. The next chapter will provide a more detailed look at the benchmarked 4P-model.

4.4 Benchmarked 4P-model

By starting the analysis of the benchmarked 4P-model from the service point of view, the most prominent services to offer on the B2B and B2G market were outdoor and elderly escort services and music event services, as suggested by the survey results. Points found from the international benchmarking data suggest the usage of the mobile and customizable service to be used first when entering the B2B and B2G markets. Rather than meeting demands into the quantity of the service than can be offered, the provider should start with the more group-based comfort services, such as music services. Music for Alzheimer's patients has been internationally proven to be a highly effective treatment method. In addition, musical events have the benefit of being offered to a larger size of customers within the target market. Outdoor and assistance services could be offered similarly but in case of the Polunmutka Oy, providing more personalized services for individual customers. As for group activities it could be offered in the future through the use of business partner or company's own employees. Following up by bringing social interaction to the offered services as well. In nursing and care homes, the staff need time to rest during the days. At these moments, independent service providers are suitable to fill the role in addition to the main staff. For this reason, communication of the service should be effectively brought out during the selling process to give a better understanding of the seller's offer to the buyer and further the end user of the service. These services can be sold in packages or separately depending on the customer's needs. To ensure a formalized yet organic purchase process, a service is able to solve problems and a provider is able to provide solutions to the buyer. In addition to this the benefit of the services for the end user must be clearly brought out. This ensures a clear picture of the service for the buying party and as well as for the end user. The services' ability to touch both parties offer additional customer value and receive the ability to communicate the provider's value position.

The provider has to be aware of the key purchase decision makers within the organisations where the service is offered. Most notably the service and its descriptions should be found from the provider's website as it is often the preferred starting point when organisations start to choose and differentiate purchasing options. Thus, buyers' abilities to modify the provider's service to suit the needs of the purchase is important in order to bring added value and provide solutions to the problem at hand. Furthermore, the ability to give and receive feedback must be implemented into the purchase process to further develop the process and the core service itself. Regarding the sales process itself, the provider must be ready to offer the service directly to the target market. The given sales process must be done from a problem-solving standpoint rather than from a service-based perspective. This is ensured with effective communication to provide customer related service-based solutions and benefits for the end user due the more variable and flexible service network. To enhance the sales experience for both parties and reach a win-win situation mobile and easy-to-purchase services are more likely to receive positive feedback.

Pricing for the B2B and B2G market provider should follow a dynamic pricing solution. By calculating the amount of the purchased service, time, and effort to order to provide the desired service and additional costs such as materials and manoeuvrability. The price of the service is calculated to meet the expectation of the service by offering benefits such as flexibility and customer-orientated service. On the other hand, the provider must include the additional zone pricing to provide enough income if the service is required outside the main operation area. Overall, the pricing strategy for the provider is a premium service and thus costs more than the industry standard. Thus, considering the added value and premium approach this pricing option is considered to be most effective and suitable in this case.

Finally, the promotion portion of the marketing mix should emphasize the provider's value and customer satisfaction, which benefit more than the buyer itself but the end user as well. It is important to note that as an international perspective emphasises the communication is brought to the importance of a varied service network and co-operation around the service user. This co-operative strategy was already realised by the provider, but it lacks the effective promotion and communication compared to the international counterparts. This realisation forms the bases of the promotion by providing a customer- and human-orientated emphasis on the offered services. This is important to include in the

provider's brand image since it deals directly with the well-being of the elderly and brings happiness to their lives. This marketing is consciously implemented to all communication, whether it be internal or external to create an effective interactive marketing path and greater service value. Providers focus on building the effective brand image to connect with the target market directly through personal selling rather than marketing campaigns. Figure 9 presents the marketing mix in a benchmarked 4P-model. The figure relates the information for the provider in their respective area of influence while designing the implementation phase of the marketing mix.

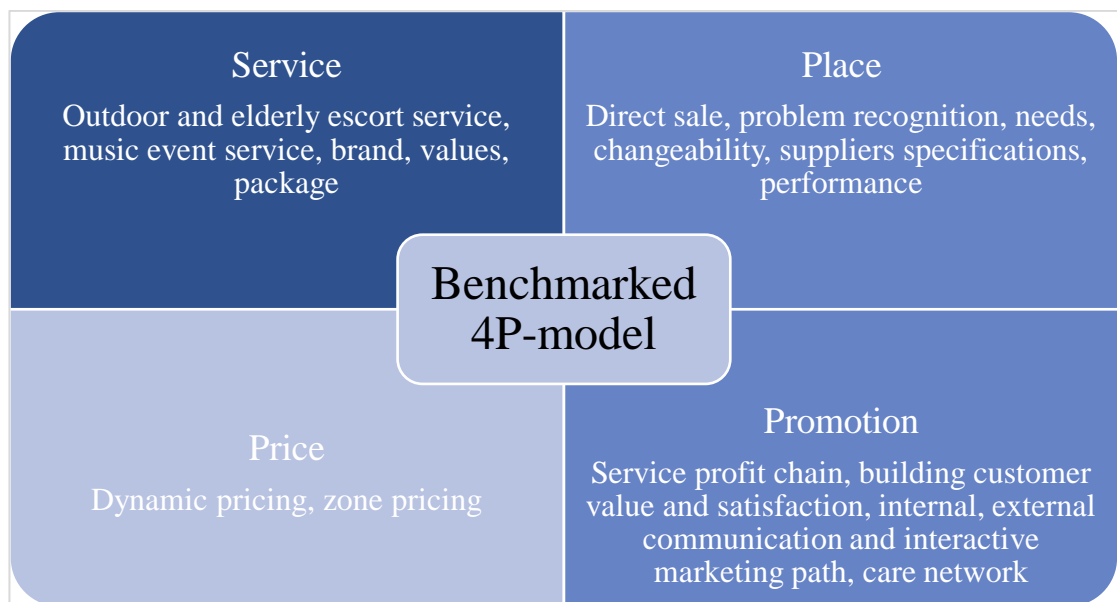


Figure 9. Benchmark marketing mix 4P-model (Kotler et al. 2017), modified by author.

To summarize the importance of the benchmarked marketing mix formed from the 4Ps, the model can be used with great effectiveness when done correctly. The model gives the bases to create and perform the marketing strategy for the given target market and thus further turn it into an effective sales strategy. The chosen methods of implementation of the benchmarked 4P model are left for the provider, as the thesis gathers the bases of strategies and the data necessary to enter the provider's chosen target market. On the other hand, Polunmutka Oy must be prepared to face competition or find innovative ways around it, due the demand in elderly services and high focus on quantity over quality across the service providers. Thus, providing data from the international research level is more than likely to bring new ways in service solutions. This can be focused to meet new demands in the B2B and B2G sectors alike and provide innovative solutions to serve the aging population.

5 CONCLUSION

Throughout the thesis the focus has been on understanding the importance of benchmarking and finding innovative ways to improve services for small- and medium-sized enterprises which in the case have been under pressure to keep up sales during the time of a pandemic. The information research during the study has given tools and knowledge to build strategies to reach out for new possible market segments which require planning and most importantly correct analysis before entering the new segment. Thus, the research conducted for the provider was set to form theoretical and information bases in order to create a suitable marketing mix to reach an effective B2B and B2G customer acquisition strategy. The provider's offered service concepts were field proven through the survey data, which in this case was targeted only at a small focus group in the provider's operational area. This small focus group brings its challenges because the accuracy of the responses might give more variance than a larger sample. Thus, the provider keeps building the operations to more stable levels within the chosen operation where the survey was conducted. For this reason, the responses received provide enough estimation to the provider to engage in the target market.

From the author's point of view on the analysis of the marketing mix and data collection, the intended results were achieved via the survey and benchmarking for the provider. The survey response rate was 26.98%. Even though more answers would have aided in gaining more prominent data, the information already possesses the needed value combined with benchmarked information through academic articles, literature, and findings of the best practices in the field. This highly improves the provider's strategies for the upcoming market entry. The information of this research with such methods was beneficial in the provider's case. During the time of the COVID-19 pandemic the research was conducted at distance. Benchmarking showed prominent results even though most of the time benchmarking heavily relies on the close learning from the given benchmark target. This closer learning unfortunately was not possible to implement during the pandemic. A few other methods were not included in the research as originally was intended due to the validation and resources of the research and the author's heavy load as a working entrepreneur alongside the writing process. Acquiring the distribution channels for surveys were a challenge due the highly protective nature of the field of business and data that is managed

within it. As forming the survey for the research informing the target group has been done and that the information in the research will be used. Survey form was design in such a way that none of the answerers are not recognizable from their answers. As well as asking highly sensitive information and irrelevant information were not asked. Survey participants received the corresponding cover letter which included the provider of the thesis and the purpose of the research. Governmental research permit from Siun Sote was required as well to prove the research as ethical and to offer the survey to distribution. The benchmarked research information shows the importance of co-operation within the services provided for the elderly. Thus, service providers must form the link between themselves and the customer in order to offer and operate on an efficient level, which was shows in the study by Wilemse, Anthierens, Farfan-Portet, Schmitz, Macq and Bastiens (2016) as well as by Arsenijevic and Groot (2018), who indicated how rapidly situations can change and that service providers must be able to react and be informed in time to provide support for the customer as needed. The study of Broese van Groenou, Jacobs, Zwart-Older and Deeg (2016) indicates the idea of the service network around the elderly customer, which in the provider's case is the main driving strategy of Polunmutka Oy. This forms value-based co-operation to serve customers even better now and in the future. This model of operation forms a more reliable and flexible service network such as in European counterparts, as indicated by Kemper-Koebrugge, Adriaansen, Laurant and Wensing (2019).

Understanding the difference between the consumer and business markets has been the driving force throughout the thesis process. The thesis has given the author the ability to dive into the different markets and dive more deeply to acknowledge the business and its culture. The thesis provider Polunmutka Oy is one year old, which means the business is still in the beginning phase. On this note, challenges to compete against the populated market has pushed the company to form its brand identity around its value-based sales strategy in order to differentiate among the competitors. On the other hand, value-based strategy must be evaluated again when entering to the B2B market. More of the B2B market focuses on the volume from which service can be provided, additionally adding the quality control and consistency and additional benefits are expected when businesses close the deal with each other. It will take time until Polunmutka Oy is given to opportunity to pass from the beginning phase to growing phase but through experience services

evolve and change to meet the demand which is important aspect of service adaption and the company's capability to develop.

In the author's point of view development as an entrepreneur occurred during the thesis process. Development in the writing process already began in 2019 in the Netherlands along with the exchange studies. Within the six months of the exchange, an understanding of writing became a custom, due the studied subjects and writing skills required to complete the chosen subjects during the exchange. Now as an entrepreneur, author has been given the opportunity to partake in global conferences on the Silver Economy Project through Karelia UAS, which have further deepened the understanding of the global scale of the given field of operation and varied needs in the target market. Learning to understand the different markets, field of operations, demands and values greatly enhances the overall perspective how, what and to whom to offer the available services that Polunmutka Oy can provide. The importance of the networking within the market is crucial to reach the optimal results and give a competitive edge from marketing and sales points of view. The author's confidence to improve the provider's sales strategy to B2B and B2G market has given great value to Polunmutka Oy, because as new business strategies are formed gradually as business and opportunities grow. Risks in funding in the time of COVID-19 have risen high, and a large investment to increase the capacity are not considered worthwhile in the provider's point of view at least for the time being. Thus, market skimming, evaluation and benchmarking are safer options and more reliable ways to form strategies beforehand upon the entry in such markets.

By turning to the future research topics, growth, and the expansion of Polunmutka Oy will take part in upcoming years as the company establishes the foundation of networks and a solid customer base on the business to consumers and business to business markets. More often the attempt of co-operation is harder than it feels. Challenges arise due the different perspectives of profession, ideology, and values that different fields carry. On the other hand, Polunmutka Oy has remained an active service provider even in the time of pandemic by generating income and at the same time promoting a value-based service model that is beneficial to bring added value to the market. Future topics of research would cover a growth investment plan, improvement marketing design for online platform use, internet, and website sales development, a building strategy to expanding the

area of operations further into North Karelia and other parts of the Finland and improving the service experience in an innovative and customer-oriented way.

Another topic of study one must consider is the improvement and greater implementation of the care network. It shows prominent aspects around European countries by adding additional value to the services provided for the elderly. This relies on the co-operation of different operators in the caring field, but through it more benefits and opportunities arise. It must be noted that small- and medium-sized business owners are pushed to their limits when organizing the new innovative solutions to improve offered services, to produce daily new marketing material to reach potential markets, to operate and provide customers with solutions and be on the lookout for substitutes which might someday surpass the traditional services entirely. Thus, the field of care for the elderly is growing day by day since people live longer and the employed population will find difficulties in supporting the aging population. For this reason, independent service providers are seeking out solutions to aid such causes by providing care, assistance, and happiness for the elderly by offering support on daily activities but also for their relatives to be sure that their elderly live safely and happily during their golden years.

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Marketing research survey for Polunmutka Oy in Finnish**Markkinointikyselytutkimus Polunmutka Oy:lle****1. Oletteko julkinen vai yksityinen toimija**

- ☐ Julkinen
☐ Yksityinen

2. Toimipaikka

- ☐ Eno
☐ Joensuu
☐ Kiihtelysvaara
☐ Pyhäselkä
☐ Tuupovaara
☐ Kontiolahti

3. Vastaajan asema organisaatiossa

- ☐ Johto
☐ Esimies
☐ Työntekijä
☐ Muu, mikä

4. Kuinka usein käytätte yksityisten tukipalvelutuottajien palveluita?

- ☐ Päivittäin
☐ Viikoittain
☐ Kuukausittain
☐ Harvemmin

Marketing research survey to Polunmutka Oy in Finnish

☐ Muu, milloin

5. Mitkä seuraavista asioista koette tärkeinä yksityistä tukipalvelutuottajaa valitessanne? Voitte valita myös useamman vaihtoehdon.

- ☐ Laatu
- ☐ Palvelun toimitusvarmuus
- ☐ Palvelun räätälöinnin mahdollisuus
- ☐ Suositukset
- ☐ Yhteiset arvot
- ☐ Hinta
- ☐ Muu, mikä

6. Kuinka kiinnostuneita olette paikan päälle tuotavista palveluista COVID-19 rajoitteet huomioiden?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Erittäin kiinnostunut	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	En lainkaan kiinnostunut

7. Kuinka kiinnostuneita olette etäyhteyksin tuotetuista palveluista?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Erittäin kiinnostunut	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	En lainkaan kiinnostunut

8. Polunmutka Oy tuottaa ikäihmisille muun muassa seuraavia alla olevia palveluja. Mitkä palvelut kiinnostavat Teitä eniten? Voitte valita myös useamman vaihtoehdon.

- ☐ Sosiaalinen kanssakäyminen
- ☐ Asiointi- ja avustamispalvelut
- ☐ Ulkoilu- ja saattajapalvelut

Marketing research survey to Polunmutka Oy in Finnish

- ☐ Muusiikkitapahtumat
- ☐ Käsityökalujen, veitsien ja saksien teroituspalvelu

9. Mitä muita kuin edellä mainittuja palveluja toivoisitte Polunmutka Oy:n tuottavan?

10. Miten tärkeänä koette hinnan merkityksen valitessanne lisäarvon tuottavaa palvelua?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Erittäin tärkeänä	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Ei lainkaan tärkeänä

11. Mitä seuraavista asioista pidätte tärkeimpänä kriteerinä yksityistä palveluntuottajaa valitessanne. Voitte valita vain yhden vaihtoehdon.

- ☐ Palvelun hinta
- ☐ Suhdeasiakkuus
- ☐ Palvelun tuottama lisäarvo
- ☐ Maksuehdot
- ☐ Muu, mikä

12. Polunmutka Oy tarjoaa yhden kuukauden ajan kestäviä palvelupaketteja sekä tuntihintaista kertaostoa. Teemme myös pidempiaikaisia sopimuksia. Jos olisitte ostamassa yrityksen palveluja, mikä alla olevista vaihtoehdoista sopisi Teille parhaiten? Voitte valita vain yhden vaihtoehdon.

- ☐ Pitkäaikainen sopimus

Marketing research survey to Polunmutka Oy in Finnish

☐ Määräaikainen sopimus

☐ Kertaosto

☐ Muu, mikä

13. Mistä seuraavista viestinnän kanavista lähtisitte etsimään tietoa Polunmutka Oy:stä? Voitte valita myös useamman vaihtoehdon.

☐ Nettisivuilta

☐ Sosiaalisesta mediasta

☐ Yhteistyökumppaneilta

☐ Muu, mistä

**14. Yrityksen verkkosivut löytyvät osoitteesta: <https://polunmutka.fi/>
Kuinka tyytyväinen olette verkkosivuihin?**

☐ Erittäin tyytyväinen

☐ Tyytyväinen

☐ Tyytymätön

☐ Erittäin tyytymätön, miksi

15. Löysittekö Polunmutka Oy:n verkkosivuilta Teille tarpeellista tietoa?

☐ Kyllä

☐ Ei, mitä kaipaisitte lisää

16. Koetteko, että yrityksen tarjoamat palvelut ovat helposti ostettavia?

☐ Kyllä

☐ Ei, miksi

Marketing research survey to Polunmutka Oy in Finnish

17. Mikäli kiinnostuitte Polunmutka Oy:stä ja sen tarjoamista palveluista, mikä olisi Teille paras tapa ottaa yhteyttä yritykseen? Voitte valita myös useamman vaihtoehdon.

- ☐ Sähköpostitse
- ☐ Puhelimitse
- ☐ Henkilökohtainen tapaaminen
- ☐ Yrityksen kotisivuilla olevan yhteydenottolomakkeen avulla
- ☐ Muu, mikä

18. Onko yrityksen viestintä tavoittanut Teitä aiemmin?

- ☐ Kyllä
- ☐ Ei, miksi

19. Jos vastasitte edelliseen kysymykseen kyllä niin mistä seuraavista kanavista viestintä on tavoittanut Teidät? Voitte valita myös useamman vaihtoehdon.

- ☐ Internetistä
- ☐ Mainonnan kautta
- ☐ Suosittelijoiden kautta
- ☐ Yhteistyökumppaneiden kautta
- ☐ Työyhteisön kautta
- ☐ Toisten organisaatioiden kautta
- ☐ Muu, mistä

20. Millainen markkinointiviestintä tavoittaa Teidät parhaiten? Voitte valita myös useamman vaihtoehdon.

- ☐ Suora sähköpostimarkkinointi viesti

Marketing research survey to Polunmutka Oy in Finnish

- ☐ Sosiaalisen median mainonta
- ☐ Lehtimainonta
- ☐ Radiomainonta
- ☐ Suullinen markkinointiviestintä suosittelijoiden kautta

21. Mitkä alla olevista vaihtoehtoista vaikuttavat yrityksestä syntyneeseen mielikuvaan eniten? Voitte valita myös useamman vaihtoehdon.

- ☐ Mainonta
- ☐ Asiakaspalvelu
- ☐ Yrityksen brändi
- ☐ Julkinen viestintä
- ☐ Palvelun helppo ostettavuus
- ☐ Asiakassuhteiden ylläpito

22. Millaisena näette ikäihmisille tuotettavien palveluiden tulevaisuuden vision?

23. Tutustuitteko Polunmutka Oy:hyn ennen kyselyn aloittamista?

- ☐ Kyllä
- ☐ Ei

24. Jos vastasitte edelliseen kysymykseen kyllä niin vaikuttiko yritykseen tutustuminen vastaus valintoihinne?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Erittäin paljon	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Ei juuri lainkaan

25. Voitte halutessanne jättää yhteystietonne alla olevaan kohtaan osallistutte samalla Polunmutkan Duo Kaksi Kitaraa tuottaman, maksuttoman pienimuotoisen konsertin arvontaan (arvo 140€). Mikäli arpaonni suosii Teitä konserttiin voivat osallistua sekä asiakkaat että henkilökunta. Konsertti voidaan järjestää myös etänä. Kiitos vastauksistanne!

Organisaatio/ yritys	<input type="text"/>
Etunimi	<input type="text"/>
Sukunimi	<input type="text"/>
Puhelinnumero	<input type="text"/>
Sähköpostiosoite	<input type="text"/>

Marketing research survey for Polunmutka Oy in English**Marketing research survey for Polunmutka Oy****1. Public or private organisation**

☐ Public

☐ Private

2. Operation area

☐ Eno

☐ Joensuu

☐ Kiihtelysvaara

☐ Pyhäselkä

☐ Tuupovaara

☐ Kontiolahti

3. Position within the organization

☐ Management

☐ Manager

☐ Employee

☐ Other, what

4. How often do you use private supporting service provider?

☐ Daily

☐ Weekly

☐ Monthly

☐ Not often

Marketing research survey to Polunmutka Oy in English

☐ Other, when

5. Please choose what you consider to be important while choosing private supporting service provider? You may also choose multiple options.

☐ Quality

☐ Reliability of the service delivery

☐ Customizability of the service

☐ Recommendations

☐ Shared values

☐ Price

☐ Other, what else

6. How interested are you from the service that can be provided on the on the spot location considering COVID-19 limitations?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Highly interested	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Not at all interested

7. How interested are from services that can be distributed through online?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Highly interested	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Not at all interested

8. Polunmutka Oy offers several service options for the elderly. Which one of the presented service you are most interested? You may choose several options.

☐ Social interaction

☐ Errands running and assisting service

Marketing research survey to Polunmutka Oy in English

- ☐ Music service
- ☐ Home tools sharpening service

9. What else kind of services you wish that Polunmutka Oy could provide?

10. How important is the price of the service when choosing service to bring added value?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Highly important	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Not at all important

11. What you consider to be most important criteria when choosing private service provider? You can choose only one option.

- ☐ Price of the service
- ☐ Customer relationship
- ☐ Added value of the service
- ☐ Payment terms
- ☐ Other, what

12. Polunmutka Oy offers one-month lasting service packages and hourly service time. We also offer long term contracts. If you were buying providers services which one of the options below would suit you best. You can only choose one option.

- ☐ Long term contract

Marketing research survey to Polunmutka Oy in English

☐ Fixed term contract

☐ Occasional contract

☐ Other, what

13. Which one of the following communication sources would you start to searching information from Polunmutka Oy? You may choose multiple options.

☐ Website

☐ Social media

☐ Business partners

☐ Other, where

**14. Provider s website can be found in following path: <https://polunmutka.fi/>
How pleased you were from the content of the site?**

☐ Most pleased

☐ Satisfied

☐ Unsatisfied

☐ Didn't like it at all, please specify why

15. Did you found suitable information from the website?

☐ Yes

☐ No, what was missing, please specify

Marketing research survey to Polunmutka Oy in English

16. Did you found the services to be easy to buy?

☐ Yes

☐ No, why

17. Whether as you were interested in services that Polunmutka offers what would be the best solution for you to get in contact with the company? You may choose multiple options.

☐ E-mail

☐ Phone

☐ Personal meeting

☐ Contact through the company's website

☐ Other, what

18. Has the company's communication or marketing reached you before?

☐ Yes

☐ No, why

19. If you answered yes on the previous question, please choose the following channels where communications has reached you. You may choose multiple options.

☐ Internet

☐ Advertisement

☐ Recommendation

☐ Business contact

☐ Own organisation

☐ Through another organisation

Marketing research survey to Polunmutka Oy in English☐ Other, where

20. Which channels marketing communication would reach you most effectively? You may choose multiple option.

- ☐ E-mail newsletter
- ☐ Social media advertisement
- ☐ Newspaper
- ☐ Radio advertisement
- ☐ Oral marketing communication

21. Which of the following attributes effect the perspective that the company is seen? You may choose multiple options.

- ☐ Marketing
- ☐ Customer service
- ☐ Company's brand image
- ☐ Public image and communication
- ☐ Easy service access and purchase
- ☐ Customer relationship management

22. Please describe how do you see the services for the elderly in the future?

23. Did you find information from Polunmutka Oy before you started the survey?

Marketing research survey to Polunmutka Oy in English

☐ Yes

☐ No

24. If you answered yes on the previous question, please mark how much of an impact it had when you filled the survey.

	1	2	3	4	5	
High impact	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Low impact

25. If you wish you may leave your contact information below and you have chance to win free small concert performance from Polunmutka Oy's Duo Kaksi Kitaraa (value 140 €). If you will be chosen winner both staff and the elderly house customers are allowed to join the concert. Concert can be done also by using remote connections. Thank you for your answers!

Organization/
company

First name

Last name

Phone number

E-mail address