

Master's thesis

Creative Design Management

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Effective B2B marketing through creativity

– Literature review and current state in Finland



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Practices of traditionally informational or educational approaches hold strong in B2B marketing, although research shows that business buyers are also influenced by emotional and creative appeals. This thesis provides deeper insight on the topic from Finland, which has not been available before. In addition to introducing the latest changes shaping B2B marketing, a quantitative analysis was carried out to gather information on how creative approaches are currently viewed by B2B marketing professionals in the Finnish market. Key findings indicate that the majority believes in the more effective impact of creative approaches. However, the dominant perceptions and lack of resources are seen as barriers to take these approaches to practice. The study supports the view that the importance of creativity in B2B marketing will increase significantly in the next few years in Finland.

Keywords:

Advertisement, Business-to-Business (B2B) Advertising, Business-to-Business (B2B) Marketing, Creativity, Finland

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Tehokasta B2B-markkinointia luovuuden avulla

- Kirjallisuuskatsaus sekä nykytila Suomessa

B2B-markkinoinnissa perinteiset informaatio- tai opetuslähestymistavat vallitsevat vahvasti, vaikka tutkimukset osoittavat, että myös emotionaaliset ja luovat vetovoimat vaikuttavat yritysostajiin. Tämä opinnäytetyö tarjoaa syvempää näkemystä aiheesta Suomesta, mitä ei aiemmin ollut saatavilla. B2B-markkinointia muovaavien muutosten esittelyn lisäksi toteutettiin kvantitatiivinen analyysi, jonka avulla kerättiin tietoa, miten B2B-markkinoinnin ammattilaiset tällä hetkellä näkevät luovat lähestymistavat Suomen markkinoilla. Tärkeimmät havainnot viittaavat siihen, että enemmistö uskoo luovien lähestymistapojen tehokkaampaan vaikutukseen. Kuitenkin hallitsevat käsitykset ja resurssien puute nähdään esteinä näiden lähestymistapojen käytäntöön viemiselle. Tutkimus tukee näkemystä, että luovuuden merkitys B2B-markkinoinnissa kasvaa merkittävästi lähivuosina Suomessa.

Asiasanat:

Luovuus, Mainonta, Yritysten välinen (B2B) mainonta, Yritysten välinen (B2B) markkinointi, Suomi

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List of abbreviations

B2B	Business to business
B2C	Business to consumer
EEA	The European Economic Area
NPS	Net promoter score
OBB	Organizational buying behaviour
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
POS	Point of sales
PR	Public relations
ROI	Return on investment
ROMI	Return on marketing investment

1 Introduction

According to the Creative Work Life 2030 project in Finland, creativity is one of the most significant working life skills in the future. The ability to solve problems and find new, more efficient ways of performance provides companies with professional competence to innovate, renew and grow continuously, which will contribute to the competitiveness of Finnish businesses (MRKTNG, 2022).

In advertisement, creativity refers to an idea or implementation that is “novel, divergent from the norm, unique, original, meaningful, value added, and acceptable” (Ang & Low, 2000). It is acknowledged as a key factor contributing to the results achieved with advertising (Baack et al., 2016), later referred to as creative effectiveness (Hurman & Fill, 2020).

As stated by Hurman, creative effectiveness is the element which allows marketers to over-achieve both in short-term and long-term goals, outdoing marketing approaches considered the norm in the industry (2021). The topic has aroused growing academic interest in the past decade regarding B2B marketing. Still, there is notably less literature available on creativity in B2B than in B2C context, presumably caused by “the possibly false distinction between organizational buyers and individual consumers” (Baack et al., 2016). To author’s knowledge, no studies have been conducted in certain geographic markets on the matter.

For the purposes of this thesis, the concepts of B2B marketing, creativity and creative effectiveness are defined as following:

- *B2B marketing* is the action in which the advertiser is marketing its brand’s products or services to a business audience to turn them into purchasers.
- *Creativity* is treated as a distinguishing factor used in marketing campaigns to attract attention of the target audience in novel ways. This definition is close to how Zinkhan approaches creativity in advertising; as

an ability to come up with new ways to present selling propositions (1993).

- *Creative effectiveness* means that creativity enables a stronger commercial impact compared to traditional B2B marketing approaches, which are later described in chapter 2.3.

While the importance of creative effectiveness in B2B marketing seems to be increasingly underlined in the available literature, the differences between various industries or geographic areas are not addressed. Therefore, the scope of this thesis is to gain more insight specifically from Finland.

Although we live in a world of growing global markets, according to OECD, it remains relevant for many businesses to define their market based on the competition and achievable market share in a certain geographical area. Geographic market definitions are influenced by several factors such as pricing, regulations related to products and imports, manufacturing locations, distribution channels, languages used and other national preferences (2016). Market characteristics affect marketing choices (Kotler et al., 2021), which is why different markets are likely to have different prevailing practices regarding marketing.

In addition to the introduction (chapter 1) and conclusions (chapter 7), the thesis is divided into five consecutive sections. Chapter 2 introduces previous literature published on the topic. Based on the literature review, a contingency model of creative effectiveness utilization in Finnish B2B organizations was created. The model, which is introduced in chapter 3, works as a conceptual framework for this thesis, helping to define and guide what kind of data to collect and analyse. Chapter 4 focuses on the presentation of the chosen research method to collect empirical insight from Finland as well as the assessment of the reliability of the collected data. The findings based on the collected data are introduced in chapter 5, which are discussed in more depth in chapter 6.

The purpose of this thesis is to provide information on how creative effectiveness is currently viewed in B2B organizations in the Finnish market, and what type of opportunities it comes with. Hopefully, it also supports marketers to open a discussion in their organizations about the growing significance of creative approaches to B2B marketing.

The central research questions of this thesis are:

- How creativity and its effect is perceived by B2B marketers in the Finnish market at the time, and
- whether creativity is strategically utilized to achieve long-term objectives of brand and business growth.

Majority of B2B advertisement score the lowest possible rank for creative effectiveness (Rogers, 2021). However, there are notable examples in the field, such as the global video campaign called 'The Epic Split feat. van Damme (Live Test)' (Volvo Trucks, 2013) from the past decade. The video went viral online, showing new Volvo truck's steering features by presenting a celebrity performing a stunt, famous music, and appeal to emotions – all which are choices seen primarily in B2C campaigns as described in chapter 2.3. A recent noteworthy B2B example from Finland is by VILPE, a company which specializes in ventilation and roofing solutions. It has succeeded in harnessing the social media platform TikTok to rapidly build global brand awareness and their employer image (2022) in an unusual way by putting employees and their personal, often industry-irrelevant preferences and characteristics in the centre instead of their products.

While benchmarks in creatively effective B2B campaigns stay few and far between (Hurman, 2021), this can be expected to change. In 2022, 'Creative B2B Lions' was launched as a new category in the global Cannes Lions Awards (Cannes Lions, 2022). This does not only recognize the growing number of creative B2B marketing campaigns but will most likely set new benchmarks and expectations for B2B marketers in the future.

2 Drivers of change in B2B marketing

2.1 Changes in B2B marketplace and organizational buying behaviour

During the past 20 years, the B2B marketplace has been evolving in various ways; globalization, rise of social media, tactics based on emotional appeals, and the adoption of multiple advertising media forced by competition (Roberto et al., 2020) all present a challenge for marketers and their campaigns to stand out in the constantly growing marketing clutter.

Organizational buying behaviour (OBB) has traditionally been considered a rational process (Kemp et al., 2020). In contrast to consumer buying, business purchases include far more complex decisions; they involve “large sums of money, technical and economic considerations, and interactions among people at many levels of the buyer’s organization” (Kotler et al., 2021, p. 184). Although it can be argued that this definition is too broad considering the range of different types of purchases that take place in B2B settings, the key difference to consumers is that organizational buying behaviour is based on the interests and needs of the business rather than those of the individual decision makers.

Early research in B2B marketing has set the ground for the presumption that organizational buying behaviour is mostly built upon cognitive elements such as perceived quality, price, partnership, and risk, or by criteria such as costs and technical specifications (Pandey & Mookerjee, 2018). As Diba et al. describe it, organizational buying behaviour is motivated and directed by organizational objectives, and it is constrained by the financial, technological, and human resources available in the organization. Therefore, the B2B buying process is conducted and influenced differently compared to B2C purchases (2019).

Although the rational nature of organizational buying processes set the starting point for B2B purchase decisions, it is likely that emotional and creative appeals play a bigger part in B2B context than previously thought. Persons involved in organizational buying processes can be influenced by subjective marketing

factors such as branding or emotional responses to advertisement, especially if it helps in reducing risk perceptions and legitimizing buying decisions (Baack et al., 2016). Emotional influences, especially for decisions which, in case they are wrong, could cause a negative impact on the business, have long been acknowledged to affect organizational buying behaviour (Hall, 2017). Therefore it is not surprising that individuals in organizations make decisions every day using a combination of rationalizations and emotions (Kemp et al., 2020).

Today, B2B purchases are constantly influenced by interactivity among industry peers, information search possibilities and broader social networks, which all have shifted how business buyers should be approached (Taylor, 2018). Finding and evaluating different options can be done more independently than before, which is why vendors are much later engaged in the buying process (Hall, 2017). Based on studies of B2B buyers, this development is ongoing, and evidence points to an upcoming generational shift in significant customer engagement preferences in the coming years (Adamson, 2022).

In addition to helping prospect buyers to proceed towards the purchase decision as independently as possible, the significance of capturing their attention and ensuring that messaging tactics serve both emotional and rational needs already at an early stage has grown in importance in B2B marketing.

2.2 Convergence of B2B and B2C marketing concepts

The currently common approach in B2B marketing emphasizes driving responses, generating leads, and converting short-term sales (Hurman, 2021). A high volume of relevant and detailed information presented in a rational and logical style is required to serve the complex business buying process (McKee & Fill, 2011).

Since marketing aims to “engage customers, build strong customer relationships and create customer value in order to capture value from customers in return” (Kotler et al., 2021, p.25), the cognitive reasoning behind complex B2B purchase processes explains why the prevalent message tactics

are seen ideal to reach and affect business buyers. In their study, Hurman analyzed hundreds of B2B marketing campaigns from over a decade's period, confirming that B2B marketers trust informational and educational strategies much more than their colleagues in B2C (Figure 1).

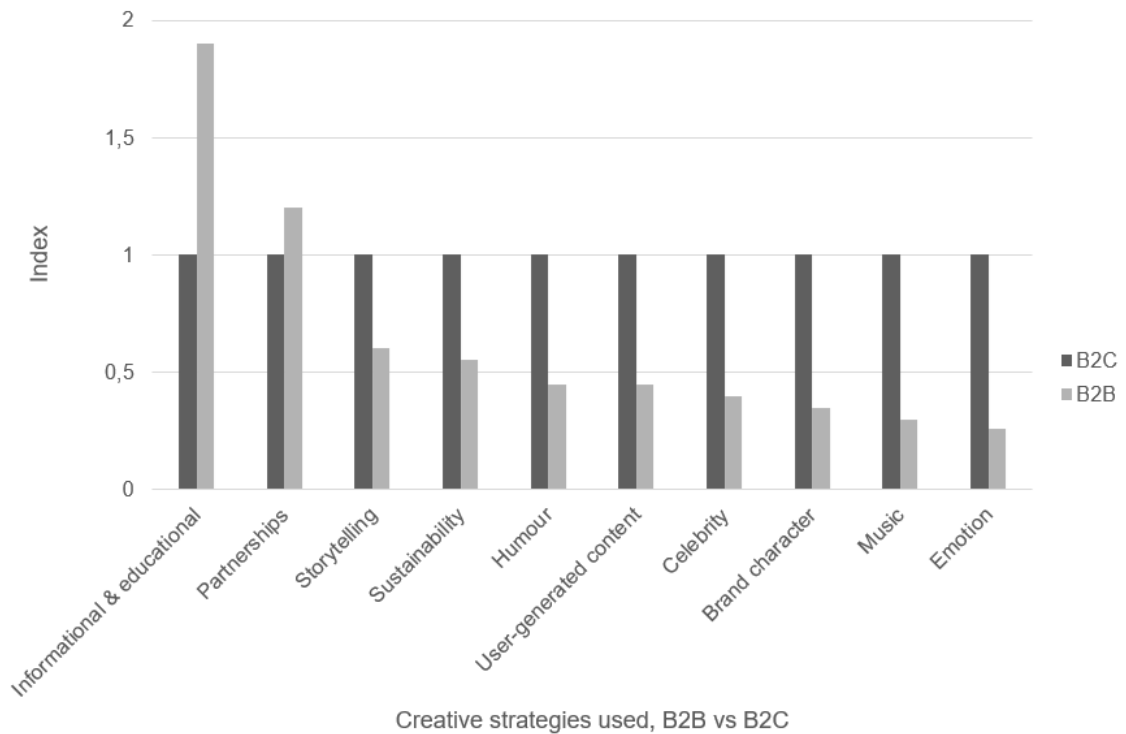


Figure 1. Creative strategies, B2B vs B2C (Hurman, 2021)

The belief that purchase decisions are based solely on logic and reason hold strong in B2B organizations (Taylor, 2018). However, based on research, concepts in B2C marketing, which include a significant emphasis on emotional and creative appeals, are shown to apply to B2B buyers also (Baack et al., 2016).

With the changes in the B2B marketplace and OBB, as well as the convergence of B2B and B2C marketing concepts, there is a growing understanding that creative approaches should be utilized in both B2B and B2C marketing settings.

As Baack et al. summarize it, "B2B advertisements, therefore, need to be more than informative; they also need to be liked" (2016).

2.3 Creative effectiveness

The utilization of creativity to drive marketing results has primarily been a topic studied and implemented in consumer marketing. Research shows that creative advertisement affects cognitive and affective consumer responses, such as ad and brand evaluations, emotional responses to advertisement and intentions to buy (Sasser & Koslow, 2008).

Both in terms of content and audience, novelty and relevance are needed for advertisement to be defined as creative (Ilgin & Miller, 2019). A creative ad must at the same time be in accordance with its context, address its audience but also be unprecedented.

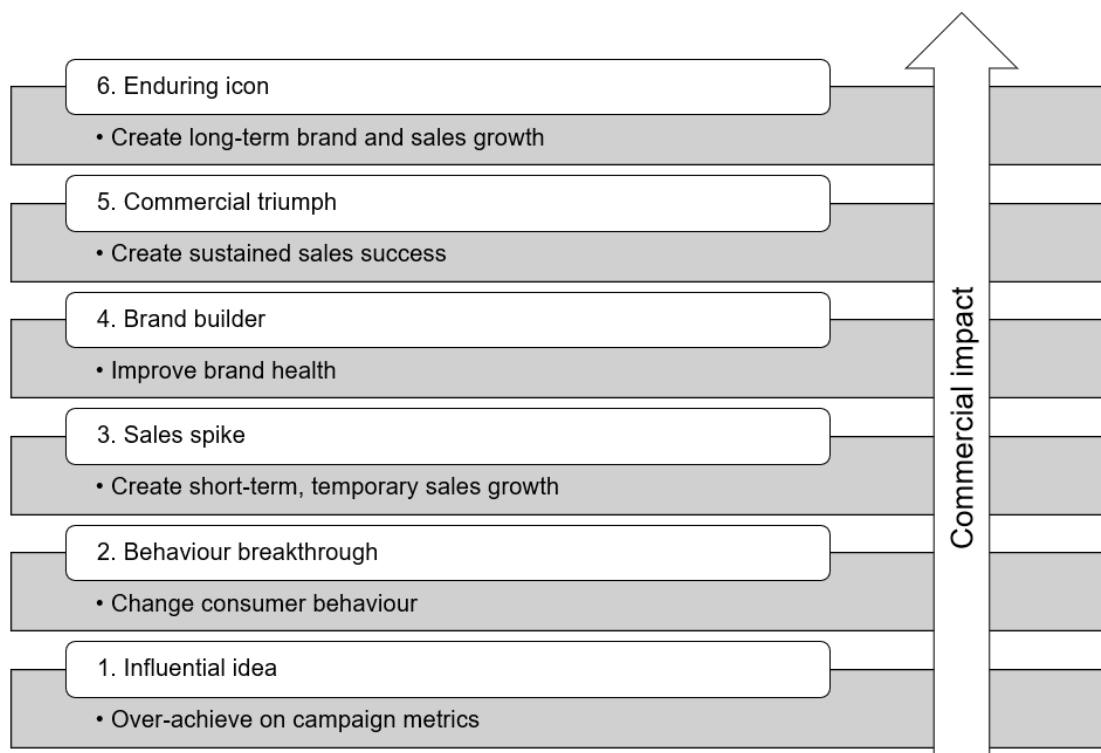


Figure 2. B2C creative effectiveness ladder (Hurman & Field, 2020)

While studying how the effectiveness of creativity is evaluated in marketing awards, Hurman and Field found that common definitions are lacking (2020). To have a shared understanding in this area, they created a model called *the*

creative effectiveness ladder (Figure 2). The model illustrates the six main types of results that creative marketing produces from least to most commercially impactful.

According to the author's interpretation, the use of the model requires an understanding of how campaigns that are similar in some way, e.g., same product category or same target audience, usually perform. By comparing to the predicted performance, the level of impact achieved by unusual or novel approach can be evaluated with the model. However, it should be noted that the model does not actually take a stand on creativity itself, but only how great its influence was by estimation. The model therefore only helps to assess how successful a deviant-approached campaign was, considering the set goals and the performance of the previous comparable campaigns.

Hurman and Field also conducted a ladder level analysis which presents the creative aspect more clearly by listing ideal metrics, media, and strategic choice suggestions for each of the ladder's steps (appendix 1). It shows more concrete information about media choices and messaging tactics that have succeeded in achieving creative effectiveness in a way that is unusual in the market, achieving the novelty mentioned in the definition of creativity.

The analysis is based on previous award-winning campaigns and gives more insight about the methods harnessing creativity as a tool in campaigns. (Hurman & Field, 2021). However, although it is possible to find traits and choices that have previously strengthened creative effectiveness, one can question whether those past choices fit the given definition of creativity, i.e., something new and unprecedented.

The original creative effectiveness ladder focuses on B2C marketing (Hurman & Fill, 2020). To share similar insights for B2B marketers, Hurman continued their studies focusing on B2B marketing campaigns, which resulted in the development of the B2B creative effectiveness ladder (Figure 3).

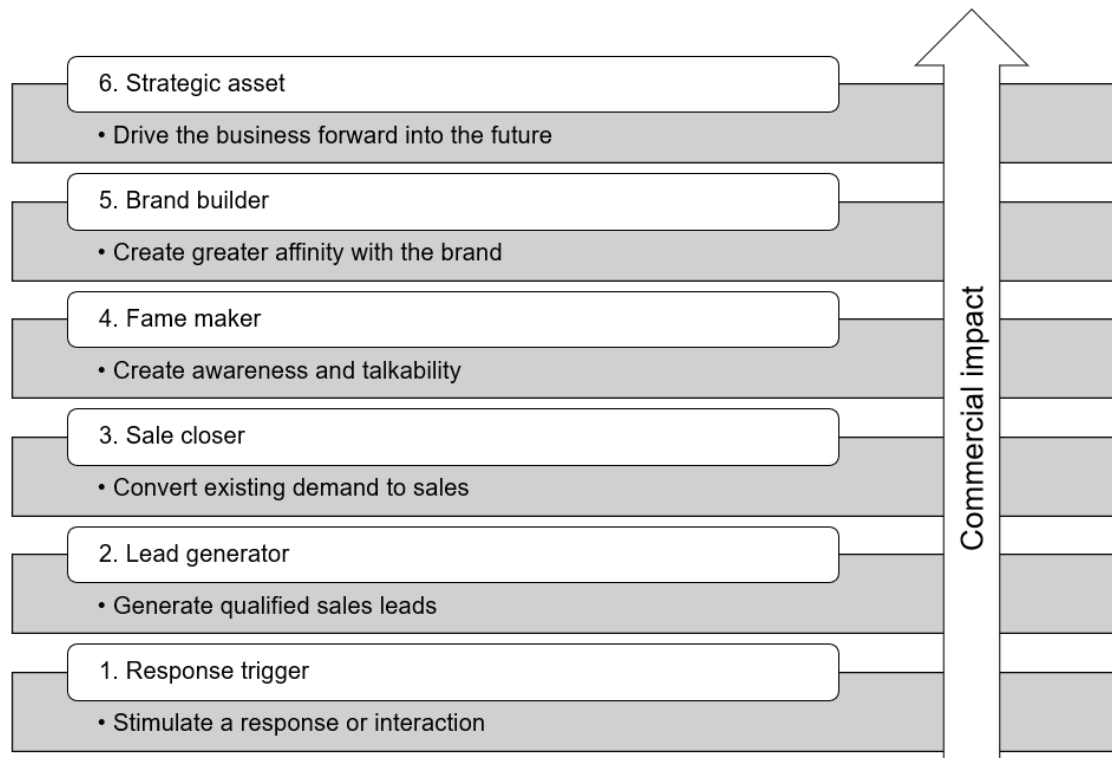


Figure 3. B2B creative effectiveness ladder (Hurman, 2021)

It is an altered model of the original version, consisting more central features and vocabulary typical for B2B marketing. According to Hurman, the model's purpose is to encourage marketers "to expend more of the budgets on bigger, longer-term, emotional, and broad-reach campaigning" (2021). A ladder level analysis was implemented for B2B campaigns as well (appendix 2). In contrast to the B2C ladder, lead media and creative strategies that over-index the metrics have been left out of the B2B ladder. There is no clear explanation provided why the ladders differ in this matter, but the author assumes it is due to the lack of enough comparable data in B2B context.

Hurman underlines that while the presented strategic choices in the model work as a starting point, further analyses are needed to see if they hold true. Due to so few examples for the highest level of the B2B creative effectiveness ladder, the analysis is also missing strategic choice suggestions for the final ladder level (2021).

2.4 Factors inhibiting or enabling creative approaches

Prevalent emphasis on rationality, as described in chapters 2.1 and 2.2, might limit how creative effectiveness is perceived in B2B organizations. Additionally, B2B companies are typically product, engineering or sales driven instead of marketing driven (Rogers, 2021). They have far fewer marketers on their board of directors than B2C companies (Taylor, 2018), suggesting that the ultimate decision-power concerning marketing is not actually owned by marketing experts. Therefore, the level of autonomy the marketing function has when deciding on novel approaches could be an inhibiting factor considering creative effectiveness.

Consequently, B2B marketers must work more to convince others in their organizations of new approaches compared to B2C (Rogers, 2021). Maintaining an already trusted, traditional approach might seem less risky in terms of workload and professional status, resulting in motivational boundaries to propose changes that, while increasing the utilization of creative effectiveness, are not guaranteed certain results due to lack of previous experiences. This claim is also supported by Sasser and Koslow, who also argue that organizational operating models and routines stifle creative approaches, and therefore development of creative advertising should be outsourced to advertisement agencies (2008).

Creative commitment, a concept introduced by Hurman and Field, refers to the willingness to invest the necessary resources to creative campaigns, resulting in higher levels of effective outcomes (2020). Compared to B2C, B2B campaigns lack creative commitment; they get to run with less money, for shorter durations, and in fewer media channels than B2C campaigns (Hurman, 2021). In the author's opinion, the possibility of using external advertising agencies is also strongly linked to creative commitment; in addition to the required resources to run the campaign, the development of the campaigns should be also accounted.

Another issue could be related to competence regarding creativity. According to a study conducted by Creative Work Life 2030 project in Finland, perceptiveness, i.e., the ability to find alternative ways of thinking and acting, is a clear asset for Finnish professionals, but they lack creative self-esteem, which means the resilience to stand behind controversial approaches and to proceed with uncertain outcomes ahead (Yellow Method, 2022). Depending on the individual, there may be variation in their ability to suggest, develop and implement creative efforts, even if the organization is fundamentally open to new ways of marketing.

Finally, in many B2B organizations, creative advertisement could be seen as too much of a risk (Baack et al., 2016). This suggests that companies with a higher tolerance for reputational or financial risks could be more open to pursuit creative effectiveness.

3 The conceptual framework

Based on the literature review, a contingency model of creative effectiveness utilization was created by the author (Figure 4). The primary purpose of the model is to structure the perspective on the topic and show how the introduced concepts are related to each other. One of the purposes of the research is to assess whether the presented model is valid in practice in Finnish B2B organizations.

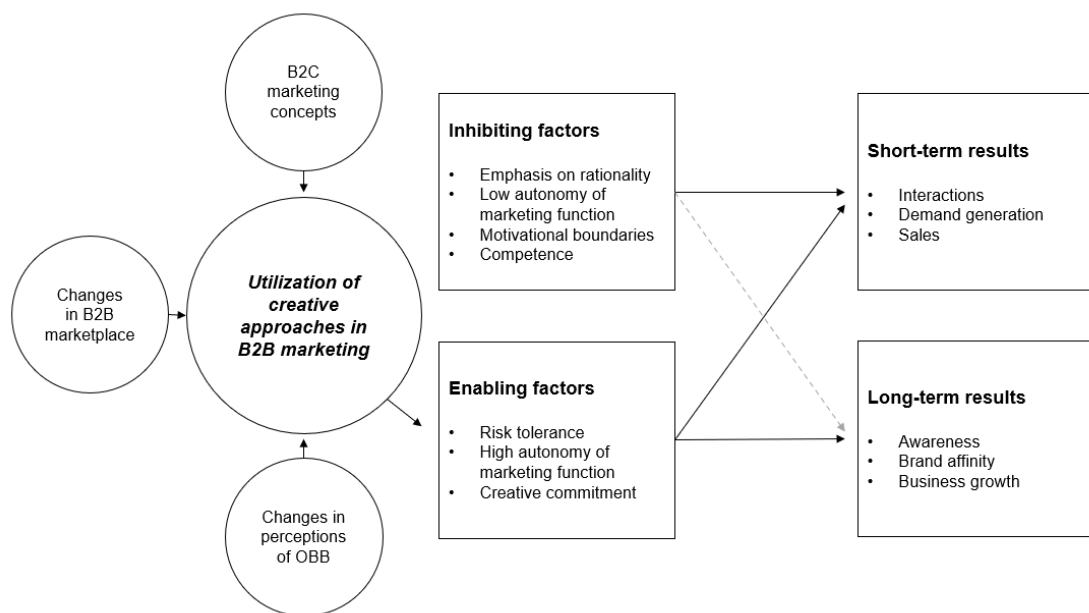


Figure 4. Contingency model of creative effectiveness utilization

The model illustrates how changes in organizational buying behaviour and the B2B marketplace together with the influences from B2C marketing concepts have increased the need to utilize creative effectiveness by B2B marketers in the Finnish market, and what type of outcomes it supports.

Emphasis on rationality, low autonomy or decision-power of marketing function in the organization, and marketers' motivational boundaries as well as current competence are factors which might inhibit the utilization of creative effectiveness. Enabling factors include risk tolerance, high autonomy of

marketing function and creative commitment. To complement Hurman and Field's definition, the possibility to use external advertising agencies contributes to organization's willingness to support more creative approaches in this framework.

The listed desired results have been selected based on Hurman's writings. While these might differ depending on the company, it can be assumed, for example according to Kotler's definition of marketing, that the short- and long-term goals presented in the framework are more or less always objectives of marketing efforts.

In the light of literature review, active utilization of creative effectiveness contributes more efficiently to the realization of long-term results, such as awareness, brand affinity and business growth, as featured in the B2B creative effectiveness ladder by Hurman (2021). Short-term results such as interactions between the buyers and the vendors, demand generation and sales remain achievable through marketing activities, whether creative effectiveness is utilized or not – although according to Hurman, the goals are met more efficiently when creativity plays a part (2021).

4 Study in Finland

4.1 Research objectives

The purpose of the research was to obtain more detailed information on the utilization of creative effectiveness in B2B marketing specifically in the Finnish market, due to geographic factors explained in the introduction.

Through the study, the goal was to gain better understanding on whether Finnish B2B marketers agree with the need to utilize more creative approaches. Another objective was also to find out how the issues raised in the literature review hold true in Finland.

4.2 Data collection and sampling

The data was collected by quantitative approach. To construct the study, the contingency model presented in chapter 3 was used to define the scope and the necessary questions for the survey.

An online questionnaire was chosen as the survey instrument, including total of 23 questions (appendix 3). Majority of the questions were close ended, with few open response exceptions. The online questionnaire was created via Microsoft Forms.

Respondents were recruited using a convenience sampling approach. All samples, in which the probability of a potential respondent becoming part of the sample cannot be calculated, is considered a convenience sample. The convenience sample is based on respondents' self-select to take part in the survey (Schonlau et al., 2002).

The link to the survey was distributed in social media. Responses were collected for two weeks. The sample consisted of a group of people who filled out the questionnaire after coming across it on social media channels. The link to the questionnaire was distributed by the author in LinkedIn, and in a

Facebook group called Markkinointikollektiivi, which is an online community for Finnish marketers. The Finnish marketing association, Marketing Finland, also promoted the questionnaire in their social media channels.

4.3 Sample distribution

27 respondents answered the questionnaire. Table 1 provides an overview of the respondents' position in marketing and their company's represented industry. Out of 27, 25 met the conditions of the survey as qualified respondents.

Table 1. Respondents' represented industry and position in marketing

Industry	Entry-level	Manager-level	Director-level	Executive-level	Total industry representatives
Arts, entertainment, repair of household goods and other services			1		1
Construction	1	1			2
Financial and insurance activities		2			2
Information and communication		2	2		4
Manufacturing chemicals, rubber, plastics, fuel, and other non-metallic mineral products	1		1		2
Manufacturing machinery and equipment		3	2		5
Manufacturing transport equipment			1		1
Professional, scientific, and technical activities		3			3
Wholesale and retail trade	1	2			3
Marketing service provider (e.g., freelancing or a position in an ad/marketing agency)		1		1	2
Total by position	3	14	7	1	25

23 respondents, a clear majority, represent so-called in-house marketing, i.e., they work in the marketing function in a specific industry, responsible for the marketing activities of a certain company. 22 respondents work in a manager-, director-, or executive-level position, indicating that the majority of the

respondents are also responsible for creating, planning and/or overseeing approaches to marketing strategies in their organizations.

As shown in Table 2, the number of employees in the marketing function tends to increase with the size of the company, considering in-house marketing. Two of the respondents work for a provider of marketing services, which is a deviation in the overall sample. Both respondents work in a company employing 10–49 employees, with a marketing function of 10–19 people in size.

Table 2. Respondents' company and marketing function size

Number of employees	1-4 in marketing	5-9 in marketing	10-19 in marketing	20-39 in marketing	40+ in marketing	Total by company size
1–49	3	1	2			6
50–99	2					2
100–499	5	5		1		11
500–999		1		1		2
1000+			2	1	1	4
Total by marketing function size	10	7	4	3	1	25

60% (15) of the respondents share that their organization has a seat for CMO, Head of Marketing or other C-level executive responsible for marketing in the top management team. Based on the companies' organizational charts, 40% (10) of the respondents are led by another function, e.g., sales, engineering, or product development.

4.4 Reliability and validity of data

Due to the nature of online questionnaires, uncontrolled instrument distribution affected the sample selection; anyone could access the questionnaire, and therefore there is no control over who took part in the survey or how many times (Schonlau et al., 2002). This may affect the reliability of the findings. To increase the reliability and validity of data, eliminative question was added to the survey. The respondents were asked to confirm whether they are B2B

marketing professionals, and if they work in the Finnish market. A negative answer ended the survey.

The author was unable to find an exact number of B2B marketing professionals in Finland, which is why it is challenging to assess the comparability of the sample. In 2020, there were approximately 27 000 people working in marketing in Finland (Isoniemi, 2020), including both B2B and B2C professionals. Based on Marketing Finland's marketing barometer from 2020, roughly 65 % of their respondents were working in B2B marketing.

These numbers give indicative information that at least several thousand people are likely to work in B2B marketing. Compared to this estimate, the sample is marginal, and for that reason the results of the study must be interpreted as indications at most, with limited possibilities to draw conclusions. The research primarily provides a starting point for mapping the state of creativity in the field of B2B marketing in Finland, with the help of which, for example, attitudinal or practical trends can be followed in the future.

Finally, the subjective interpretations of creativity must also be raised as a possible disruption of data reliability. Although creativity or creative approaches were defined several times in the accompanying text and questions during the survey (appendix 3), the concept is not unambiguous. Differences in interpretation between individuals may affect the responses, and therefore, the overall outcome of the study.

5 Findings

5.1 Organizational factors and decision power

According to the study conducted in Finland, 76% (19) of the respondents agree that creative approaches, referring to ideas or implementations that are novel, different, unusual or deviant in the industry, are currently expected from them as B2B marketing professionals in their company. Out of these respondents, clear majority, 79% (14) support the claim that this is due to organizational objectives related to gaining competitive advantage and/or long-term brand or business growth.

44% (11) of the respondents work in an organization that could be considered ideal for creative B2B marketing; the company has a marketing expert in the board of directors, and the final decision-making power of marketing is not under another function such as sales, engineering or product development.

Based on the literature review, these are ideal organizational structures concerning creative approaches. However, the study showed no clear correlation between them and creativity in practice. 54% (6) respondents from those with the ideal organizational structures report to have experimented with creative approaches. The number was similar for the whole sample; 52% (13) of all respondents had tried creative approaches in B2B marketing.

5.2 Factors that inhibit creativity

Figure 5 illustrates how the respondents evaluate inhibiting and enabling factors in their companies concerning creativity. B2B marketers in Finland seem to agree with the most remarkable obstacles raised in the literature review; 72% (18) found the prevalent emphasis on rational approaches as well as the lack of resources a frequent or occasional inhibitor of creativity.

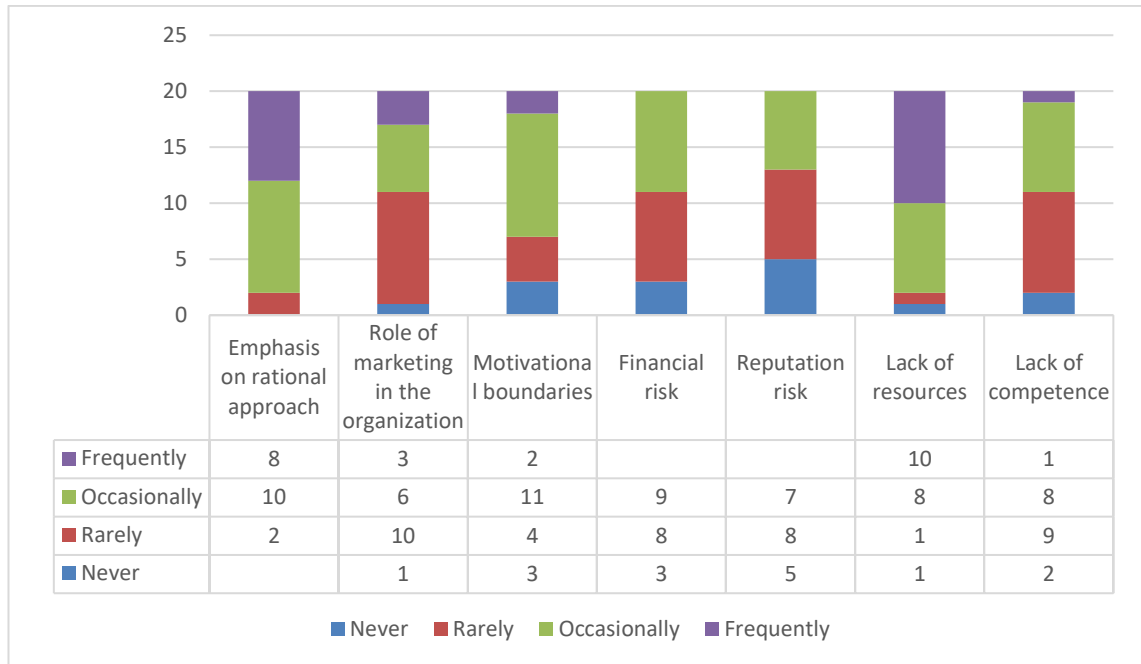


Figure 5. Obstacles inhibiting creative approaches in Finnish B2B marketing

When asked about overall spend on creative approaches, 36% (9) of all respondents estimate that they have enough resources at hand. 56% (14) of the respondents work with external agencies when developing and/or implementing B2B marketing campaigns.

Role of marketing function in the organization, marketers' competence regarding creative approaches, as well as company's financial or reputation risks are the least recognized as inhibiting factors. However, marketing may be biased when evaluating these issues in its own role; a truer picture could be obtained by gathering a more comprehensive view also from other stakeholders in companies, such as board of directors and financial management.

5.3 Views regarding creativity

Every respondent is of the opinion that with creativity, more effective results can be achieved in B2B marketing. More than half (13) of the respondents have already experimented with creative approaches, and all of them agree that their experiments were successful.

Figure 6 shows how different elements have been utilized in Finnish B2B marketing in the past twelve months prior to the survey. The measured elements were chosen based on the ones Hurman compared in Figure 1.

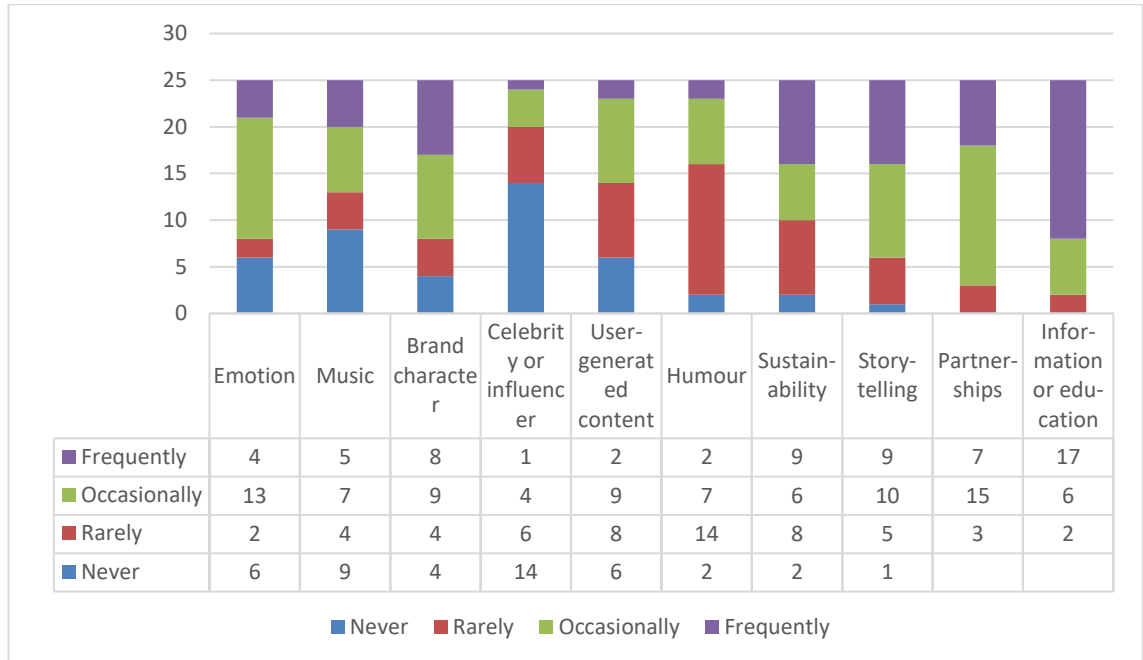


Figure 6. Creative strategies in Finnish B2B marketing during 2021-2022

In line with literature review, informational and educational approaches are the most popular elements in Finnish B2B marketing; 68% (17) of the respondents utilize them frequently in B2B marketing. Storytelling, sustainability, and perhaps surprisingly, brand characters, have also been utilized remarkably.

Compared to the statistics presented by Hurman, there seems to be a slight difference in emphasis in Finland between the different strategies. For instance, storytelling and sustainability seems to be more significant than promoting partnerships in Finland. However, figures Figure 1 and Figure 6 are not directly comparable, as Hurman compares B2B statistics to the corresponding numbers in consumer marketing.

92% (23) believe that creative approaches will play a more significant part in their company's B2B marketing in the next 5 years.

6 Discussion

The results suggest that the contingency model of utilizing creative effectiveness holds true for B2B marketing in Finnish organizations for the greater part. It also seems that creativity is recognized as a strategically important asset for brand or business growth.

Concerning the organizational factors, majority of Finnish B2B marketers seem to have more ideal circumstances for creative approaches than what was raised in the literature; the expectations as well as the ownership of marketing decision power should support creative approaches. It could be assumed that ideal organizational factors would increase the number of creative experiments. However, the responses did not show a correlation between the two. This may be due to the limited number of responses, and further research is needed to see if a correlation could be found.

It might also be that the significance of other inhibiting factors overrun the ideal organizational conditions. The survey results point to the direction that the lack of creative commitment within the organization as well as the strong emphasis on rational marketing approaches are seen as key factors on whether creativity is pursuable. The study results are in line with the literature review in this matter.

When asked about creativity in practice, more than half of the respondents report to have successfully experimented with creative approaches in B2B marketing. One of the respondents commented that if an experiment could have been more successful, it was due to the creative ideas not being executed all the way, for example, because they were not based on a real understanding of the target audience.

In author's opinion, this type of knowledge sets the foundation for any, traditional or creative, marketing strategy. Thorough customer understanding should always come first, and only then should marketing professionals look for ways to implement marketing in a distinctive way.

In their open response, one of the respondents also raised the importance of recognizing the different steps of the buyer journey as well as the shift from supporting sales to supporting customers:

“Creativity is important for attracting attention, however, in B2B your prospects typically want to quickly know what your product does, what it doesn't do, and why they should care. B2B buying is complex, and marketers' important job is to help them on that journey as much as possible”.

Based on the literature review and their own work experiences, the author agrees with this comment. Marketing activities in B2B settings have an important informative function, which are emphasized especially at the later stages of the buyer journey. To utilize more creativity is not about forgetting the cruciality of providing the buyer with enough information to carry out a purchase decision. However, it is an interesting argument whether creativity could serve as more than attention seeking strategy in the beginning of the buyer journey. After all, finding new, perhaps more interesting and effective ways to present information in the later stages would serve B2B buying equally.

The results of the study indicate that Finnish B2B marketers strongly believe in the effectiveness of creativity, and soon we are likely to see more and more examples of its utilization. However, as shown in Figure 6, prevailing traditional elements are currently very popular. Depending on the industry, the less utilized elements could become a very effective way to harness attention and differentiate from other messages in the marketplace to gain advantage. One of the open answers commented on the importance of standing out from the competition:

“In this information overload era, it is more important than ever that your marketing stands out. It is too risky to spend a lot of money trying to look exactly like all your competitors.”

When asked about competitors, only two have noted unusual media choices and/or messaging tactics in the market. As the respondents were not asked to confirm how actively they monitor their competitors, it is challenging to assess whether different approaches to marketing are only in their infancy or just unrecognized.

7 Conclusion

This research aimed to identify how creativity and its effect are perceived by B2B marketers in the Finnish market, and whether creativity is seen as a strategically important asset for brand and business growth. With this thesis, more detailed geographical information from Finland is available on the subject, which was not available before.

Based on a quantitative analysis of Finnish B2B marketing professionals' responses, the results indicate that the potential is recognized, but it has not fully translated into practice. However, the research supports the view that the importance of creativity in B2B marketing is likely to increase in the next few years.

The research supports most of the statements raised from the literature review, and it seems that B2B marketers and their organizations in Finland are more open to novel marketing ideas. Putting these into practice seems to be inhibited by the prevailing notions of effective B2B marketing, which are still strongly based on traditional approaches. Another clearly inhibiting factor is resources. Without enough creative commitment from the organization, there are little means to carry out more creative marketing.

As described in the introduction, B2B marketing is a large entity with various industries within. Future studies could help to gain better understanding about industrial differences. Also, studying preferences and trends regarding Finnish B2B buyers could give further insight on the topic in Finland.

One purpose of this thesis was to gather arguments for why it is worth pursuing more creative approaches in B2B marketing. Based on both literature review and the experiences of the respondents, by utilizing the means of creativity, marketing could contribute more efficiently to long-term objectives of brand and business growth and shift focus from supporting sales to supporting buyers. Creativity not only helps to stand out from competitors and achieve greater attention value, but at best it also helps to find better ways to serve the complex

purchasing processes and both rational and emotional needs of business buyers.

Considering the results of the research, B2B organizations in Finland could be pioneers in this field by embracing novel, more creative ways of implementing marketing. To do this, there needs to be a common understanding between marketing and organization's top management. To succeed in the increasingly creative era of B2B marketing, organizations must be ready to change not only their presumptions, but also support and encourage the work with the required resources and freedom. Positive experiences from past creative experiments by Finnish B2B marketers as well as previous studies on influencing B2B buying behavior support the view that the financial risk is worthwhile.

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B2C creative effectiveness ladder level analysis by Hurman & Field (2020)

Ladder level	Metrics	Lead media & creative strategies that over-index the metrics	Strategic choice suggestions
1. Influential idea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Campaign recall – Social shares – Earned impressions – Earned media value 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Online video, packaging & design, events & experiential 2. Celebrity, stunts, music 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Act in opposite way of big companies 4. Capitalise on a major media or cultural moment 5. Take the side of the consumer against injustice
2. Behaviour breakthrough	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Penetration (number of purchases) – Frequency / weight of purchase – Loyalty (to the brand) – Trial (1st time purchases) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. POS/instore, PR, events & experiential 7. Sustainability & responsibility, emotion, celebrity 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Set a clear behavioural goal 9. Orient the creative idea around a clear behavioural outcome 10. Make the new behaviour more attractive
3. Sales spike	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Sales (value and volume) – Market share (value and volume) – ROI 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Online video, social media, sales promotion – User-generated content & participation, stunts, celebrity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Use creativity to make sales promotions engaging – Use stunts, events, and experiential marketing in highly creative ways – Use 'Big Tactics' to achieve large results with seemingly small ideas
4. Brand builder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Brand awareness – Brand preference – Purchase Intent – Brand attributes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Online video, television, online display, newspaper, radio & audio – Storytelling, music, emotion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Forge a bond with the brand by championing the consumer – Tap into existing brand strengths – Where the brand is lacking, get specific about the brand attributes you want to shift
5. Commercial triumph	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Sales (value and volume) – Market share (value and volume) – ROI 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Online video, packaging & design, social media – User-generated content & participation, music, celebrity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Use the timeless power of emotional storytelling – Involve the consumer in your idea – Use packaging as lead media
6. Enduring icon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Sales (value and volume) – Market share (value and volume) – ROI – Brand health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Television, packaging & design – Celebrity, brand character, music 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Find a genuinely enduring insight – Find a limitless idea – Commit to the long term

B2B creative effectiveness ladder level analysis by Hurman (2021)

Ladder level	Metrics	Strategic choice suggestions
1. Response trigger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Response rate - Campaign engagement - Interactions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ at events ▪ with the brand ▪ with the product - Attendance (events, retail locations) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Don't be a boring business - Demonstrate product benefits in surprising ways - Catch people off-guard
2. Lead generator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ lead generation ▪ sales pipeline ▪ inbound enquiries / call centre calls - Reduction of cost per lead - Improvement in lead quality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Target insightfully - Get playful with your direct marketing - Be useful
3. Sale closer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Generation of incremental sales - Increase in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ sales growth rate ▪ market share - Reduction of cost per sale - High revenue or profit ROMI 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Activate the channel - Lead thought - Prove your ongoing relevance
4. Fame maker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Generation of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ campaign or brand awareness beyond expectations (considering the media budget) ▪ significant news coverage and earned media reach ▪ significant earned impressions and social shares 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Be surprising and original - Champion a purpose or cause - Do something everyone can be part of
5. Brand builder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increases in brand awareness, consideration, or preference - Improvement of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ NPS ▪ specific brand perceptions ▪ specific product perceptions - Increases in purchase intent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use emotion - Target broad audiences - Address key brand weaknesses
6. Strategic asset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improvements in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ lead generation performance ▪ brand health - Sales and market-share growth - Profit growth - Long-term ROMI 	

Questionnaire for Finnish B2B marketing professionals

Cover text for respondents

This survey is conducted by a student at Turku University of Applied Sciences, Finland. The results will be used for the master's thesis of the author. The objective is to find information on how creativity is perceived regarding B2B marketing campaigns and advertisement in B2B organizations in the Finnish market, and whether it is utilized to achieve competitional advantage and/or long-term brand & business growth.

The survey is intended for marketing professionals who work with, manage, or lead the development and/or execution of commercial campaigns by B2B organizations in Finland. The survey has a total of 23 questions. All information provided by the respondents is collected and handled anonymously.

Please answer the questionnaire considering the following definitions:

1. B2B marketing is defined as the action in which the advertiser is marketing its brand's products or services to a business audience to turn them into purchasers
2. Creativity refers to an idea or implementation that is novel, different, unusual, or deviant, and as a factor aiming to drive more effective results of advertising.

In case you have any questions regarding the survey, you may contact the creator by sending an email to claudia.saarukka@edu.turkuamk.fi. Thank you for your participation.

Questions

Background information

1. Do your work with, manage or lead the development and/or execution of commercial B2B marketing campaigns in Finland? *
 - Yes
 - No (*survey ends*)

2. Which position level is closest to your job description in marketing?
 - Entry-level
 - Manager-level
 - Director-level
 - Executive-level

3. Choose the option that best describes your relation to B2B marketing
 - I work in-house, focusing on a certain business
 - I provide marketing services for multiple businesses (e.g., freelancing or a position in an ad/marketing agency) (*answer skips question 4*)

4. What is the industry of your company? If unsure, please view the STAN industry list (<https://www.oecd.org/sti/ind/2stan-indlist.pdf>) to find the best option.
 - Agriculture, hunting, forestry, and fishing
 - Mining and quarrying
 - Manufacturing food products, beverages, and tobacco
 - Manufacturing textiles, wearing apparel, leather, and related products
 - Manufacturing wood and paper products, and printing
 - Manufacturing chemicals, rubber, plastics, fuel, and other non-metallic mineral products
 - Manufacturing basic metals and fabricated metal products

- Manufacturing machinery and equipment
- Manufacturing transport equipment
- Manufacturing furniture and other manufacturing
- Repair and installation of machinery and equipment
- Electricity, gas, steam, air conditioning and water supply; sewerage, waste management and remediation activities
- Construction
- Wholesale and retail trade
- Repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles
- Transportation and storage
- Accommodation and food service activities
- Information and communication
- Financial and insurance activities
- Real estate activities
- Professional, scientific, and technical activities
- Administrative and support service activities
- Community, social and personal services
- Arts, entertainment, repair of household goods and other services

5. Company size *

- 1-49 employees
- 50-99 employees
- 100-499 employees
- 500-999 employees
- 1000+ employees

6. Marketing function size *

- 1-4 employees
- 5-9 employees
- 10-19 employees
- 20-39 employees
- 40+ employees

7. Do you use external agencies to develop and/or execute B2B marketing campaigns in your company? *
- Yes
 - No
8. In the management team, does your company have a seat for CMO, Head of Marketing or other C-level executive responsible for marketing? *
- Yes
 - No
9. Does marketing belong to another function based on your company's organizational chart, e.g., sales, engineering, or product development? *
- Yes
 - No

Views regarding creativity and its effectiveness

10. Past 12 months, how often the following elements have been utilized to drive effectiveness of B2B marketing campaigns by your company? *
(Answer options: never / rarely / occasionally / frequently)
- Emotion
 - Music
 - Brand character
 - Celebrity or a known social media influencer
 - User-generated content
 - Humour
 - Sustainability
 - Storytelling
 - Partnerships
 - Information and/or education

11. Have you experimented with creative approaches regarding B2B marketing, referring to an idea or implementation that is novel, different, unusual, or deviant in the industry? *

- Yes
- No (*skips question 12*)

12. In your opinion, were the experiments successful?

- Yes (*skips question 13*)
- No

13. Please describe the reasons why you don't think they were successful:

14. Do you believe that creativity, referring to an idea or implementation that is novel, different, unusual, or deviant, drives more effective results in B2B marketing? *

- Yes
- No

15. Please describe reasons why not: (*open field*)

16. Considering B2B marketing, have you noted any unusual media choices and/or messaging tactics from the competitors in your market?

- Yes
- No (*skips question 17*)

17. Have these notions affected the way you think your company should approach B2B marketing?

- Yes
- No

18. Are you expecting or expected to develop and/or execute B2B marketing campaigns with a creative approach in your company? *
- Yes
 - No (*survey moves on to next section*)
19. Are B2B marketing campaigns developed and/or executed in a creative manner to gain competitive advantage, long-term brand, or business growth in your company? *
- Yes
 - No
20. Is the development and/or execution of creative B2B marketing campaigns supported with enough resources (e.g., campaign spend, duration and number of media channels) in your company? *
- Yes
 - No
21. What obstacles do you face when developing and/or executing creative B2B marketing campaigns in your company? (*Answer options: never / rarely / occasionally / frequently*) *
- Emphasis on rational approach (e.g., information or product-focused)
 - Role of marketing in the organization
 - Motivational boundaries (e.g., professional risk or unwillingness towards the workload caused by convincing others of an unusual approach)
 - Financial risk (for the company)
 - Reputation risk (for the company)
 - Lack of resources
 - Lack of competence

Prospects and open responses

22. Do you believe that creativity will play a more significant role as a result driver in your company's B2B marketing campaigns in the next five years? *

- Yes
- No

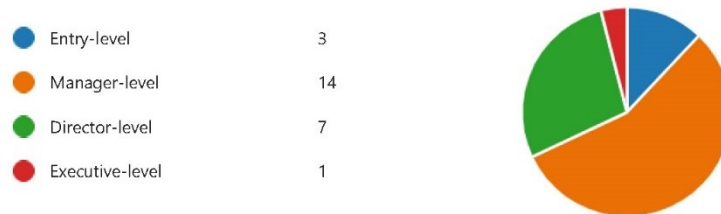
23. Feel free to share any raised thoughts regarding creativity and its effectiveness in B2B marketing context: (*optional, open field*)

Summary of the responses

1. Do your work with, manage or lead the development and/or execution of commercial B2B marketing campaigns in Finland?



2. Which position level is closest to your job description in marketing?

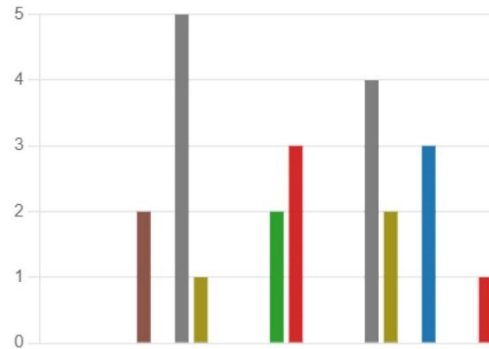


3. Choose the option that best describes your relation to B2B marketing



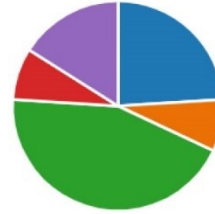
4. What is the industry of your company? If unsure, please view the STAN industry list (<https://www.oecd.org/sti/ind/2stan-indlist.pdf>) to find the best option.

- Agriculture, hunting, forestry, an... 0
- Mining and quarrying 0
- Manufacturing food products or... 0
- Manufacturing textiles, wearing ... 0
- Manufacturing wood and paper... 0
- Manufacturing chemicals, rubbe... 2
- Manufacturing basic metals and... 0
- Manufacturing machinery and e... 5
- Manufacturing transport equip... 1
- Manufacturing furniture and oth... 0
- Repair and installation of machi... 0
- Electricity, gas, steam, air conditi... 0
- Construction 2
- Wholesale and retail trade 3
- Repair of motor vehicles and m... 0
- Transportation and storage 0
- Accommodation and food servi... 0
- Information and communication 4
- Financial and insurance activities 2
- Real estate activities 0
- Professional, scientific, and tech... 3
- Administrative and support serv... 0
- Community, social and personal... 0
- Arts, entertainment, repair of ho... 1



5. Company size

● 1-49 employees	6
● 5-99 employees	2
● 100-499 employees	11
● 500-999 employees	2
● 1000+ employees	4



6. Marketing function size

● 1-4 employees	10
● 4-9 employees	7
● 10-19 employees	5
● 20-39 employees	2
● 40+ employees	1



7. Do you use external agencies to develop and/or execute B2B marketing campaigns in your company?

● Yes	14
● No	11



8. In the management team, does your company have a seat for CMO, Head of Marketing or other C-level executive responsible for marketing?

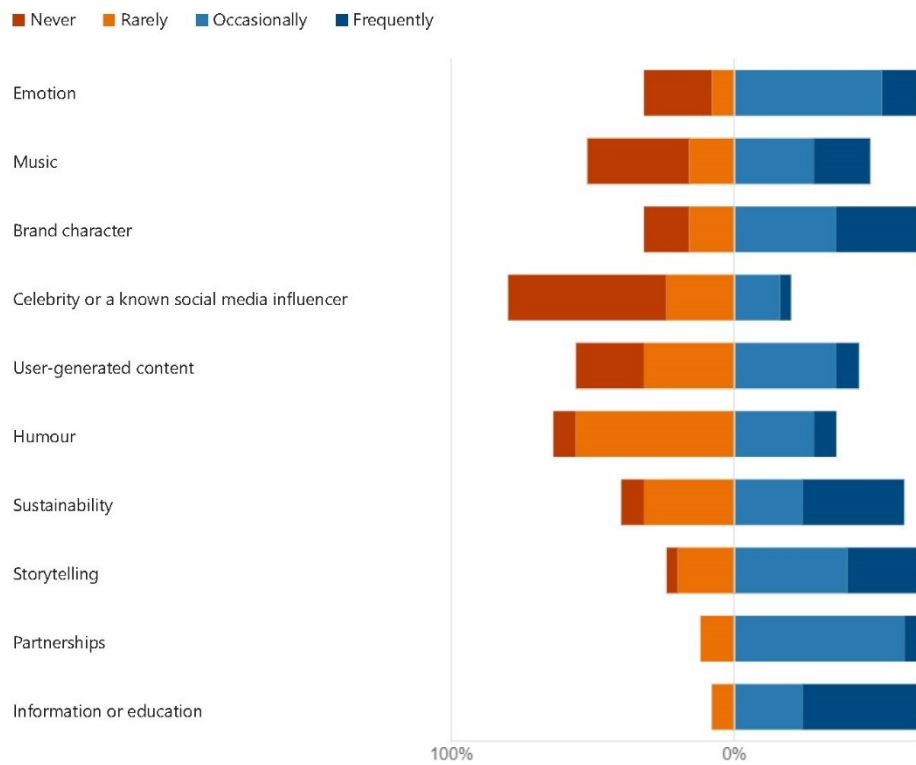
● Yes	15
● No	10



9. Does marketing belong to another function based on your company's organizational chart, e.g., sales, engineering, or product development?



10. **Past 12 months**, how often the following elements have been utilized **to drive effectiveness** of B2B marketing campaigns by your company?



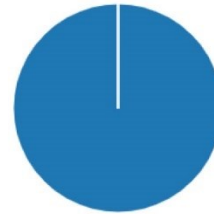
11. Have you experimented with creative approaches regarding B2B marketing, referring to an idea or implementation that is novel, different, unusual or deviant in the industry?

● Yes 13
● No 12



12. In your opinion, were the experiments successful?

● Yes 13
● No 0



13. Please describe the reasons why you don't think they were successful:

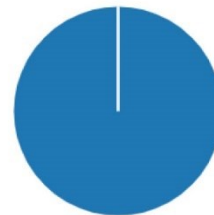
1
Responses

Latest Responses

All the creative experiments have been more or less successful. If not, the problem has been that creative ideas have been too 'random' or 'weak', not executed all the way or based on a real understanding of the target group.

14. Do you believe that **creativity**, referring to an idea or implementation that is novel, different, unusual, or deviant, drives more effective results in B2B marketing?

● Yes 25
● No 0



15. Please describe reasons why not:

0
Responses

Latest Responses

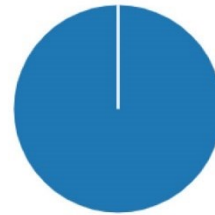
16. Considering B2B marketing, have you noted any unusual media choices and/or messaging tactics from the competitors in your market?

● Yes 2
● No 23



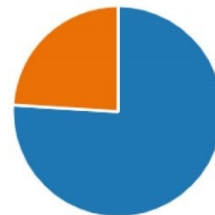
17. Have these notions affected the way you think your company should approach B2B marketing?

● Yes 2
● No 0



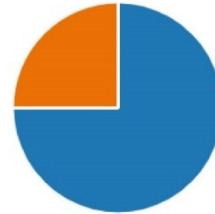
18. Are you expecting or expected to develop and/or execute B2B marketing campaigns with a creative approach in your company?

● Yes 19
● No 6



19. Are B2B marketing campaigns developed and/or executed in a creative manner to gain competitive advantage, long-term brand, or business growth in your company?

● Yes 15
● No 5

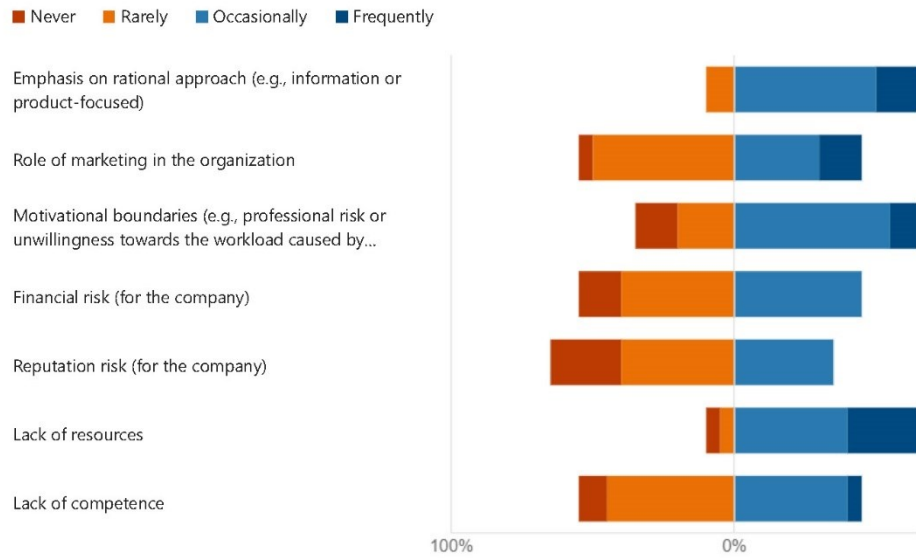


20. Is the development and/or execution of creative B2B marketing campaigns supported with enough resources (e.g. campaign spend, duration and number of media channels) in your company?

● Yes 9
● No 11



21. What obstacles do you face when developing and/or executing creative B2B marketing campaigns in your company?



22. Do you believe that creativity will play a more significant role in your company's B2B marketing campaigns in the next five years?



23. Feel free to share any raised thoughts regarding creativity and its effectiveness in B2B marketing context (optional)

5

Responses

Latest Responses

Generally people are way too marinated in constant information flow from different media outlets, either light and entertaining content for fun, or boring and serious content for business. To be able to wrap B2B content in a fun, fresh and entertaining way is a challenge but very well received when it's relevant for the audience and creates real value in a form of emotions or learning.

Creativity is important for attracting attention, however, in B2B your prospects typically want to quickly know what your product does, what it doesn't do, and why they should care. B2B buying is complex, and marketers' important job is to help them on that journey as much as possible.

I think creativity is crucial in B2B marketing to reach the target audience. People buy from people, not from dull, concrete walls, even though it is B2B. It is important though to have the right tone for the right marketing platform when it comes to social media. An approach that works on TikTok, might not work on LinkedIn. Marketing is there to create a demand and sales is there to execute on that demand. If you make the marketing department too dependent on sales figures, it will stump the marketing development. It is important to have independent marketing and sales departments, that of course communicate with each other. In this information overload era, it is more important than ever that your marketing stands out. It is too risky to spend a lot of money trying to look exactly like all your competitors.

The notion of design and all it entails is unknown to many b2b organisations

We have to and want to be very creative. We work in a field where it is necessary and sometimes it can even cause stress to always find something new. All ideas are always welcome, which is great!