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The impact of marketing automation software on international marketing efficiency

ABSTRACT:

Globalization and growing competition in global markets have increased the need for effective international marketing strategies. Digital transformation is accelerating the shift from traditional marketing towards digital marketing, and marketers are becoming more and more dependent on the increasing amount of real-time data available online. This has also caused the growing need for marketing automation, which removes the need for manual work and helps with collecting, handling, and analyzing marketing data. Marketing automation software enable several benefits for companies, but the implementation and use of the software creates various challenges that need to be first tackled.

The goal of the study is to understand the impact that marketing automation software have on international marketing efficiency. The theoretical background of the study consists of analyzing international marketing strategies and marketing automation software's benefits and challenges as a part of international marketing. The framework of the study consists of seven antecedent factors that determine marketing automation's success. The seven factors are review and development of internal marketing and business processes, scoping of instance requirements and implementation project, gain organization buy-in and find a project champion, create and deliver relevant and timely content, set realistic expectations and be patient, continue to invest and reallocate found efficiencies, and correct human resources. The study was conducted as qualitative research, where the data was collected from seven participants as a form of semi-structured interviews.

The findings of the study show that the impact of marketing automation software on international marketing efficiency is dependent on all the seven antecedent factors. Companies use marketing automation software for different purposes, and the benefits also vary based on how the software is used. The common benefits regardless of how the software is used are saving time, sending real-time content to the target audience, and quicker responses to customers. The benefits were relatively easy to measure, but the total impact of marketing automation software on international marketing was seen as difficult to measure and the study suggests that some companies might even avoid measuring it to avoid discovering the negative impacts of it. The impact of marketing automation software was also dependent on how much adaptation is needed locally.

KEYWORDS: international marketing, digital marketing, marketing automation, technology adaptation

TIIVISTELMÄ:

Globalisaatio yhdessä kasvavan kilpailun kanssa ovat kasvattaneet tarvetta tehokkailla kansainvälisille markkinointistrategioille globaaleilla markkinoilla. Digitaalinen transformaatio kiihdyttää muutosta perinteisestä markkinoinnista kohti digitaalista markkinointia ja markkinoijat ovat koko ajan enemmän ja enemmän riippuvaisia kasvavasta määrästä reaaliaikaista dataa, joka on saatavilla verkosta. Tämä on myös kasvattanut tarvetta markkinoinnin automaatiolle, mikä poistaa tarvetta manuaaliselle työlle ja auttaa keräämään, käsittelemään ja analysoimaan markkinointidataa. Markkinoinnin automaatio-ohjelmistot tuovat yrityksille useita hyötyjä, mutta ohjelmiston käyttöönotto sekä käyttö luovat erilaisia haasteita, jotka on ensin ratkottava.

Tutkimuksen tarkoitus on ymmärtää markkinoinnin automaatio-ohjelmistojen vaikutus kansainvälisen markkinoinnin tehokkuuteen. Tutkimuksen teoreettinen tausta koostuu kansainvälisten markkinointistrategioiden analysoinnista sekä markkinoinnin automaatio-ohjelmistojen hyötyjen ja haittojen määrittämisestä kansainväliselle markkinoinnille. Tutkimuksen viitekehys koostuu seitsemästä edellytystekijästä, jotka määrittävät markkinoinnin automaation menestyksen. Tutkimus tehtiin kvalitatiivisena tutkimuksena, jossa aineisto kerättiin seitsemältä osallistujalta puolistrukturoitujen haastattelujen muodossa.

Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat, että markkinoinnin automaatio-ohjelmistojen vaikutus kansainvälisen markkinoinnin tehokkuuteen on riippuvainen kaikista seitsemästä edellytystekijästä. Yritykset käyttävät markkinoinnin automaatio-ohjelmistoja eri tarkoituksiin ja hyödyt vaihtelevat riippuen siitä miten ohjelmistoa käytetään. Riippumatta siitä miten ohjelmistoa käytetään, yleiset hyödyt ovat ajansäästö, reaaliaikaisen sisällön lähetys kohdeyleisölle sekä nopeammat vastaukset asiakkaille. Hyötyjä oli suhteellisen helppo mitata, mutta markkinoinnin automaatio-ohjelmistojen kokonaisvaikutuksen mittaaminen kansainväliselle markkinoinnille nähtiin vaikeana mitata ja tutkimus osoittaa, että osa yrityksistä saattaa jopa vältellä sen mittausta välttyäkseen negatiivisten vaikutusten löytämiseltä. Markkinoinnin automaatio-ohjelmistojen vaikutus oli myös riippuvainen siitä, miten paljon adaptaatiota tarvitaan paikallisesti.

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1   Introduction

This chapter provides and introduction to the thesis by describing the background of the study as well as explaining the main research question and objectives. The scope of the study and key terms are also explained. Lastly, the chapter explains the structure of the thesis.

1.1   Background of the study

Nowadays, international business has become crucial for the economic development of countries and also offering new major growth opportunities for companies (Tan & Sousa, 2013). Globalization together with growing competition in global markets have increased the need to build effective international marketing strategies (Ryans et al., 2003) to secure the existence, expansion and success of companies operating in multiple countries (Katsikeas et al., 2006). One of the key questions in international marketing research is whether a company should standardise or adapt its marketing strategy when expanding to foreign markets (Tan & Sousa, 2013; Theodosiou & Leonidou, 2003; Vrontis et al., 2009). However, the discussion about which strategy is more effective still remains controversy after four decades (Katsikeas et al., 2006; Ryans et al., 2003; Tan & Sousa, 2013; Theodosiou & Leonidou, 2003; Theodosiou & Katsikeas, 2001).

Even though the international marketing strategies have been widely studied in the past, the research around the impact of digitalization and technology on international marketing performance is still lacking (Gregory et al., 2019). Digital transformation is accelerating the growth of e-marketing, which also has substantial impacts on customer behaviours (Sheth & Sharma, 2005). The ongoing digital transformation is constantly increasing the digital data available, providing marketers the opportunity to use significant amount of customer data to examine and enhance the marketing activities (Berghofer et al., 2018). Companies are constantly becoming more and more dependent on the real-time data about customers (Bucklin et al. 1998).

Several studies have recognized the new marketing opportunities that the digital era is enabling (Biegel, 2009; Gregory et al., 2019; Katsikeas et al., 2019; Yip & Dempster, 2005) as well as the growing need for marketing automation (Biegel, 2009; Bucklin et al. 1998). Nowadays, it has become possible to automate all digital marketing activities, starting from segmentation and targeting to service provision, advertising, distribution, retailing and finally pricing (Wertenbroch, 2021). Marketing automation has removed the need for manual work in marketing (Lyu et al., 2022) since several tasks can be automated, including email and social media marketing, ad campaigns, lead management, customer relationship management, as well as marketing analytics (Silva et al., 2020). According to Bucklin et al. (1998) automation in marketing can even outperform the decisions made by managers since the quality and availability of data is high but managers have only limited capabilities to analyse it.

However, with the implementation of new marketing technologies comes new challenges (Katsikeas et al., 2019; Murphy, 2018) that companies need to overcome before benefiting from these technologies. Marketing automation enables companies to gain major benefits when it comes to the efficiency of the marketing function (Biegel, 2009; Bucklin et al. 1998; Silva et al., 2020), but the benefits are dependent on several factors that are related to pre- and post-implementation phase of the software (Murphy, 2018). Companies often underestimate the needed resources for the implementation process, which means that the benefits of marketing automation cannot be reached (Murphy, 2018).

Since the market for marketing automation software has only significantly grown recently, the research in this area is limited (Murphy, 2018). More research is needed to understand what factors determine the success of marketing automation software implementation and usage, and what benefits are actually reached with the software. There is a gap in current research when it comes to measuring the impact of marketing automation on marketing efficiency in international marketing context.

1.2   Research questions and objectives of the study

The main research question of this study is: **What is the impact of marketing automation software on international marketing efficiency?**

Three sub-questions were determined to support the research objective:

1. How is the international marketing strategy determined?
2. How is a marketing automation software utilized as a part of international marketing?
3. How can the impact of marketing automation on international marketing efficiency be measured?

1.3   Definitions of key terms

International marketing: According to Doole and Lowe (2008), international marketing consists of "the firm in making one or more marketing mix decisions across national boundaries" (p. 5) where the marketing mix consists of product, price, distribution, and promotion factors (Albaum & Tse, 2001; Mandler et al., 2021). Another definition by Tien et al. (2019) is that international marketing is "defined as the conduct of a business to plan, price, promote and drive a line of goods and services to customers or users in more than one country to create a profit".

Marketing automation: Marketing automation refers to the repetition and automation of standardized marketing processes (Berghofer et al., 2018) as well as tracking customers' behaviour (Corsaro et al., 2021). It focuses on the customization and personalization of marketing mix activities (Heimbach et al., 2015). Marketing automation is used to automate tasks like email and social media marketing, ad campaigns, lead management, customer relationship management, as well as marketing analytics (Silva et al., 2020).

Marketing automation software: A marketing automation software provides companies an effective way to manage the marketing workflow starting from planning and creating to production, delivery, and reaction (Biegel, 2009). These technologies consist of software, networks, and hardware, which receive and process the marketing and business data and finally provide the outcome of the analysis (Silva et al., 2020). The purpose of a marketing automation software is to provide tools to build personalized content and advise the marketer to produce new rules and campaigns, while instructing them which channel is the most suitable for communicating with this customer (Semerádová & Weinlich, 2020).

1.4   Structure of the thesis

The structure of the thesis consists of six chapters. First chapter is the introduction, which starts with describing the background of the study and determining the main research question and sub-questions. After that, key terms are defined, and the chapter ends with an explanation of the structure in this part. The second chapter is the literature review, where different academic theories are reviewed. First part of the literature review describes international marketing strategies, and the second part analyses the impact a marketing automation software on international marketing efficiency. The third chapter is an overview of the research methods used in the study and how the data is collected and analyzed. Chapter four describes the findings of the study and chapter five analyses the findings together with the theories. The final chapter concludes the whole study and provides recommendations for future research.

2 Literature review

This chapter introduces the theoretical background of the study. The first part of the literature review discusses about international marketing and demonstrates the main concepts and theories around it. The second part focuses on analysing marketing automation software and its impact on international marketing efficiency.

2.1 International marketing strategies

Nowadays, the domestic markets are increasingly reliant on the foreign markets in order to grow and succeed (Tan & Sousa, 2013). International business has become crucial for the economic development of countries and offering new major growth opportunities for companies (Tan & Sousa, 2013). Globalization together with growing competition in global markets has increased the need to build effective international marketing strategies (Ryans et al., 2003; Tien et al., 2019) to secure the existence, expansion, and success of companies operating in multiple countries (Katsikeas et al., 2006).

2.1.1 International marketing

According to Doole and Lowe (2008), international marketing consists of "the firm in making one or more marketing mix decisions across national boundaries" (p. 5) where the marketing mix consists of product, price, distribution, and promotion factors (Albaum & Tse, 2001; Mandler et al., 2021). Another definition by Tien et al. (2019) is that international marketing is "defined as the conduct of a business to plan, price, promote and drive a line of goods and services to customers or users in more than one country to create a profit". Thus, the difference between marketing and international marketing is that international marketing involves various uncontrollable variables that make the marketing more complicate in the international environment (Doole & Lowe, 2008, p. 6).

The aim of an international strategy is to utilize a company's available resources and match them to the internal and external environment in foreign markets in order to

produce higher profits (Tan & Sousa, 2013). With international marketing, a company can for example improve its reputation and brand awareness, increase brand loyalty and trust towards the brand, and in this way diminish the costs of marketing, which results in higher profits (Tien et al., 2019).

International marketing consists of export marketing, multinational marketing, and global marketing (Tien et al., 2019), which describe the company's level of involvement in international markets (Doole & Lowe, 2008, p. 6). Export marketing focuses on helping a company to market its products to foreign markets (Tien et al., 2019). Multinational marketing refers to the interactive cooperation with marketing activities in different countries to make market specific marketing plans (Tien et al., 2019). Multinational marketing, also called as multidomestic marketing, normally identifies different markets as independent actors, who decide what kind of marketing best fits to the specific markets (Doole & Lowe, 2008, p. 6). Lastly, global marketing means that all marketing activities in different markets around the globe follow the same global marketing strategy (Tien et al., 2019). Global marketing requires more cooperation, integration, and control across the countries and the main goal is to achieve synergies that generate competitive advantage (Doole & Lowe, 2008, p. 6).

The global markets these days consist of many countries, which have significant differences in economic, political, legal, cultural, competitive, and infrastructural circumstances, as well as different consumers with their local demands and desires (Mandler et al., 2021). Doole and Lowe (2008, p. 20) claim that compared to domestic marketing, international marketing has several differences that cause challenges for international marketers. These include multicultural and diverse markets that can be scattered and widespread, possibly unstable political and economic situations, high data expenses due to difficulties in acquiring it, government's regulations towards foreign companies, differences in financial systems and regulations, stakeholders in home versus host country, differences in business rules, and the challenges of controlling and coordinating between markets (Doole & Lowe, 2008, p. 20).

2.1.2 Antecedent factors

According to Theodosiou and Leonidou (2003), antecedent factors include all the background factors that have an impact on the decision of whether a company should standardize or adapt its international marketing strategy. Schilke et al. (2009) suggest that antecedent factors, such as company and product characteristics, together with other parts of marketing strategy determine the impact of international marketing in the company's performance. Tan and Sousa (2013) determine antecedent factors as internal factors consisting of company and product characteristics, and external factors referring to industry and foreign market characteristics. In addition, several research states that customer behaviour should also be considered as an antecedent factor (Chung et al., 2012; Viswanathan & Dickson, 2007).

Tan and Sousa (2013) determine company characteristics as company size, international experience, level of centralization, management commitment, foreign market share, and the previous year's performance. It is usually beneficial for large companies to adopt more standardized marketing strategy, since it allows them to utilize the economies of scale, and lack of flexibility would hinder the implementation of adapted strategy (Tan & Sousa, 2013). Standardized strategy is often preferred when a company does not have much international experience, because it demands less understanding of the foreign market, and adapted strategy is preferred when the company has gained a great deal of international experience (Chung et al., 2012), since it can better position itself in the foreign market (Zou & Cavusgil, 2002).

High level of centralization, meaning that decisions are made in the headquarters, often occurs with standardized marketing (Theodosiou & Leonidou, 2003). Management commitment is determined as the willingness of management to reserve resources to export operations (Lages et al., 2008). High commitment often means high adaptation of marketing strategy, since more resources relate to more willingness to adapt the strategies (Lages & Montgomery, 2004). Foreign market share is expected to have a positive impact

of marketing standardisation due to the economies of scale (Schilke et al., 2009). The impact of previous year's performance to standardization remains unclear, since it has been overlooked in most studies (Tan & Sousa, 2013).

Product characteristics refer to the product type, product life cycle stage (Theodosiou & Leonidou, 2003), and other product specific considerations. Product type can mean for example whether the product is consumer or industrial product (Theodosiou & Leonidou, 2003), or if the product is homogeneous or heterogenous (Schilke et al., 2009). The favourable degree of standardization is dependent on these product characteristics, since consumer products are often sensitive to local preferences and tastes referring to more adapted strategies, whereas industrial products less sensitive, leaning towards standardized marketing strategies (Chung et al., 2012; Wang, 1996). In addition, homogeneous products can often better utilize standardized strategy and heterogeneous products can require more adaptation in marketing (Schilke et al., 2009). If customers have the same level of knowledge and demand of products, meaning that the product life cycle is in similar stages across countries, standardization is favourable strategy (Katsikeas et al., 2006).

According to Tan and Sousa (2013), foreign market characteristics consists of environmental forces, competition, market coverage, and psychic distance. The environmental forces involve various economic, political, legal, sociocultural, and technical aspects (Doole & Lowe, 2008, p. 7) that affect the company's international business activities directly or indirectly (Theodosiou & Leonidou, 2003). The similarity in environmental forces encourages companies towards marketing standardization, whereas differences suggest that adaptation is needed (Chung et al., 2012).

Competition forces consists of the level of competition, the structure (monopoly versus oligopoly) of competition, and whether the nature of competition is price or nonprice related (Theodosiou & Leonidou, 2003). Intensive competition suggests that adapted strategy is needed and less competition means that the strategy can be less adapted (Tan

& Sousa, 2013). Market factors consist of market infrastructure and size, distribution structure, advertising media accessibility, and other factors that describe the potential demand in the market as well as the opportunity for a company to fulfil this demand (Theodosiou & Leonidou, 2003). Market factors are known to have a negative influence on marketing standardization (Theodosiou & Leonidou, 2003). Psychic distance, which means the perception of differences that an individual has over the home and foreign country (Sousa & Lages, 2011), often has a negative impact on the degree of standardization (Tan & Sousa, 2013).

Whether or not a company manages to reach its targets in a foreign market is highly dependent on its ability to respond to the needs and preferences of the target audience (Theodosiou & Katsikeas, 2001). Differences in customer purchasing behaviour implies that a more adapted marketing strategy is needed (Katsikeas et al., 2006), whereas similar consumer behaviour suggests that a standardized strategy can be used for all markets (Chung et al., 2012; Viswanathan & Dickson, 2007).

2.1.3 Different international marketing strategies

One of the key questions in international marketing research is whether a company should standardise or adapt its marketing strategy when expanding to foreign markets (Tan & Sousa, 2013; Theodosiou & Leonidou, 2003; Vrontis et al., 2009). The controversy discussion about standardization and adaptation strategies is still ongoing after four decades (Katsikeas et al., 2006; Ryans et al., 2003; Tan & Sousa, 2013; Theodosiou & Leonidou, 2003; Theodosiou & Katsikeas, 2001). The research made over standardization and adaptation is still lacking one coherent theory of which strategy is the most efficient for companies operating in global markets (Chung et al., 2012; Mandler et al., 2021; Ryans et al., 2003; Theodosiou & Leonidou, 2003).

The question whether to standardize or adapt the strategy, is often related to the decision to save costs with standardization versus providing more targeted offerings to local customers with adaptation (Albaum & Tse, 2001). Several research argue that the

research should not be about whether to adopt a standardised or adapted strategy, but to focus on determining what is the right degree of standardization/adaptation in each marketing mix element (Lages & Montgomery, 2004; Ryans et al., 2003). Theodosiou and Leonidou (2003) state that international companies often struggle to determine what is the right degree of standardization in different marketing mix elements in their company specific circumstances. Albaum and Tse (2001) indicate that the decision of what degree to standardize the strategy should be made based on what strategy best supports the company's competitive advantage. To better understand the questions that international marketers are facing when building international marketing strategies, the following chapters discuss the differences between standardization and adaptation, as well as combining both.

Standardization

Standardization of the international marketing strategy means that a company's marketing mix elements remain the same regardless of the country or market in question (Zou & Cavusgil, 2002; Lim et al., 2006). Thus, the same marketing strategy and marketing activities are applied regardless of the country or market in question. In total standardization approach, the market environments in all countries are seen extremely similar, resulting in the use of standardized marketing processes globally (Schilke et al., 2009).

The study by Schilke et al. (2009) indicates that a standardized marketing strategy is especially beneficial when the marketing activities are globally well coordinated, the products are similar to each other, the size of a company is big, it operates is several foreign markets, and it focuses on cost leadership, because in this case the company can fully utilize the economies of scale from standardization, which results in cost savings. If a company wants to sell standardized products with low prices, standardization in marketing strategy saves marketing costs globally (Zou & Cavusgil, 2002), since all the marketing processes can be scaled to different markets. A company using a standardized strategy often has high centralization in the decision-making, because it aligns the policies and procedures, decreases the risk for failures in subsidiaries if the employees do not have

accurate knowledge, and enhances the control over subsidiary's operations (Özsomer & Simonin, 2004).

Adaptation

Adaptation strategy, also called as localization strategy, is determined as the customization of the marketing mix elements based on individual markets' circumstances (Lim et al., 2006). This means that in adapted marketing strategy the marketing activities in different foreign markets are adjusted according to the local needs and wants. The marketing strategy for each different market is created based on the local market environment to reach better efficiency by targeting customers with more customized marketing (Özsomer & Prussia, 2000).

Schilke et al. (2009) argues that companies who use differentiation as a strategy might prefer choosing adaptation strategy to retain their competitive advantage. Differentiators often have better flexibility in their marketing activities, which also helps to adapt the marketing processes in foreign markets and reduces the benefit that could come from standardization and economies of scale (Schilke et al., 2009). Özsomer and Prussia (2000) argue that if adaptation can be reached with reasonable cost, the subsidiary should always use an adapted strategy, because it improves the company's competitive superiority.

The study of Katsikeas et al. (2006) indicates that when there are differences in the regulations, technology levels, customs and traditions, client characteristics, product life cycle stages, and competitiveness between the home and host countries, an adapted marketing strategy is considered favourable. In addition, when there is high psychic distance between the markets, which refers to "the individual's perceived differences between the home and the foreign country" (Sousa & Lages, 2011), adapted marketing strategy is preferred (Tan & Sousa, 2013). The localized marketing strategy usually performs better, if the decision-making process is decentralized and local managers with more

knowledge of the specific market requirements are making decisions (Özsomer & Prussia, 2000).

Contingency theory

The contingency approach in international marketing was created to remove the juxta-position between standardization and adaptation (Lages & Montgomery, 2004; Theodo-siou & Leonidou, 2003). It focuses on building an international marketing strategy based on the market environments, whereas similar foreign market environments advocate standardization of marketing strategy and different environments advocate the adapted strategy (Özsomer & Prussia, 2000). Hence, the strategic choice is always based on the individual company's internal and external factors, and there is no common strategy that fits all (Chung et al., 2012; Lages & Montgomery, 2005). Lages and Montgomery (2004) argue that the strength of continency theory is that it considers both benefits and weak-nesses of both standardization and adaptation.

The key in contingency theory is to continuously follow the market changes, adjust the degree of standardization and adaptation, and modify the marketing structure to always fit to the current marketing strategy (Özsomer & Prussia, 2000). After recognizing the similarities and differences in foreign market environments, standardized strategy should only be implemented on those markets that are similar to each other and rest of the markets should use adapted strategy (Özsomer & Prussia, 2000).

According to the contingency model, in markets with an adapted marketing strategy the variety between markets causes more administrative tasks for the subsidiary, meaning that the company needs to build a new more decentralized structure to reach higher results (Özsomer & Prussia, 2000). In a standardised strategy it is natural that the deci-sion-making process is centralized, because all the markets will follow the same market-ing strategy (Özsomer & Prussia, 2000). As a conclusion, Özsomer and Prussia (2000) indicate that both standardized and adapted marketing strategies can produce good

results, as long as the marketing structure is always adjusted according to the chosen strategy.

2.1.4 Challenges in measuring the strategy's success

The suitability of a marketing strategy is best measured with the performance of a company (Katsikeas et al., 2006; Lages & Montgomery, 2004). It has been difficult to prove the effectiveness of a standardized marketing strategy compared to adapted strategy when it comes to a company's performance (Albaum & Tse, 2001; Özsomer & Simonin, 2004; Özsomer & Prussia, 2000), since the standardisation enables economies of scale, which results in cost savings, but cost savings alone do not prove that a marketing strategy is effective (Ryans et al., 2003).

Ryans et al. (2003) argue that depending on the objectives, an adapted marketing strategy can be effective, but still not enhance the performance of a company. This can be the case if the objective is for example to increase the brand awareness (Ryans et al., 2003). In addition, if the marketing strategy's efficiency is measured in individual marketing mix element's level, it can provide inaccurate results, because different marketing mix elements are often connected to each other and the performance of one element has an impact on other element's performance (Samiee & Chirapanda, 2019).

Another challenge when measuring the efficiency of standardization and adaptation is that if the results are only measured in the company headquarters, it can be difficult to determine how the individual local offices are performing (Katsikeas et al., 2006) or even confirm to what extent the local offices are following the chosen strategy (Samiee & Chirapanda, 2019). Katsikeas et al. (2006) indicate that when applying the same marketing strategy to all foreign markets, it is expected that the efficiency of marketing activities varies considerably in different markets. For this reason, measuring the marketing success only in general level may lead to inaccurate results and generate a distorted picture of how the adaptation or standardization is affecting the marketing efficiency (Katsikeas et al., 2006).

2.1.5 Successful international marketing

Albaum and Tse (2001) argue that regardless of whether the international marketing strategy is standardization or adaptation, a company should always choose the strategy based on what best supports its competitive advantage. And even though a company decides to implement a standardised or adapted strategy, it does not mean that the strategy cannot be change later. Vrontis et al. (2009) state that companies operating globally should not only implement one strategy to all marketing activities, but to combine the best elements from both standardisation and adaptation to succeed.

Katsikeas et al. (2006) claim that that changes in global market conditions should determine when the marketing strategy for a specific foreign market is changed. When the management is deciding for the global marketing strategy, the strategic fit should always be considered before following their own preferences (Katsikeas et al., 2006). In addition, it is possible to use a standardized global strategy and implement some level of adaptation in local offices, but this requires the multinational company to have some level of local flexibility (Vrontis et al., 2009). The local managers are in a key role on recognizing when the strategy is not suitable for the local market anymore and building internal resources that help to quickly adapt to changing environments (Katsikeas et al., 2006).

Doole and Lowe (2008, p. 31) argue that the main factors for creating successful international marketing are the early recognition of changes in the foreign market environments and the continuous organizational learning. International market environments are constantly changing, and successfully operating in these markets requires deep understanding of the targeted market as well as ongoing monitoring of the upcoming changes (Doole & Lowe, 2008, p. 31). The organization must utilize the skills and knowledge of its employees to identify the strengths and weaknesses of its market and use this information to build right capabilities and resources to generate sustainable competitive advantage (Doole & Lowe, 2008, p. 31). It is crucial to change the marketing strategy and structure as the market environments change.

2.1.6 Changes in international marketing

Internet technologies play a key part in globalizing the marketplace and enabling companies to enter the global marketplace (Javalgi et al., 2012). Advances in communication, transportation, and information technologies are increasing the global trade (Gregory et al., 2019). Technical innovations have made it possible to collect data from the markets, manage capabilities and practicalities, and communicate easily with customers around the world (Doole & Lowe, 2008, p. 17). E-marketing is constantly growing, and its effects cannot be ignored, since it has substantial impacts on customer behaviours (Sheth & Sharma, 2005).

The shift from traditional markets towards e-markets requires specific marketing capabilities to reach higher marketing efficiency (Gregory et al., 2019). Especially for companies with B2B customers, it is important to find ways to communicate with customers through internet, since these companies often enter to new markets and nurture customer relationships from geographically distant places (Gregory et al., 2019). Online capabilities enable companies to get valuable data about consumers' attitudes, behaviour, and preferences, which helps in forming international marketing strategies for segmentation, targeting, positioning, and communication (Katsikeas et al., 2019). In addition, the use of digitalized technologies can tackle several barriers in global markets, for example geographical, political, and legal barriers (Yip & Dempster, 2005). Companies are less dependent on local infrastructures and governments cannot anymore control the transfer and access of information (Yip & Dempster, 2005). Additionally, it is less costly and risky to use internet for sending information around the globe (Yip & Dempster, 2005) and customers are easier to reach regardless of their location (Sheth & Sharma, 2005).

The challenges with e-marketing are related to the fact that the access to technology and internet varies between countries and because of that, e-marketing is not always a suitable way to market (Doole & Lowe, 2008, p. 19). It is common that companies use their websites to provide valuable information about the products and services, because

it is a cost-efficient way to spread awareness to a large audience (Katsikeas et al., 2019). However, the challenge that comes with global marketing is whether to use English as the website's language or translate the website to all the languages that are spoken in the company's target markets (Yip & Dempster, 2005). This question is relevant in all international e-marketing activities, because even though e-marketing is an efficient way to reach large audiences, the messages need to be appropriate in different countries (Katsikeas et al., 2019), when it comes to cultural, religious, and language differences.

The new digital marketing era provides companies new opportunities, but also new challenges (Katsikeas et al., 2019). At its best, the combination of digital and traditional marketing approach enables a company to create satisfying, long-term, and beneficial relationships with clients all around the globe, which also helps on tackling competitors (Katsikeas et al., 2019).

2.2 Marketing automation software as a part of international marketing

The growth of big data and cloud technologies has caused significant changes in marketing practices, and marketing automation has become the new trend in marketing (Lyu et al., 2022). Nowadays, technology is becoming more and more important in marketing, and it is a critical part of marketing automation development (Biegel, 2009). Organizations are gathering substantial amount of customer data, which is mostly coming from digital environment, including website visits, downloads from mobile applications, or other social network interfaces (Semerádová & Weinlich, 2020). Marketing technologies are shifting the field of marketing from traditional marketing towards digital marketing and enabling more effective marketing activities (Biegel, 2009). However, changes in consumer behaviour are causing new challenges in finding efficient ways to reach the target market (Biegel, 2009).

2.2.1 Marketing automation

The concept of marketing automation was first introduced by John D.C. Little in 2001 (Little, 2001), but it has been gaining more popularity only in the last decade (Semerádová & Weinlich, 2020). In a nutshell, marketing automation refers to repetition and automation of standardized marketing processes (Berghofer et al., 2018) as well as tracking customers' behaviour (Corsaro et al., 2021). Another definition by Lyu et al. (2022) is that marketing automation is "a kind of software in the cloud that is used to execute, manage, and automate marketing tasks and processes based on big data". It includes implementing several marketing activities, such as marketing plans and production, inventory and information management, budgeting and forecasting, product pricing and knowledge base, customer tracking, distribution management, and data analysis (Jyu et al., 2022). In addition, it focuses on the customization or personalization of marketing mix activities, and it originally started in B2B environment (Heimbach et al., 2015).

Marketing automation has removed the manual work in marketing (Lyu et al., 2022) since several tasks can be automated, including email and social media marketing, ad campaigns, lead management, customer relationship management, as well as marketing analytics (Silva et al., 2020). According to Semerádová & Weinlich (2020), marketing automation framework has five core elements, where the first one is the input data, which is gathered from prior contacts with the customers. The second element is the real-time decision guidelines, which utilize the accessible data to estimate customers' behaviours and conduct response strategies, and the third element is the customer interface in these systems, where marketers can build and modify automation rules. Offering feedback and data about the performance is the fourth element, whereas the fifth element that Semerádová & Weinlich (2020) describes is utilized for strategic planning.

Since the market for marketing automation software has only significantly grown recently, the research in this area is limited (Murphy, 2018). Therefore, when researching marketing automation, similar topics can be used to compliment these studies, such as CRM, email and SMS marketing, sales automation tools, online testing and optimization,

content marketing and web personalization (Murphy, 2018). Additionally, marketing automation overlaps with interactive and direct marketing, since it automates these processes, as well as touches the area of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and email marketing due to the use of numerous data sources to form real time communication with customers (Heimbach et al., 2015). Since all marketing automation relies in the current, upcoming, and changing information of customers, data plays a significant role in building marketing automation systems (Heimbach et al., 2015).

2.2.2 Marketing automation software

Marketing automation software enable sending personalized messages to the target audience at the right moment (Świeczak, 2013). Marketing automation technologies provide companies an effective way to manage the marketing workflow starting from planning and creating to production, delivery, and reaction (Biegel, 2009). These technologies consist of software, networks, and hardware, which receive and process the marketing and business data and finally provide the outcome of the analysis (Silva et al., 2020). The purpose of a marketing automation software is to provide tools to build personalized content and advise the marketer to produce new rules and campaigns, while instructing them which channel is the most suitable for communicating with a specific customer (Semerádová & Weinlich, 2020). Lead and campaign management, email marketing, customer segmentation, and interactive content are the core features that different marketing automation platforms offer (Silva et al., 2020).

Nowadays, having a marketing automation software has become essential for an organization's data construction (Lyu et al., 2022). Marketing automation software can be used to resolve a specific problem inside the marketing process or utilize the software to cover various marketing processes (Biegel, 2009). The software acts as one part of an organization's business information platform, while other complimenting systems are product databases, enterprise resource planning platforms, financial management systems, and other relevant technologies which together form efficient business management (Biegel, 2009).

The market for marketing automation software is continuously growing and few of the biggest players in the field are Marketo, Hubspot, Pardot, Elogua, (Irina, 2016) and Infusionsoft, as well as software companies like Oracle, Salesforce, Adobe, and IBM (Murphy, 2018). The market consists of solutions targeted to huge enterprises as well as lighter solutions meant for smaller companies with less resources, providing a broad selection of alternatives when it comes to functionality and cost of the platforms (Biegel, 2009). Semerádová and Weinlich (2020) argue that the bigger the company is, the higher the degree of online marketing tools' implementation is. Even though the use of these systems requires some technical knowledge, the software in the market are taking a step towards more user-friendly interfaces, making marketing automation more accessible even for organizations and people with less know-how in marketing (Semerádová & Weinlich, 2020).

2.2.3 The benefits and functionalities of marketing automation

The core benefit of marketing automation is the enhanced efficiency in marketing activities when manual tasks are automated (Silva et al., 2020), which can be seen as increasing return of marketing investment (Biegel, 2009). In the long term, the goal with marketing automation is to enable the marketing department to be more efficient with the same resources and same budget but reaching even higher results than before (Silva et al., 2020). For customers, marketing automation brings more personalized experience when marketers have better access on customer journey (Wood, 2015).

According to the study of Phatak et al. (2020), companies who implemented marketing automation systems to support their growth and development reached 451 percent increase in qualifying leads, 14.5 percent growth in sales activity, and 12 percent decrease in marketing costs. After successfully automating the marketing activities, it is easy to scale the processes and use the automation for new marketing tasks quickly and effortlessly (Silva et al., 2020). The most important features that marketing automation software provide are personalized communications, email and social media campaigns, lead

management, CRM integration, and analytics (Corsaro et al., 2021; Silva et al., 2020; Świeczak, 2013). The following chapters discuss each feature more closely.

Email marketing

Automation in email marketing provides marketers a way to send enormous number of emails to a company's subscribers and at the same time get valuable data from them (Bawm & Nath, 2014). By using marketing automation to email campaigns, an organization can control billions of contacts and qualify them based on their engagements (Irina, 2016). It also allows marketers to receive more detailed information about the emails, for example sending them real-time notifications when a contact opens an email and, in this way, allowing more accurate follow-ups (Phatak et al., 2020). The main benefits of email marketing are that it is relatively low-cost way of marketing, it is a fast way to reach customers regularly, and email campaigns can be easily optimized due to the data that is received of the performance of different email campaigns (Bawm & Nath, 2014).

According to Irina (2016), an email campaign begins when a contact decides to join the campaign and an email is sent to the contact. Based on the possible engagement of the email, the contact will receive another email linked to the actions taken from the first email (Irina, 2016). For example, the contact might choose to click to a product in the first email and then the second email will contain more information about this specific product, instead of general information about all the products. The marketing automation system recognises these actions and continues the campaign with pre-defined steps made by marketers, adjusting each step to the action taken by the contact (Irina, 2016). The steps in an email campaign can follow the contact's action, timelines, or other set variables (Irina, 2016).

Segmentation & personalization

Segmentation as a part of marketing automation means that customer data is used to divide customers into different profiles based on their demographics, regions, behaviour, (Phatak et al., 2020; Świeczak, 2013) or other relevant information, such as sent/received

emails, customer engagement, or event participations (Irina, 2016). To succeed in segmentation, several data points for each customer are needed in order to receive enough detailed information about the customers and this data needs to be available in real-time (Phatak et al., 2020). Once the process of gathering relevant data and categorizing customers into different profiles is automated, marketers can start using segmentation to generate personalized communication to customers.

Montgomery & Smith (2009) determine personalization as adapting products and services to a customer based on the information that is collected from that customer's transactions and behaviour. On the internet, personalization is seen as personalized search, recommendations, or prices and promotions for individuals (Montgomery & Smith, 2009). This means that customers will automatically receive content that is responding to their interests or needs, based on the information that is collected from them and based on how they are categorized in different segments (Świeczak, 2013). The marketing automation technologies use different content for different customer profiles and provides suitable content for each customer in different touchpoints (Phatak et al., 2020).

Campaign management

When it comes to building marketing campaigns, marketing automation softwares enable producing more personalized campaigns for each customer segment and automating the whole process of building marketing campaigns (Phatak et al., 2020). The study conducted by Silva et al. (2020) indicates that automation in marketing campaigns helps marketers to produce campaigns with higher volume, and at the same time targeting different campaigns to different customer segments, making the campaign management process more efficient and faster than before. The core benefit is to target individual customers with personalized content, while reducing the risk of human errors and saving time and work from marketers (Świeczak, 2013).

According to Irina (2016), marketing automation software allow creating various campaigns at the same time, and when different steps and rules to each campaign are included in the platform, the campaigns will automatically target right customer segments with the right campaign. Campaigns can also be linked to each other, meaning that after the first campaign has ended, the second campaign will automatically start (Irina, 2016). Marketing automation software also help to optimize the campaigns by providing historical data on which keywords work best in titles, what is the best time to send the campaign to customers, and what are the best channels to contact each customer segment (Phatak et al., 2020). As a result, a more personalized marketing campaign leads to better customer engagement as well as higher conversion and retention rates (Phatak et al., 2020).

Lead management

One key aspect of marketing automation is lead management, which consists of lead scoring and lead nurturing (Semerádová & Weinlich, 2020). The basic idea of lead scoring and lead nurturing is that prospects can be converted into customers, since leads can be effectively managed through the platform and data is updated in real time (Jena & Panda, 2017). According to Irina (2016), the purpose of lead management is to produce qualified leads to the sales department at the right moment.

According to Nygård and Mezei (2020), organizations use lead scoring to prioritize which leads they want to target. Potential customers receive different scores based on their actions when they are interacting with the organization in various channels (Nygård & Mezei, 2020), because these actions demonstrate their intent to purchase (Świeczak, 2013). According to Semerádová & Weinlich (2020), these actions can be for example a customer visiting a certain web page including an offer for a product, and then deciding to subscribe the newsletter. Next, each action will give certain number of points to that customer based on the value of the action. Based on the scores, the marketing automation platforms start targeting this potential customer with customized campaigns (Semerádová & Weinlich, 2020). As a result, the higher the score for a lead is, the higher is the

chance that the lead buys from the company, which means the sales team should prioritize this lead (Nygård & Mezei, 2020). In order to generate successful lead scoring, the variables of the lead scoring models need to be carefully selected to provide high quality results (Nygård & Mezei, 2020).

In B2B environment, the aim of lead nurturing is to educate qualified leads who are not yet willing to purchase the service or product (Pantikova, 2014). It means that automated campaigns are created to interact with potential customers in order to convert them into loyal customers (Semerádová & Weinlich, 2020; Świeczak, 2013). Successful lead nurturing consists of producing valuable and interesting content to the leads to keep them engaged (Pantikova, 2014; Świeczak, 2013). The goal is to create a strong brand and product preference in the mind of the prospects before they are even seriously considering the purchase (Pantikova, 2014). Marketing automation software enable this by tracking the qualified leads and automating the content delivery to different marketing channels (Pantikova, 2014).

CRM integration

During the past decade, the rise of marketing automation software has completely renewed the sales, marketing, and customer service procedures of companies (Alexandru et al., 2022). Many B2B companies are integrating marketing automation software with their current CRM system to merge both marketing and sales activities into the same platform, enhancing the clarity to both teams to follow the latest activities (Irina, 2016). A CRM system refers to a software that helps an organization to manage customer relationships in a structured way (Xu et al., 2002). The aim of a CRM system is to provide a technology that enables to initiate, develop, and nurture customer relationships, which boosts the acquisition and retention of profitable customers (Payne & Frow, 2006).

Marketing automation as a part of CRM consists of campaign plans, segmentation, scheduling, and tracking campaigns (Alexandru et al., 2022). It allows the company to interact with customers more efficiently, meaning that customer complaints or requests

are faster handled, tracking and following up of customers is easier, and customers receive personalized solutions, finally leading to higher customer satisfaction (Jena & Panda, 2017). The aim is to improve the efficiency of a CRM system with marketing automation, but it is important to remember that a marketing automation software is not capable of fully replacing the CRM system (Wood, 2015).

Analytics and reporting

The demand for marketing accountability is growing, since the management often requires an accurate information on where the marketing budget is allocated and how efficient the different marketing processes are (Silva et al., 2020). The analytics that marketing automation software enable, provide marketers a way to demonstrate their success in performing different marketing activities and justify the use of the marketing budget (Silva et al., 2020). In addition, the marketing accountability helps companies to find the best metrics and building the most suitable processes to fit their business (Silva et al., 2020). Additionally, analytics allow more accurate measurement of the efficiency of marketing activities, offering more visibility to follow the return on marketing investment (Świeczak, 2013; Redding, 2015). Examples of the metrics that can be used are return on marketing investment, net promoter score, customer satisfaction, customer retention rate, cost per lead, customer acquisition rate, market share and so on (Keens & Barker, 2009).

On the other hand, advanced analytics cause more pressure to marketers to handle the increasing amount of data, choosing what metrics to use and in what points to measure it, and finally find a way to demonstrate the value of these activities to the management (Silva et al., 2020). Hence, chief marketing officers are constantly facing more and more pressure to cut marketing costs, increase revenues, and finally demonstrate this by enhancing the accountability (Keens & Barker, 2009). Luckily, marketing automation tools make analysing the data cheaper and faster, and the time required for real-time marketing is shifting from minutes to milliseconds (Jena & Panda, 2017).

2.2.4 Antecedents of marketing automation success

Although marketing automation software provide several opportunities and benefits for organizations, it is not self-evident that these benefits will follow after implementing a new software. Murphy (2018) introduces seven antecedent factors that affect the marketing automation's success (see figure 1 below). Murphy (2018) formed these factors based on what factors were found on companies who successfully implemented marketing automation and what factors were missing from companies that failed the implementation. The factors are divided into three pre-implementation factors, three post-implementation factors, and one factor that is present in both pre- and post-implementation. Since this study focuses on analysing the impacts of marketing automation software on international marketing efficiency, the study by Murphy provides a suitable framework for studying the topic.

Review and updating of marketing and business

Correct scoping of instance requirements and implementation project

Have correct human resources

Create relevant, timely, customer-centric content

Continue to invest and reallocate efficiencies gained

Gain organisation buy-in from management and staff, find project champion

Set realistic goals and expectations for ongoing

Pre-implementation
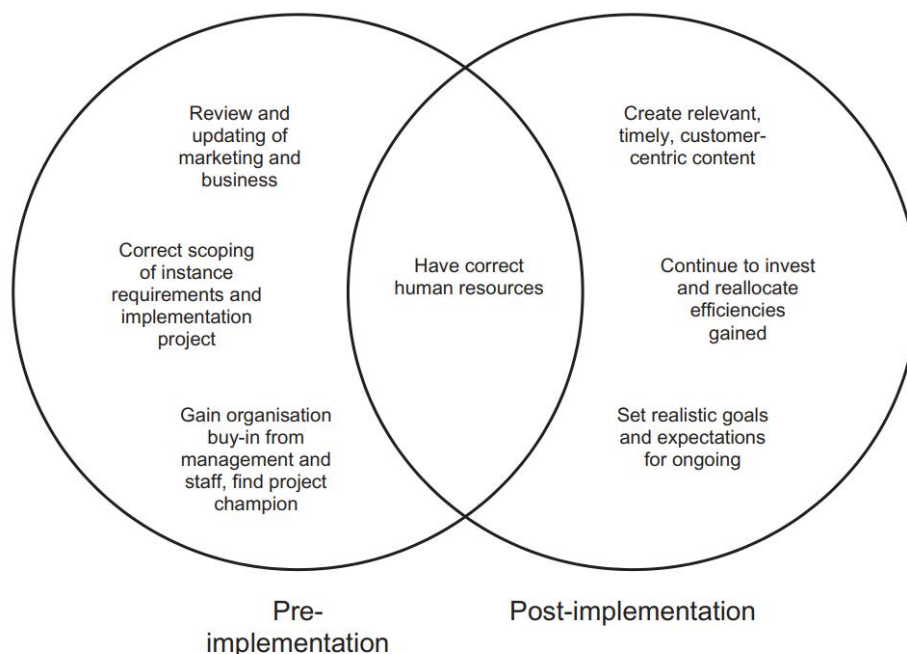
Post-implementation

Figure 1. The seven antecedents of marketing automation success (Murphy, 2018).

According to Murphy (2018), pre-implementation factors include review and updating of marketing and business processes, correct scoping of instance requirements and

implementation project, as well as gaining organization buy-in and finding a project champion. The post-implementation factors consist of creating and delivering relevant and timely content, setting realistic expectations and being patient, as well as continuing to invest and reallocate found efficiencies (Murphy, 2018). Lastly, the factor that Murphy argues is present in all phases is having correct human resources. Next, the factors are in introduced more thoroughly.

Pre-implementation phase

1. Review and development of internal marketing and business processes

Before purchasing a marketing automation software, a company should examine and develop its current marketing processes (Doyle, 2000; Murphy, 2018) and identify the technical, strategic, and human resource demands for an automation software (Xu et al., 2002), because a marketing automation software itself cannot fix an ineffective marketing process (Wood, 2015). Hence, the company needs to understand its current marketing processes, recognize what parts should be removed to reach better results, and focus on optimizing these processes (Keens & Barker, 2009). In almost every time an organization reviews its marketing and business processes, several changes are needed (Xu et al., 2002) when it comes to people, processes, and technologies (Doyle, 2000). Without proper marketing processes, purchasing a software might end up causing additional costs, since the wanted results do not appear and new marketing efforts are needed while struggling to reach to the set targets (Berghofer et al., 2018).

2. Correct scoping of instance requirements and implementation project

The next phase involves scoping to evaluate the functionalities, implementation processes, and costs of implementing a marketing automation system (Jena & Panda, 2017). The implementation decision needs to be well-argued and fit to the needs of a business (Berghofer et al., 2018). It is important to check the main features, functionalities, and suitability for the company's industry, add on products, and after sales services of the software package and compare these to the cost of the software (Jena & Panda, 2017). Nasir and Sahibuddin (2011) state that the three most critical success factors before

implementing a software are clear requirements and specifications, clear objectives and goals, as well as a realistic schedule. Failing to set a realistic schedule and budget can result in the failure of the whole software project (Nasir & Sahibuddin, 2011).

3. *Gain organization buy-in and find a project champion*

The success of implementing a marketing automation software is highly dependent on the buy-in of internal management and staff (Murphy, 2018). Before implementing an automation software, a company needs to make sure the management understands the need and value of the software (Wood, 2015). Lin et al. (2018) argue that the support of top management is vital for receiving the needed budget and resources for the implementation project. In addition, the study by Lin et al. (2018) indicates that the most important factor defining the success of a project is the capabilities of a project leader, because he/she is responsible for the communication with top management and also influences the whole project by making important decisions during the project.

Lastly, after the top management and the project leader are engaged with the project, it is important to engage the users of the software with the project. Several studies have shown that attitudes of the employees who will use the new software will influence on the success of the implementation (Hassandoust et al., 2016; Sorgenfrei et al., 2014), because it affects the intent to use or not to use the software (Jones et al., 2002). Therefore, it is crucial to educate the users about the benefits of the new software and provide them with comprehensive training so that they can successfully use the new marketing automation system (Murphy, 2018).

Post-implementation phase

4. *Create and deliver relevant and timely content*

After the software implementation is done, the next step is to continue delivering content that interests the target audience (Murphy, 2018). The study by Järvinen and Taiminen (2016) showed that when a company uses marketing automation software to constantly deliver relevant, interesting, and useful content according to their customers'

needs, the company will receive more high-quality leads than before. Another study by Sahni et al. (2018) indicated that by adding personalization to emails the consumers were more likely to open the messages and finally increasing the number of sales leads. If the customers see the content as time-consuming, tedious, and not valuable, it might have negative consequences (Murphy, 2018), such as customers unsubscribing from the emails or customer not opening the emails anymore.

In today's digital world, consumers are expecting that the content they receive is tailored to their needs (Wood, 2015). However, companies often fail to understand what kind of content customers want (Murphy, 2018), and end up focusing too much on product-specific content rather than answering to customer needs by using best-practices and data-driven solutions (Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016). This can be avoided by asking for feedback from customers and prospects to learn what they are interested in (Ghanadan, 2018) and by utilizing analytics to identify what kind of content is relevant to customers (Heddleston, 2018).

5. *Set realistic expectations and be patient*

The fifth antecedent factor includes setting realistic expectations that can actually be achieved and then allowing enough time for the results to appear. Chief marketing officers are constantly in high pressure to demonstrate the value of different marketing activities (Keens & Barker, 2009), and it is common that unrealistic goals are set in all levels of the management when it comes to the implementation process (Murphy, 2018). To avoid setting unrealistic expectations, smaller goals attached to the implementation timeline can be used to demonstrate the implementation progress (Biegel, 2009). However, it is necessary for the management to be patient (Murphy, 2018), and understand that before seeing any benefits of the marketing automation software, considerable amount of time and money is needed (Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016). Hence, this factor is connected to the second antecedent factor, because when scoping the implementation process, a realistic schedule and goals need to be established. If a company fails to do

this before the implementation, the problems will follow after the implementation is done.

6. *Continue to invest and reallocate found efficiencies*

When marketing automation is implemented, it should replace some parts of the needed human work and release more resources into other parts of marketing (Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016). To improve the efficiency of marketing activities, marketing managers should utilize the additional resources to further develop the marketing automation process and not just cut expenses (Murphy, 2018). When the use of marketing automation becomes more and more thorough with advanced functionalities, the extra resources should be used in places where they provide most benefits (Jena & Panda, 2017). Different options could be investing more in technologies, software features, huma resources, or other supportive marketing activities (Murphy, 2018).

Both pre- and post-implementation phase

7. *Correct human resources*

The last antecedent factor includes having the right human resources in place both during the implementation process and after it. According to Marketing Automation Report 2021 (Zumstein et al., 2021), one of the biggest barriers to implement marketing automation is too low internal know-how. The implementation of a marketing automation software requires technical know-how, and a fair number of resources either inside or outside of the company need to be allocated to properly set up the needed infrastructure (Silva et al., 2020). Humans are needed in different parts of the implementation process to continuously make sure that the marketing automation system operates properly. Marketing automation systems need for example marketing automation specialists, developers, analysts, content creators, and other people with the knowhow to use the system (Murphy, 2018).

If needed human resources and knowhow is not available, Murphy (2018) argues that the implementation can fail already before the marketing activities are started. Internal

human resources can be created by hiring new workforce with knowledge about marketing automation or by training the existing employees with needed skills (Murphy, 2018; Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016). However, it is common that organizations struggle to train their current employees when a new marketing automation software is presented (Jena & Panda, 2017), because it requires certain technical and data analytics skills that can be hard to find internally (Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016). A solution for this is to outsource parts or the whole implementation and maintenance process (Murphy, 2018).

3 Research methodology

This chapter describes the research method, data collection and analysis, as well as reliability and validity of the study. First chapter explains why qualitative research method and semi-structured interviews are chosen for the study. The second chapter reviews the methods used for collecting and analyzing the research data. The last chapter evaluates whether the study provided reliable and valid results.

3.1 Research approach & method

The research approach in this study is a deductive approach. In deductive approach, the study is based on existing theories and the qualitative research is created according to the theories (Azungah, 2018; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 548). As a comparison, in the inductive research approach the data is first collected and then the theory is created based on the result and analysis of the collected data (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 548). This study first explores the theories around the topic and then uses the theories as a base for forming the research method and data collection techniques, and for this reason the deductive research approach is more suitable for the study. After that, the data is analyzed to confirm whether the theories and the data in the study support each other.

This study uses a qualitative research method because it is a suitable method when the goal is to explore a new phenomenon that has not yet been thoroughly studied (Corbin et al., 2014, p. 5) to get an in-depth understanding of the topic (Carson, 2001, p. 65). This research method allows the researcher to form a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon that is studied, by getting insides from the participants' own experiences and understand how they form meanings (Corbin et al., 2014, p. 5; Mayer, 2015). In this study, qualitative research method is utilized to gain better understanding of the topic and get new knowledge from different perspectives. One part of qualitative research is the comparison between existing theories, previous data, and new research data (Gummesson, 2005), which is also the process in this study.

While quantitative research uses numbers as data, qualitative research includes non-numeric data (Mayer, 2015), such as words, videos, and images, and in qualitative research the data collection is often done through interviews or other ways that generate non-numerical data (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 161). Different types of interviews include structured, semi-structured, open-ended, face-to-face, through mobile phone or computer, and one-to-one or group interviews (Khan, 2014). The data collection is not standardized, meaning that it is normal that the questions and the process might vary during the research process (Mayer, 2015; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 163). Open-ended questions provide more flexibility to the participants to discuss about the perspectives that they find important, but also meaning that the researcher needs to focus on uncovering the right themes and topics (Azungah, 2018). Therefore, it is also important the researcher is curious, creative, and not afraid of taking risks while having dynamic discussions with the study participants (Corbin et al., 2014, p. 5).

3.2   Data collection

This study uses semi-structured interviews, where key questions are formed around the main themes of the study (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 374). Semi-structured interviews follow a structure, but the researcher can deviate from the predefined structure when needed (Kallio et al., 2016). The order of questions may differ according to the conversation flow, and the use of questions may change depending on which questions are needed to better answer to the research question and objectives (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 374-375). Semi-structured interviews are popular due to their versatility and flexibility (Kallio et al., 2016), which enables steering the conversation to right direction and getting relevant in-depth answers from the interviewees, which is beneficial also in this study.

As in semi-structured interviews, the structure of the interview questions in this study is formed by dividing the interview in different parts based on the research question and objectives. Then few questions are created under each section. The structure of the interview format followed the framework that was introduced earlier in the study.

The participants in this study were chosen from companies that operate in international markets and have at least one marketing automation software in use. To get more perspective for the study, all participants were from different companies. The participants all work with international marketing strategies in their companies and are actively using marketing automation software as part of their job. In total, seven people participated in the study and shared their knowledge and experiences. The participants have different titles and different backgrounds, but they all work currently either in marketing or in sales. The individuals were chosen not based on their titles or the departments they work in, but if they had experience working with international marketing strategies and marketing automation software.

To protect the privacy of the participants, the names of the individuals or the companies they work in are not published. Therefore, only relevant background data is introduced in the table below.

Table 1. Background of the interviewees.

INTERVIEWEE	TITLE	COMPANY'S INDUSTRY	COMPANY SIZE
A	Global Digital Marketing Manager	Computers and electronics manufacturing	Large
B	Digital Marketing Manager Nordics	Information technology and services	Large
C	Chief Operating Officer	Pharmaceutical manufacturing	Large
D	Global Marketing Project Manager	Information technology and services	Medium
E	VP New Acquisition	Information technology and services	Medium
F	Chief Growth Officer	Financial services	Medium
G	Group Chief Marketing Officer	Financial services	Small

Two types of time horizons can be chosen for the study. Cross-sectional studies focus on exploring a specific phenomenon in a specific time, whereas longitudinal studies research the phenomenon over a chosen time period (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 190). The time horizon for the study is more cross-sectional, because the aim was to collect the data in a specific time, but due to different schedules of the participants, the interviews were held between fourth of October and 21st of October in 2022. Interviews were one-to-one interviews and held online via Teams and they lasted between 30 minutes and one hour.

3.3 Data analysis

In qualitative research the meanings are mainly formed from words and not using numbers, and therefore these meanings need to be carefully analyzed, since words can have several meanings and sometimes the meaning can be unclear (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 546). The subjectivity of a researcher is a key factor since the analysis relies on the researcher's ability to separate facts and interpretations (Mayer, 2015). Thus, the quality of qualitative research is dependent on how the data collection and data analysis is conducted and whether the meanings are understood and clarified comprehensively (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 546). To ensure high quality of data analysis, several steps were taken to better analyse the collected data.

According to Saunders et al. (2012, p. 557), data analysis should be started by understanding the broad amount of data, combining data from different interviews, forming themes and relationships, then developing the patterns and relationships, and finally forming conclusions. Stuckey (2014) argues that the first step in qualitative research analysis is to transcript interviews from the recordings. At this study, the data analysis was started by writing the transcripts of each interview by carefully following the recordings.

The next step in data analysis is coding, which refers to the process of organizing and categorizing the data (Stuckey, 2015). Categorizing data enables better structuring of the

data and organizing it to correspond the research questions (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 557). The categorising was done by reviewing the transcripts and marking similarities between different interviews. This was followed by unitizing the data, which means gathering data from different interviews to various categories (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 557).

According to Saunders et al. (2012, p. 560), the next step is to identify relationships and further develop the categories, meaning that after utilizing the data, some reformation of the categories might be needed based on the meanings found on the data. At this point, the data was reorganized in a way that the categories better respond to the research questions and can be compared to the theories. After reorganizing the categories, the data was compared to the theories and literature that was introduced earlier in the study. Lastly, some conclusions were formed based on the analysis.

3.4   Reliability and validity

Reliability of the study evaluates if the chosen data collection techniques and procedures would generate similar results, when they were repeated in another situation or by another researcher (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 192). This means that with good reliability the results stay similar when the study is repeated, and this can be tested by assessing the trustworthiness of a study (Golafshani, 2003). To increase the trustworthiness in this study, the participants were all from different companies and with different backgrounds, such as age, gender, work experience etc.

One way to enhance reliability is to use verification, which means constantly confirming and making sure that matters are understood correctly (Morse et al., 2002). Therefore, verification was used during interviews to confirm the meanings of participants' answers. To enhance the reliability, the interviews were held as one-to-one interviews and enough time was prepared so that both interviewee and interviewer could ask more precise questions in order to fully understand each other.

Even though the study aimed at maximizing the reliability, several challenges can be recognized that can affect the reliability negatively. Since the study relies on participants' experiences, conducting the study again might generate different results, because the experiences of these participants will continuously change, and the knowledge of the topic can evolve. This is impossible to control, since the researcher cannot influence on the new experiences of participants. Another challenge is that if the study is repeated with a different researcher, the individual's subjectivity might differ and result in different interpretations of participants' answers. To avoid this, the researcher strived to be neutral and unbiased during the research. However, when repeating the study with another researcher, the personal ways to interact and communicate might affect the answers of the participants, which means worse reliability.

Validity has several definitions in qualitative research (Golafshani, 2003). One definition by Golafshani (2003) is that validity means whether the chosen measurement is precise and if it actually measures what it is supposed to measure. Saunders et al. (2012, p. 382) state that validity refers to a researcher's ability to gather a participant's knowledge and experience and knowing how to interpret the meanings that a participant expresses. To increase the validity, the research method and approach was chosen based on what best fits to studying the topic. Data analysis followed several steps in order to better interpret the meanings of participants and to measure the research objective. The research process and its measurements were justified by relevant literature and not chosen by the preference of the researcher. In this way, the researcher remained unbiased, and the most suitable methods were chosen to the study, which increases the validity.

4 Analysis of findings

This chapter presents the key findings of the study based on the interviews. The structure follows the framework of the study, starting with a discussion about the three pre-implementation factors affecting the marketing automation success and then continuing with three post-implementation factors, and finally discussing about human resources, which is connected to both pre- and post-implementation.

4.1 Current international marketing processes

Based on the interviews, all seven companies have a standardized global marketing strategy as a base for all marketing activities, but in addition to that, all of them are applying different level of adapted marketing activities locally (see table 2). All the interviewees argued that their marketing strategy has shifted to digital channels, mostly including the use of different social media channels, content marketing, email marketing, and search engine optimization.

Table 2. Level of standardization versus adaptation.

COMPANY	LEVEL OF STANDARDIZATION	LEVEL OF ADAPTATION
A	High	Low
B	Medium	Medium
C	High	Low
D	High except in the six focus markets	High in six focus markets
E	Medium	Medium
F	High except in the eight focus markets	High in eight focus markets
G	High	Low

Interviewee A states that most of their sales come from big countries in Europe, US, China, and the rest of Asia Pacific, so all marketing processes are planned to international

audience and therefore the international marketing strategy is standardized so that it can be easily applied to all markets. However, small adaptation of the marketing is often needed in different countries and the local offices are responsible for understanding the local customer needs and making adaptations based on that. When expanding to new markets, the most important factor for this company is the market size and the potential business opportunity. When measuring the success of international marketing, interviewee A stated that the most important KPI for them is the sales margin. They compare these results across the different regions and the interviewee explained that for them it is the key to have a holistic view and understanding of the differences between the markets. Based on that understanding, country specific adaptations can be done to enhance the efficiency of marketing. Since the company has millions of product users, one key aspect of their marketing is to reach as many users around the globe as possible.

Interviewee B states that the company operates globally but focusing their marketing efforts to countries where they see most business opportunities. The company has a global marketing strategy, which determines the general guidelines for marketing, but the interviewee emphasized that local offices in different countries have the freedom to plan the marketing strategies in country and region level. The interviewee said that the local strategies need to be coherent and in line with the global strategy, but at the same time adjusted in a way that it matches the local market needs. As an example, the interviewee said that "*how well the company is known in certain area has a big impact because if the company is not known in certain country, we have to highlight different messages in our marketing communications and maybe select the target audience little bit differently*". The product offering varies in different markets and that is also a reason for adaptation. The marketing is focused on reaching the target audience with content that demonstrates the value of their products and in this way create leads. The most measured KPI in their marketing is the amount and quality of leads and how it differs between the countries and regions.

Interviewee C told that the company operates in over 30 countries all over the world and the international marketing strategy focuses on leveraging the brand identity around the globe. The growth of company C has been achieved through both organic growth and by acquiring several new companies, and as a result they are still in the process of making customers recognize the company's global reach. The company operates in highly regulated industry, but the interviewee states that for example inside EU the regulation is mostly same everywhere, which enables them to utilize a standardized marketing strategy globally. The adaptation consists mostly of translating the content into local languages and highlighting different content more in different markets. When deciding where to expand next, the size and amount of regulation of the market plays a key role. The most important things to measure are the generated traffic at the website and the number of leads. The marketing budget is always allocated to areas where the most demand is and where they see the highest return of marketing investment.

The global marketing strategy of the company where interviewee D is working is to be as local as possible in their six most important markets, and then have an international standardized marketing strategy for the other markets. Even though the goal is to be as local as possible, the lack of resources in marketing department forces the company to use the same base strategy in all marketing and then localize parts of marketing whenever it is possible. Since the company has been expanding to new markets aggressively in the past few years, the main goal of marketing is to build awareness of the company in new markets and demonstrate the value of their product to the target market to generate leads. The interviewee describes the marketing department as small but agile, meaning that there are constantly small changes in marketing processes since they are trying new approaches to determine which activities are most effective in which markets. The most important KPIs for them are the website traffic and the amount and quality of marketing and sales qualified leads.

The interviewee E explained that since their product is a software, it is in principle available in all countries through their website. However, the company went through a

rebranding process and is now aiming to expand quickly to several new markets. Currently the company has offices in five markets but is in a process to establish two new offices in new countries. Since the company is new in several markets, the focus is to make the company known in these markets, and the bigger the market potential is the more resources the company allocates in a specific country's marketing. The marketing strategy follows a standardized base strategy, but adaptations are constantly done based on the individual market differences that are noticed. When expanding to new markets, the countries are chosen based on market similarities with current markets, so that the experience gained from one market can be utilized to the new market and the current marketing strategy is most likely to succeed in the new market too. The marketing and sales department together measure the amount and quality of leads, as well as the conversion rate and cost per lead in lead generation.

According to interviewee F, the company operates globally all around the world but focusing on eight specific markets. The company has an international marketing strategy, which is applied to all other countries except the eight most important markets. For these eight markets, the company has built localized country specific strategies. The interviewee told that the template for marketing is similar regardless of the market, meaning that all markets use content marketing, search engine optimization, and social media marketing, but then execution of these activities is different. For example, the platforms for content marketing vary between countries, and in the eight main markets the content is always tailored based on the market specific needs, which can be based on the cultural factors or legislation. New markets to expand are chosen based on the business potential and where there is least resistance, meaning that similarities in markets reduce the need to localize, when the current processes can be utilized again. The company measures the return of marketing investment and how it differs between countries, and more resources are always allocated based on where the return on investment is the highest.

Interviewee G states that the company operates in two markets, which are Finland and Sweden. The interviewee said that the international marketing strategy is aiming to be

relatively standardized in both markets, but differences in market maturity, competitive landscape, taxation law and legislation in general forces them to differentiate the strategy in some parts. The interviewee adds that *"overall the strategy is targeted to both markets, and we are actually one marketing team catering both markets."* The interviewee explained that the company is in the growth phase in both markets and for that reason it is easy to use similar content and strategy to both markets, even though the markets differ from each other, and the product offering varies to some extent. The company has millions of users for their product, and one of the key targets in marketing is to engage the users to increase the use of their product. The main KPIs are website visits, marketing generated leads, and conversion rates.

4.2　Implementation plan for a marketing automation software

The companies of interviewee E and F were currently in the middle of an implementation process with a new marketing automation software. All other companies had implemented one or more marketing automation software during the past two years. The reasons why the interviewees felt that marketing automation is needed in their companies varied and the companies were using marketing automation for different purposes, often as a part of a specific marketing process and not as a comprehensive platform that automates as much as possible. However, regardless of how the marketing automation software is used in the company, the interviewees highlighted that the core benefits that they are looking for in the software are right timing of content to customers and target audience, quicker responses to customers, and efficiency by saving time while still reaching bigger audience than before.

Several interviewees highlighted the importance of integration with the current systems when considering a new marketing automation software. The interviewee from company E said:

> If you buy an automation solution, then the solution needs to follow what you have in place. It cannot be that the solution dictates everything else to change. It's like a dog and the tail, the automation solution cannot become the dog and everything

else that you have already emplaced needs to follow that solution. It needs to be the other way around, that the solution is the tail and is following the dog.

Other interviewees also argued that the ability to integrate with current systems is a critical requirement for a marketing automation software. Several of them highlighted that integration would affect the final benefits that the automation will bring to the marketing, since well-integrated systems save time and remove manual work, but without integration not all steps can be automated and there will still be manual work to do between different systems. Another aspect was the cost of integration and how much time and technical resources are needed for it. The interviewees emphasized that the integration process is crucial to understand before developing the implementation plan.

Since all the companies operate in international markets and do some level of adaptation in their marketing strategies, one key aspect to consider when choosing a new software was the adaptation options in the software. All the interviewees mentioned languages as a challenge when it comes to using a same marketing automation software globally. Interviewee F stated that:

The tools had to be chosen in a way that we can easily localize them, for example this Userflow tool, the way it works is that you can build the flows technically in one language first, and then the same flow can just be localized with the different languages or different markets, so that the flow itself stays the same but depending on the location of the user they will see different texts or different translations.

All other interviewees also mentioned that the ability to make adaptations and most importantly translate content into local languages is a must when choosing a marketing automation software for global business. This also needs to be taken into account before making the implementation plan, because it affects the amount of time and work that is required to have the software in place in all markets.

All the interviewees stated that based on their experiences when implementing a marketing automation software, it is important to make a clear plan for the whole implementation process. The interviewee A stated that *"the key is to have a very concrete understanding of the goals for the implementation. So what do we want to achieve with*

the tools, what does success look like, how do we measure it". In addition, interviewee G stated that:

> *You really need to spend time on mapping your needs. So what are you getting the software for. It's kind of a maze if you just buy some software without thinking that what kind of problem this software is solving or what benefit will it bring, what added value. Because then it's almost impossible to implement if you don't know what you're doing.*

Interviewee D mentioned that when they implemented their current marketing automation software previous year, they failed to make a realistic schedule for implementation process and due to technical challenges, the implementation ended up taking 12 months instead of the original plan of six months. Interviewee D stated that:

> *The schedule needs to be as realistic as possible, because when the implementation takes longer than expected, it affects not only the marketing department's performance, but also sales and customer success, so it's like affecting everyone's performance and then the goals become unrealistic, and marketing needs to figure out other ways to compensate and use other channels for communicating.*

4.3   Project leader and organizational buy-in

Several interviewees mentioned the need to get management and employees onboard when implementing a new software. The interviewee C explained that:

> *When the first marketing automation software was introduced to the management first time, not many of them were convinced. But we had this one guy who was really eager to have a marketing automation system, so I listened to him and decided to fully support him and give him resources to take the process further. I think without his initiative it would have taken maybe years before we implemented any systems. And of course, my support as a manager helped to get the project approved in the company.*

Interviewee C highlighted that it is crucial that there is at least someone in the management to support the project and that it can be difficult to get the needed resources during the implementation and post-implementation phase if management is not fully onboard. Another important point was that there is someone who wants to take the project as their main responsibility and make sure that the project moves forward. Without this person the interviewee said the project gets easily forgotten or does not move

forward according to the plan because there is no one prioritizing the progress of the project.

Several interviewees mentioned that they have a person in the company who is responsible for the use and maintenance of the marketing automation software. However, interviewee D said that it is not the first priority for that person and due to lack of resources and time the software is not updated as much as it should. This results in messy structures and outdated data, even though the system would allow much more. The interviewee D said:

> There is so much that could be done to improve the whole system and the processes, but at the moment there is time to only do the minimum that is needed for us to continue doing what we do. And then no one else has enough time or knowledge to learn how to make the changes and teach us how to benefit from these so we just let it be as it is.

The interviewee emphasized that how the onboarding and learning is organized affects the users' motivation and eagerness to learn more to use the software better.

Interviewee E emphasized that *"you need to have buy-in from the local leaders"*. The person continued that especially salespeople are often not the most structured people and he points the responsibility to local leaders. He stated that if the local leaders really understand the benefits of the software, it is much easier to get the buy-in also from the salespeople who will use the system in their everyday work. Once the local leaders are dedicated to use the system, they will naturally make sure that the needed updates are done and that all the users know what to do and how to use the system correctly.

Interviewee A explained that for them onboarding the teams starts from the whole international marketing strategy level:

> I think the success is team working or kind of human factor influenced as well, in the sense that how do we make our local teams feel like they're a part of the process that they've been able to give their input to the strategy as opposed to us approaching them with a pre-formulated strategy, where they don't necessarily feel that they have been involved or listened to and kind of that they haven't had

the possibility to give their input. I think that's key in succeeding locally that we engage the local teams.

Interviewee A later continued that the same comes to marketing automation software, meaning that the people who will use the software around the globe need to be involved already starting from the implementation process and their feedback needs to be listened so that the software is built in a way that the local teams feel like it is tailored to them, and it fits to their needs. The interviewee added that it is important that all the users understand the purpose of the software and are aligned with the same goals and ways of working.

The interviewee B stated that:

> *Good onboarding for everybody who is part of that marketing automation in some way is important. And of course, different levels of onboarding, so the ones who really have to implement everything in the system, they should be more experts and those who just localize campaigns, it's enough that they know how the software works to a certain extent, but they don't need to know everything. Because if you're not really into these kinds of details and you get too much information, then you start paying attention to irrelevant things that you don't need and that might be even worse because of that.*

Interviewee B continued that they try to invest in the onboarding of new software users, but sometimes the problem is that an individual does not see enough value in the system and ends up not properly using it or using it in a wrong way. The interviewee G also mentioned that *"It's not just marketing related, so the whole organization needs to understand what's going on and why is the company using this software and how the whole company will need to use it and understand it and how it benefits the whole company."*

4.4 Relevant and timely content creation with marketing automation

All the interviewees mentioned as the most important benefits of marketing automation to create real-time content to target audience. However, how this is done in practice varied between the companies. Interviewee A said that they currently use two different software for marketing automation, one of them is integrated to their CRM system and

it is used for email marketing, and the other one is used to communicate with the users in their application. The interviewee said that the email marketing software has significant benefits when it comes to reaching large audience simultaneously. The software saves time and effort by segmenting consumers and customers to different groups and sending right email sequences to them at right time. At the same time, the tool used for communicating with application users enables faster responses to customers. As a challenge, interviewee A stated that *"There is little connection in between the two to have a holistic view and possibility to communicate with our users. That's why we are looking to migrate on to a single platform both the e-mail and app channels."*

Interviewee B explained that they have an email marketing software in use, which is integrated to several other systems: *"It's really important that the software has a conversation with our CRM system. Then you can do pretty good marketing automation when the CRM and the marketing automation tools understand each other. These together are really important data sources to us."* Interviewee B mentioned same benefits from email marketing automation as the interviewee A. In addition, the integration of CRM and email marketing software together provide the company more detailed analytics about customers that they can use to better target content in the future.

Interviewee C explained that for them the most important aspect is lead management, and they have integrated their CRM system to two different marketing automation software. First system is integrated to their website to collect data from website visitors and segmenting leads when these visitors fulfil their contact information, then the information is integrated to the CRM system, where the email automation sends relevant emails to these leads. The interviewee agrees with the same benefits of email marketing as the previous interviewees and adds that *"Also one of the key issues for us is to make the brand more known, so it's a good cost-effective way to create brand visibility even if they are not buying at the moment."* The interviewee C also states that:

> *At least one good thing with the CRM integration is that it's transparent to all, so if I'm thinking of my sales team for instance, they can see what kind of leads are flowing over in their customers and when they are ready to be contacted. For sales*

team the automation around these processes saves time and helps them see what
leads are the best ones and should be prioritized.

Interviewee D told that they are using a marketing automation software to lead genera-
tion, which is integrated to their CRM system in a way that the leads are automatically
segmented based on different background information, and then created to the CRM
system, and finally the right salespeople are notified when a new lead comes in. Then
the leads can be contacted through the CRM system. The interviewee states that the
main benefits are *"… to save time and to be able to communicate with the mass amount*
of leads, like so many leads that we are not able to send out by ourselves manually. Or
we can, but then it will take a lot of time." The interviewee states that the automation
systems help to keep leads warm, structure the communication, and faster the respond
time, but that the process is still not working as efficiently as it could. *"We are in quite*
early stage still with these processes, but there is more content coming every month and
right now we are localizing it, so we have some content in Finnish, some in Swedish, but
the rest of the translations are still coming."

Interviewee E stated that they have a software for email marketing, but they are in a
process of resigning the contract since they have not received enough benefits com-
pared to the costs. The interviewee E continued:

> *The benefits of those tools are to stay in touch with individuals that have been*
> *through the sales process, but at that time decided not to buy. So keeping them*
> *warm or warming them up again, basically putting them back into the sales funnel*
> *again, requalifying them, keeping them interested, or if they haven't been in the*
> *sales process yet, to emphasize some reason. Also keep those people posted, keep*
> *them interested, keep them updated, and generate them again. And the nice thing*
> *is scalability, so you do it automatically, which means that salespeople can focus*
> *on their best leads, that are the most interested leads at that moment of time.*

However, the interviewee E explained that even though the software makes it easy to

send emails to leads, they could not prove that the emails were bringing any extra value:

> *We cancel that subscription for several reasons. One of the reasons was that we*
> *didn't see the automatic and standardized messaging as the best way to actually*
> *get engagement and meetings booked. So we moved away from standardized*

messaging on the safe side, more to an individual approach and we've seen this giving better results, even though it takes more time from us.

The interviewee F states that for them, marketing automation is not needed as a part of the sales process, since their sales process is already working well. However, marketing automation is needed to inform customers about new features and teach them new ways to use the product. The emails are sent through their CRM, which includes an email automation feature. The interviewee F sees several challenges with email marketing:

In my opinion, email doesn't seem to work anymore that's pretty much the basic challenge. It takes a lot of work to set things up, it takes a lot of effort to actually do email marketing in this context, even if they are already your customers. The main challenge with marketing automation is that where it's trying to educate and upsell to an existing user base through email, it is that emails are ignored, they are blocked, or categorized as spam and then the benefit to the effort that it requires is very minimal.

Interviewee G told that they have two marketing automation software in use, one of them is the CRM system that includes features to do lead management and email marketing, whereas the other one is for making marketing campaigns in social media. Interviewee G was well aware that marketing automation itself does not work if the content is not suitable for the target audience and continued that:

Marketing automation for us is all about reach and getting scalability to what we do and get efficiency and growth. So it's a tool for us and I always say that the content is the king so no matter how cool different tools we get, it doesn't matter if the content is not golden." The interviewee stated that they use the software regularly and the benefit for them is huge. "We would be in big trouble if we didn't have these tools. On a general level, I don't think every company needs these tools, but the characteristics of our business dictate that we really benefit a lot from using marketing automation. The scalability is the biggest thing for us, so in B2B side we can reach smaller companies easier that we wouldn't have time and it wouldn't make sense otherwise, and in B2C side we can reach hundreds of thousands of our users that we otherwise could not.

4.5   Setting realistic expectations and measuring the results

Both interviewees E and F, who were in the middle of a marketing automation software implementation, explained that it is easier to set expectations on what kind of benefits

or changes the new software will cause, for example better reach to target audience, time savings, or more leads, but it is considerably more difficult to set actual expectations on how broad the reach will be or how much time will the automation save. The interviewee F told that:

> *It is hard to evaluate the accurate results that the system will bring, because we are at the same time expanding to new markets where we don't have any marketing data yet. And we are constantly developing our marketing processes and strategies and marketing automation is only on part of it, so it's hard to know the results beforehand. Now we are more focusing on testing different strategies and improving the processes when we get more data.*

The interviewee A argued that it is easy to get different kind of data from their marketing automation software, but the data is not always the best possible KPI to measure the success of marketing and using it as a key metric can cause unrealistic or distorted expectations. However, interviewee B stated that the data from marketing automation software is an extremely important measurement for international marketing and having the same metrics in all markets makes it easy to compare marketing performance between countries as well as trust that marketing processes are done in similar way in different countries. Interviewee C argued that sometimes the use of a marketing automation software is neglected, for example when the number of leads is updated to CRM systems, and this ends up causing distorted results. Consequently, measuring the current performance and setting new expectations becomes difficult.

The interviewee E argued that it is extremely difficult to set expectations towards marketing automation performance and differentiate what is a result of marketing automation process and what is a result of salespeople contacting the prospects, because often these two are done simultaneously. The interviewee E said that:

> *It's impossible to see based on what interaction that meeting was booked. It can be because of the automation flow, but that doesn't mean that it cannot be the salesperson contacting the lead. Because we go multi-channel with the leads, it is impossible to know. From management perspective, looking at the thousand meetings that were booked in a given quarter and knowing what the impact of an automation solution was and how many meetings did people generate compared to that, it's completely impossible.*

The interviewee F explained that for example email marketing is easy to measure with different metrics, but the actual business value of using marketing automation is more complicated to measure. The interviewee F continued:

> *In our case you sent an e-mail to hundreds of thousands of contacts and then you measure what was the open rate, what share was flagged as spam, what share clicked on a link in that e-mail, but the problem is that none of these actually bring any value. We recently switched off Intercom for half of our new users that arrived in the system and for roughly 2,5 months followed their performance, for what share of them started actively using our product, or what share of them started using a premium platform. The result was that there is no difference at all statistically or otherwise in those two groups. In fact, the group that never got any Intercom emails performed little bit better than the control group that was still getting the Intercom emails, so it's difficult to measure. This took us 2,5 months plus the implementation that was required to do it, plus the analysis of the data which is time consuming and so on. I would argue that many companies do things because they fear the alternative, they fear that if they switch things off, they will lose something and it's usually very complicated to test it and we measure it by the impact on the business.*

All in all, the challenge with most of the interviewees seemed to be that setting expectations to marketing automation software's performance was difficult. Measuring and setting expectations to a single activity, for example open rates and click through rates of emails, was seen easy, but setting accurate expectations and measuring the business impact of an automation software was seen difficult. Only one of the seven interviewees could argue that they had actually measured the business impact of a marketing automation software, whereas other interviewees mostly argued that the software brings several benefits but could not demonstrate the overall impact on international marketing success.

4.6   Developing processes through found efficiencies

Interviewee E stated that when marketing automation increases the efficiency, the released resources are put to any other activity that brings value: *"The nice thing about it is scalability, so you do it automatically, meaning that salespeople can focus on their best leads, that are the most interested leads at that moment of time"* The interviewee then continued that *"They don't have to manually send their content to people that were*

potential buyers three months ago, instead they're focusing their time on the things that are most relevant focus on the moment to close them up."

The interviewee D also explained that since they are already lacking resources in their marketing team, all the released resources that the marketing automation efficiency creates are allocated to the marketing activity that is seen as highest priority at that moment. The interviewee F stated that all extra resources that the marketing team has will be allocated to the marketing processes that have proved to increase marketing results. If the value of a marketing software cannot be proved, then more time or money will not be invested.

All the interviewees recognized several benefits from marketing automation, for example time savings, scalability, reaching more audience, and less manual work, which all refers to improved marketing efficiency. However, all interviewees demonstrated that marketing is seen as one entity, meaning that when improved efficiency in one part of marketing occurs, the released resources will be used inside the marketing department to the activity that is expected to provide best results. None of the interviewees said that improved marketing efficiencies would reduce the already allocated marketing resources or budget. At the same time, if the marketing efficiency was improved due to marketing automation, none of the interviews demonstrated that the released resources would automatically be allocated to marketing automation specifically. Marketing automation was rather seen as an integrated part of marketing than a separate part of which results will be measured separately.

4.7   Human resources supporting marketing automation

All the seven interviewees mentioned the importance of human resources several times during the interviews. Human resources were seen as a key part in both pre- and post-implementation phases. The interviewee A argues that *"no automation tool runs by itself. No matter what the sales pitch is, understanding that all the journeys need maintenance as well"*. Other interviewees mentioned similar thoughts, where the main statement was

that the automation tool is useless without right kind of human resources and technical knowhow.

During every interview the interviewees mentioned that they see marketing automation software as complicated systems. Interviewee C even stated that they changed from one software to another due to the complexity of the use. The person argued that *"If the software is too complicated, it takes too much time even with the right skills to constantly update the system and teach the people who need to use it to use all the functions".* However, some of the interviewees argued that is not a problem as long as the company reserves enough human resources to manage the software and makes sure that it serves the needs of marketers. The interviewee B said that *"Companies always must maybe have one person who is really good at using that tool. So it's not a tool for everybody that you can actually just learn it in one or two days. It's more complicated."*

The need of human resources was also mentioned when discussing about the implementation process. Interviewee C mentioned that:

> *When setting up the system, we had some kind of dead-ends where it didn't go the way we planned. So, it needs to have somebody developing the system that it gets set up in a proper way. It sounds simpler when you throw it on paper but then putting it in action, it's yet another thing. So it needs to have somebody who's really knowing the in-depth technical things, how to set it up. It needs to be somebody's first priority to monitor that and develop the system. If you just set it up and think that it's running by its own, it doesn't happen.*

Several interviewees mentioned that after the implementation, maintenance and updates are still needed constantly and if not enough resources are put to the maintenance of the software, the benefits that can be achieved with the platform decrease. The interviewee D said that:

> *We only have one person who can update the system and it is only one part of that person's job, so when the marketing department wants to make changes to the software, they need to always wait for the changes, which means they are losing time and it has a negative effect on the marketing's efficiency.*

Other interviewees also mentioned that it is a common mistake also in their companies that once the system is implemented, not enough resources are allocated into the development and maintenance of the software. Interviewee E mentioned that "*if the system is not kept up to date, it starts to get messy and both sales and marketing can't find the contacts or other information about the customers anymore.*"

The human resources that the interviewees described to have available for marketing automation differed between the companies. The interviewee G seemed to be the only person who had not faced any challenges due to the lack of human resources in marketing automation. Based on the interviews, the company also had most human resources dedicated to marketing automation. Interviewee G said:

> *From marketing standpoint, we do have dedicated people using this software. We have our digital marketing managers responsible for the overall strategy for marketing automation and then we have the content writers or content managers who use these tools for different campaigns with the help of these digital marketing managers. And then we have the tech support, of course.*

5 Discussion

This chapter discusses the key findings of the study compared to the theoretical framework presented earlier in the paper. The chapter aims to answer the research questions of the study.

5.1 Determining the international marketing strategy

According to several studies, one key question in international marketing is whether to standardise or adapt the global marketing strategy (Tan & Sousa, 2013; Theodosiou & Leonidou, 2003; Vrontis et al., 2009). All participants also emphasized the degree of standardization and adaptation, and its impact on the marketing performance. All the companies in the study utilized a mix of standardization and adaptation instead of only focusing to one of these strategies. Standardization was used when the foreign market environments were similar, and adaptation was used when significant differences occurred between foreign markets. Adaptation was also used when a company had enough resources to customize the marketing and when adaptation was seen as valuable to a specific foreign market's customers. This is in line with the study by Özsomer and Prussia (2000), which indicates that similar market environments advocate standardization and different environments advocate adaptation.

The contingency theory suggests that the degree of standardization and adaptation should be continuously adjusted based on the market changes to always fit the current market environment (Özsomer & Prussia, 2000). Several participants also explained that small adjustments are continuously done by the local offices, when they recognize new needs to adapt the marketing strategy in specific markets. Interviewee D also explained that marketing adaptation is done whenever they have enough resources to create market customized content, which is in line with Albaum and Tse (2001) who argue that standardization is usually connected to the decision to save costs.

Katsikeas et al. (2006) argue that if the same marketing strategy is applied to all foreign markets, it is expected that the efficiency of marketing varies considerably between markets. If the marketing results are only measured in a general level, it might cause inaccurate results of how effective the standardization or adaptation strategy is (Katsikeas et al., 2006). The study agrees with this, since several participants stated that it is important to measure the marketing efforts in a country level and adjust the marketing strategies based on the differences that local offices notice. This improves the efficiency of global marketing since every market allocates their marketing resources in the most effective channels. Similarly, Katsikeas et al. (2006) also states that local managers play a key role in recognizing the market differences and building adapted strategies.

The shift from traditional marketing towards e-marketing is becoming more and more visible (Sheth & Sharma, 2005). The study agrees with this, since all the participants stated that the marketing in their companies is conducted through digital channels. E-marketing is an effective way to reach large audiences, for example by using a company's website to provide valuable content (Katsikeas et al., 2019). However, one challenge in global marketing is the question of whether to use English language everywhere or translate everything in the local languages (Yip & Dempster, 2005). The language questions were also a challenge for the participants, since all of them mentioned that even though the same content can be used in several markets, translating the content into local languages is time-consuming and takes lots of resources. This was seen as the biggest challenge when adapting the marketing strategy, because using the local languages was seen as important when it comes to marketing efficiency, but at the same time several companies were struggling to find enough resources to do it.

5.2   Utilizing marketing automation software as a part of international marketing

The research reveals that the most important features of marketing automation software are personalized communications, email and social media campaigns, lead management, CRM integration, and analytics (Corsaro et al., 2021; Silva et al., 2020; Świeczak,

2013). However, the study showed that companies use marketing automation software for different specific purposes and not as a comprehensive solution that offers tools for all marketing activities.

5.2.1 The benefits of marketing automation software

Marketing automation software enable sending personalized messages to the target audience at the right moment (Świeczak, 2013). The core benefit of marketing automation is the enhanced efficiency in marketing activities when manual tasks are automated (Silva et al., 2020), resulting in higher efficiency with the same resources and same budget (Silva et al., 2020). Even though the intended purpose of a marketing automation software varied between the companies, all the participants mentioned efficiency by saving time, right timing of content, and quicker responses to customers as the core benefits of marketing automation. However, based on how the marketing automation was used in the companies, several other benefits were mentioned.

Six out of seven participants mentioned that they were using marketing automation for email marketing. This makes email marketing of the most common purpose where marketing automation was used between the participants' companies. According to Bawm and Nath (2014), the main benefits of automating email marketing are the low-cost way to reach large audiences and easy optimization of email campaigns based on the performance data of different campaigns. In addition, Irina (2016) states that email marketing allows to qualify billions of contacts based on their engagements. The study agrees with these benefits, since all the six participants mentioned as the core benefit reaching bigger audiences that would otherwise be impossible. In addition, other benefits that were mentioned were the cost-efficiency, time savings, data sources, and segmenting contacts.

Six out of seven participants also mentioned CRM integration as an important feature in marketing automation. Integrating a marketing automation software with a CRM system helps connecting sales and marketing activities to same platform and in this way creating more transparency between the two teams (Irina, 2016). Similarly, one of the

participants in the study mentioned the transparency as a core benefit, since it helps the sales team to save time when they can see what the best leads are that they should prioritize. The integration also aims to improve the efficiency of a CRM system (Wood, 2015) to result in better customer relationships and boost the acquisition and retention of profitable customers (Payne & Frow, 2006). Other participants mentioned the benefit of CRM integration to come from the ability to do email marketing, lead management, or segmentation from the same place and get valuable data on these activities. Even though the efficiency was not directly mentioned, all these activities can be assumed to improve the efficiency of a CRM system.

Three of the seven participants mentioned that they use marketing automation for lead generation. Lead management aims to produce qualified leads to the sales department at the right moment (Irina, 2016) and marketing automation helps to effectively manage leads through the platform (Jena & Panda, 2017). Two of the participants described similar benefits, since for them automated lead generation together with CRM and email marketing integration helps to segment leads, contact them with relevant content, and clarify to the sales team which leads should be prioritized to save the salespeople's time. One of the participants also mentioned as a benefit the faster respond times to leads and better structure of communication, which are part of the effective management of leads.

5.2.2 The pitfalls with marketing automation

Murphy (2018) argues that there are seven antecedent factors that determine whether the marketing automation is successful or not. The first one is reviewing and developing the internal marketing and business processes (Doyle, 2000; Murphy, 2018) to recognize what parts should be removed to reach better results and focus on optimizing these processes (Keens & Barker, 2009). If the processes are not optimized, the new software might cause even more costs, since it does not produce the wanted results and more efforts are needed to reach the set targets (Berghofer et al., 2018).

The second factor to consider is scoping to evaluate the functionalities, implementation processes, and costs of implementing marketing automation (Jena & Panda, 2017). According to Nasir and Sahibuddin (2011) the three most critical success factors before implementing a software are clear requirements and specifications, clear objectives and goals, as well as a realistic schedule. Failing to set a realistic schedule and budget can result in the failure of the whole software project (Nasir & Sahibuddin, 2011). The study agreed with these arguments, since several participants mentioned the importance of clear goals and plan, and one participant demonstrated that failing to set a realistic schedule caused negative consequences in different departments in the company.

The third aspect is gaining organizational buy-in and finding a project champion (Murphy, 2018). According to Lin et al. (2018), the support from top management is vital for receiving sufficient budget and resources for the implementation. The study agrees with this, since several participants mentioned the need to have management onboard. One participant mentioned that without having the management supporting the project, it is hard to get the needed resources to continue the project. In addition, the capabilities of a project leader are the most important factor defining the success of a project, because of communicating with the top management and making all important decisions (Lin et al., 2018). Several participants also demonstrated the need for a project leader, who will take the responsibility of the project and make sure it is progressing according to the plan. Companies who failed to have a project champion, ended up not using the software as well as they could, and the software had outdated data since no one was properly updating it.

According to several studies, attitudes of the employees who will use the new software will influence the success of the implementation (Hassandoust et al., 2016; Sorgenfrei et al., 2014), because it impacts the intent to use or not to use the software (Jones et al., 2002). This was also supported by the study, since two participants highlighted the need to involve the users already in the implementation process to listen their feedback and build a common understanding of how the software should be used and what are the

benefits for the users. If a user is not engaged with the system, it might result in not using the system at all or using it in a wrong way.

After the implementation, the fourth aspect is to create and deliver relevant and timely content that interests the target audience (Murphy, 2018), which can result in higher quality and quantity of leads (Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016; Sahni et al., 2018). Companies often fail to understand what content the target audience wants and failing to create engaging content might have negative consequences (Murphy, 2018). In addition to the benefits of marketing automation in producing content, the participants of the study argued that email marketing is not effective anymore, since their emails are often categorized as a spam, or the audience is not opening the mails anymore. However, it remained unclear whether the reason is in the content that they produce or something else. Other key aspects that were mentioned was that the content needs to be tailored to customers' needs and that different systems need to be integrated together to understand the bigger picture of what is happening.

The fifth factor is about setting realistic expectations for the software and being patient while waiting to get results from the investment (Murphy, 2018). Often the management in all levels sets unrealistic goals for implementation (Murphy, 2018), which could be avoided by setting smaller goals for the implementation timeline (Biegel, 2009). The study demonstrated that companies are indeed struggling to set realistic expectations, because often they do not know what to expect from the software. The study showed that it is easy to set expectations on what kinds of benefits the software will bring but calculating the real additional business value of a software was seen as difficult or even impossible. After using a platform for a while, two participants argued that email marketing is not increasing the number of leads even though they reach larger audiences. Both tried alternative ways to communicate to customers without marketing automation and realized the software was not providing additional value and they even got better results without it.

The sixth factor is to continue invest and reallocate the efficiencies from marketing automation to further develop the automation processes and not just cut expenses (Murphy, 2018). The study shows that the companies do not cut expenses when marketing automation enhances the marketing efficiency, but the released resources are used to any marketing activity that provide the most value. None of the participants showed that the extra resources would be spend in improving marketing automation. This can be due to the lack of resources in the marketing department, or marketing automation not seen as valuable enough to invest even more.

The last factor includes having enough human resources during the implementation of marketing automation software and after it is implemented (Murphy, 2018). Implementation of a software requires technical know-how and enough resources to set up the infrastructure (Silva et al., 2020), otherwise the implementation might fail before marketing is even started (Murphy, 2018). The study supports this, since all participants mentioned the need for human resources in both pre- and post-implementation. The participants understood that the software is useless without right resources and knowhow. Several companies had suffered from not having enough resources, which causes problems to the use of marketing automation or delays in implementing it.

5.3 The impact of marketing automation software on international marketing

The KPIs that the participants used for international marketing varied depending on the main goal of marketing. Common KPIs were the amount and quality of leads, website traffic, conversion rate, and return of marketing investment. Since marketing automation was used to specific marketing needs instead using it comprehensively to support all marketing activities, the KPIs differed depending on the use case. The most common way to use marketing automation was email marketing, where results were measured for example with click through rates and open rates. Another factor that several companies measured was the number of leads coming from marketing automation.

The study showed that the use of marketing automation analytics also provided important data to better measure the results of marketing. This is in line with several studies, where marketing automation analytics help marketers to demonstrate the success of marketing activities, adjust their based on the results (Silva et al., 2020) and get more accurate measurement of the marketing activities to better follow the return of marketing investment (Świeczak, 2013; Redding, 2015). Accordingly, several participants demonstrated how they can easily follow numerous metrics and see the benefits of marketing automation. However, only two of the seven participants said that they also put efforts to measure what is the actual impact of marketing automation, when considering the monetary value that the software brings and comparing it to the costs of the software. Other participants mentioned that measuring the actual impact is hard or even impossible, because separating the benefits that come from a marketing automation software and from other marketing activities is complicated.

The two participants who actually spent time and resources to measure the total impact of marketing automation argued that they noticed the automation software was not providing enough value compared to the costs, which resulted in the decision to resign the current software and look for a new one. One of the participants also argued that companies are scared to measure the actual impact, because it is both costly and time consuming. Keens and Barker (2009) argue that chief marketing offices are constantly facing more and more pressure to cut marketing costs and increase the revenues and Silva et al. (2020) argue that with advanced analytics they can choose with metrics to use to prove the value of marketing. The study together with this research suggests that measuring the real impact of marketing automation might be avoided since marketing managers want to allocate time and resources to prove the positive results of marketing. Some participants also argued that they do not have enough resources in marketing and as a result, they need to prioritize activities that they believe are providing most value. Even though changing an ineffective marketing automation platform to a more effective one could enhance the marketing significantly, it can be hard to demonstrate the need to spend the limited marketing budget in measuring the impact of a software, if there

are other marketing activities that would provide better marketing results in the short term.

Another aspect that determines the impact of a marketing automation software is how well the seven antecedent factors, introduced by Murphy (2018), are handled. The study supported the research done by Murphy (2018) by indicating that the total impact of a marketing automation software is also depended on how well the challenges related to these seven factors are tackled and how much benefits can be reached by successfully following the framework. According to the study, companies had most challenges in having enough human resources, gaining organizational buy-in, and setting realistic goals and expectations for the software.

The participants explained several common factors that affect the success of a software regardless of the company being international or not, but also several factors that are related to international business. One key factor for international companies were to find a software that allows local adaptations (most importantly different language versions) and that the adaptations do not take too much time and resources to do. The impact of a software was also dependent on how well the software was implemented in local offices. If the implementation was done successfully, the benefits of the software increase due to scalability and cost savings as well as enhanced comparison of marketing performance between the countries due to the same metrics used everywhere.

6 Conclusions

This chapter summarizes the study and concludes the main findings of the study based on the literature. After that, managerial implications are described and lastly suggestions for future research are provided.

6.1 Summary

The main research question of the study was "*What is the impact of marketing automation software on international marketing efficiency*". To respond to the research question, the international marketing strategies were discussed and then the main features, benefits and challenges of marketing automation were analysed. Lastly, the impact of marketing automation software on international marketing efficiency was examined.

To understand the role of marketing automation in international marketing, first the international marketing strategies need to be understood. One key question in international marketing is whether to standardise or adapt the global marketing strategy (Tan & Sousa, 2013; Theodosiou & Leonidou, 2003; Vrontis et al., 2009). Standardization was used when the foreign market environments were similar, and adaptation was used when significant differences occurred between foreign markets. Adaptation was also used when a company had enough resources customize the marketing and when adaptation was seen as valuable to a specific foreign market's customers.

The most important features of marketing automation software are personalized communications, email and social media campaigns, lead management, CRM integration, and analytics (Corsaro et al., 2021; Silva et al., 2020; Świeczak, 2013). Depending on a company's goals for marketing, the software can be used for different purposes, when the benefits also differ. According to the study, the most common benefits of marketing automation are saving time, right timing of content, and quicker responses to customers. Seven antecedent factors determine whether the marketing automation is successful or not (Murphy, 2018). These are the review and development of internal marketing

processes (Doyle, 2000; Murphy, 2018), scoping to evaluate functionalities and imple-
mentation processes and costs (Jena & Panda, 2017), gaining organization buy-in and
finding a project champion, creating and delivering relevant and timely content, setting
realistic expectations and being patient, continuous investment and reallocation of the
efficiencies, and correct human resources (Murphy, 2018).

The study demonstrated that companies use different KPIs to measure the results of
marketing automation, for example click through rates and open rates of emails as well
as the number of generated leads. The study showed that marketers can demonstrate
the benefits of marketing automation easily with analytics, but the actual impact of a
marketing automation software on international marketing efficiency is hard to measure.
Marketing managers might also avoid measuring the actual impacts, because they are
facing the pressure to prove that their marketing efforts are providing wanted results
(Keens & Parker, 2009). Measuring the actual impact also requires time and resources,
which is something that the marketing department is often lacking. The impact of a mar-
keting automation software on international marketing efficiency is also dependent on
how much and how well local adaptation is done through marketing automation. When
it is done successfully, the benefits of the software increase due to scalability and cost
savings as well as enhanced comparison between the countries when same metrics are
used globally.

6.2 Managerial implications

The findings of this study provide some managerial implications for international com-
panies that are either planning to implement a new marketing automation software or
already have a software in use but are facing some challenges with it. First, it is important
to understand the goals of the current international marketing strategy and what are the
possible challenges with the current approach. The higher the degree of adaptation is in
the strategy, the more adaptation is also needed with the marketing automation soft-
ware. When the goals of the marketing strategy are understood, it is easier to determine

what is the purpose of a marketing automation software as well as what benefits and features are wanted.

Before implementation, the key is to have a clear plan and timeline for the project as well as make sure that the management is supporting the project with sufficient budget and other resources, such as technical knowhow. When implementing the software, it is important to determine a project leader, who is eager lead to project and make sure it is progressing according to the plan. After the implementation, enough training needs to be offered to the users of the software. An important factor to remember is that marketing automation itself does not make effective marketing, and it is crucial that the marketing department continues to provide relevant content on a regular basis. The first results after implementation will take time, and the management should be realistic with the expectations. Once the automation starts to produce efficiencies, the released resources should be allocated to further develop the processes. For a company having challenges with marketing automation, it is beneficial to go through the steps mentioned before and see if there is something missing from the current processes.

6.3 Recommendations for future studies

Since the study consisted of only seven interviewees from different companies, the results of the study cannot be generalized. Future studies could research the topic with a larger sample in order to increase the generalisability. The study shows that marketing automation and its implementation is connected to several departments of a company, including marketing, sales, IT, and top management. To form a deeper understanding of the role of different departments in creating successful marketing automation, more people from the same company could be interviewed. In this study, the participants were all from the headquarters of the company, so in the future also people from local offices could be interviewed to understand the different perspectives from both sides.

This study included companies with different sizes from various industries and one new perspective for future research could be to study the impact of marketing automation

on international companies in specific industries, since different industries have differences in technical capabilities and marketing strategies. Another perspective for future research could be to study how the size of the company affects the ways that marketing automation is used and how it is performing in international companies. In addition, since the success of a marketing automation software is dependent on both pre- and post-implementation phases, a more longitudinal study could be conducted, where the interviews are done before, during, and after the implementation process is done.

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