

**UNIVERSITY OF VAASA**

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**ENGAGEMENT OF BRAND ADVOCATES IN ONLINE ENVIRONMENT**

Generating online brand advocacy in digital content marketing

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**ABSTRACT**

Co-creation of value together with customers cannot be underestimated in highly competitive and digital environment of nowadays. It is stated that understanding of value especially in online environment is hard for customers and therefore shifting brands is easy. To overcome this challenge, engaging customers who enthusiastically advocate company's brand becomes vital. Nevertheless it is stated that brand advocacy has likelihood of bringing new customers and profitable growth to companies. However little is known about how online brand advocacy could be used in digital content marketing.

The aim of this study is to create deeper understanding of the characteristics and role of online brand advocacy, and explore how to generate and utilize engagement of online brand advocates in digital content marketing in the case of wellness company. Theoretical framework of this study presents the most important drivers affecting on online brand advocacy and how advocacy can be further generated into digital content marketing. The empirical part of the study was conducted as qualitative research by fourteen theme interviews. Based on these interviews theoretical framework was revised and research question and sub- objectives were answered.

As a result of this research the characteristics of online brand advocacy and digital content marketing was identified. The results show that customer engagement has four main drivers and it generates online brand advocacy together with loyalty and customer-brand relationship quality. However all these concepts need to be on high level in order to leverage online brand advocacy. Besides these drivers, also trust and brand identification were identified as significant drivers of online brand advocacy. To use online brand advocacy phenomenon in digital content marketing, the elements of value and experiences, brand communication, awareness and social aspect of the brand were identified to have most positive overall impact.

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**KEYWORDS:** Customer engagement, brand advocacy, online brand advocacy, digital content marketing. Wellness industry



## 1. INTRODUCTION

This study aims to shed light into the concept of online brand advocacy and how the engagement of online brand advocates can be generated and utilized in digital content marketing of wellness industry. In this introduction chapter, background of the study is presented followed by research cap, contribution and objective. Further research question and sub-objectives are presented. Finally the structure of the study and definition of focal concepts are introduced.

### 1.1 Background of the study

The concept of value cannot be underestimated in today's highly competitive and fast moving environment (Woodruff 1997; Huber, Herrmann & Morgan 2001; Khalifa 2004). Customers co-create value by interacting with brands (Aaker 2010), and this value co-creation can be moreover formed by customer brand advocacy (Wallace, Buil & Chernatony 2012), which therefore is seen as an indicator of customer value (Wragg 2004). According to Wragg (2004), brand advocates are customers who provide positive word-of-mouth about a brand and are highly involved with it. They have tendency to bring new customers to the company without any costs, which is very beneficial when company performs in a mature industry and achieves growth (Reichheld 2003).

It is said that strong customer advocacy on behalf of company or brand is one of the most significant drivers of profitable growth (Reichheld 2003; Marsden, Samson & Upton 2005), which highlights brand advocates importance on business success. However, it is stated that customers are struggling to make an understanding of value related to digital content (Rowley 2008) and this obviously has consequences on branding and marketing communications, as an example. This arises question how companies can generate the engagement of brand advocates in online environment when the value is not seen clearly to the customers in digital content marketing. And on the other hand, how to know if the digital content marketing activity is leading to greater brand advocacy in reality.

The process of customer engagement is strongly experiential, interactive and it is said to include advocating as a sub-process (Brodie, Ilic, Juric & Hollebeek 2013). The theory of customer engagement is argued to be based on service-dominant logic and interactive marketing relationships, which are providing experiences and value co-creation

(Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric & Ilic 2011). Furthermore Vargo and Lush (2010) state that relationship marketing is always about interactive service experience, where customer always is a co-creator of value. Since brand advocacy is seen as a sub-process, it can be suggested that customer engagement and brand advocacy have similar kinds of theoretical backgrounds. However this role of advocacy in customer engagement might be different in today's fragmented communications landscape, restructured by digital and social media, where the power is on customers' side (Aaker 2010; Hoffman & Fodor 2010), the volume of peer influence is huge (Smith 2009) and the amount of information is pervasive.

In the case of online relationship marketing, the understanding of digital content and how it can create customer value and engage customers is vital. Since the core component of digital content is information, the marketing of digital content has its own characteristics as well (Rowley 2008). What makes the context of digital content even more interesting is that the consumer experience is dictated by complex network of relationships. According to Rowley, these relationships are constructed through customer service, communication, customization and communities (Rowley 2008). Therefore, it can be argued that the essence and also the development of brand advocacy might be different in digital content marketing than it is in marketing of other services and products. Hence, the concept of online brand advocacy develops and becomes crucial for marketing and brand research.

## 1.2. Research cap, contribution and objective of the study

The emerging literature of customer engagement highlights the need for further research of customer engagement, and its drivers, in different contexts and dynamics (Bowden 2009; Brodie et al. 2011; Hollebeek 2011). Customer engagement is proposed to predict customer loyalty in interactive environments (Bowden 2009), but this suggestion needs more empirical research to be made (Bowden 2009; Brodie 2011). Moreover, customer loyalty is highly related to the concept of brand advocacy, which emphasize the need of empirical research within this specific form of customer interactions.

In order to find ways to engage customers, companies need to understand the dynamics of brand discussion in consumer-to-consumer communications (Keller 2007). This further highlights the importance to gain insight to brand advocacy. Furthermore, there is a need for research addressing engagement in different contexts, such as online versus

offline settings (Brodie et al. 2011). In these kinds of digital content contexts, it is argued, that customers are facing difficulties in formulating understanding of value and there is a necessary need for companies to assist customers on this establishment of value associations. Therefore, there is a need for further research related to value and consumer society experiences in this area. (Rowley 2008.) This study aims to fill this stated research gap by providing further insight to customer engagement and brand advocacy in online environment point of view.

As Wragg (2004) highlights, customers need to be nurtured in order to become brand advocates. Even though it is known how to classify brand advocates, the information about how to generate the creation of brand advocacy especially in online environment is less studied in marketing literature. There is a great risk for a company not to be engaged into a conversation happening with or without a company (Keller 2007), and therefore further knowledge of online brand advocacy and its role in this conversation is needed.

Based on the previous literature, there is a clear research gap about the knowledge of the engagement of online brand advocates. For that reason, *this research focuses on studying how the engagement of online brand advocates can be generated and how the online brand advocacy can be utilized in digital content marketing strategies of wellness companies.* The research about digital content marketing is mainly limited to online music and online newspapers and magazines (Rowley 2008), and therefore further research about other business areas is needed. Thus, this research focuses on wellness business, which has faced major changes, opportunities and challenges throughout digitalization. Wellness services have switched more and more from offline to online services and therefore the importance of brand advocates is more vital in this dynamic online environment. By analyzing a wellness start-up company, this study aims to provide new insight into the digital content marketing of online brand advocacy.

Furthermore this research discusses about the circumstances under which the engagement of online brand advocacy may be developed. This topic is relevant and brings contribution to marketing research by providing empirical information about engagement of brand advocates in the context of online environment and by emphasizing the ways a wellness company can improve its digital content marketing through online brand advocates. The research also gives insight to the theoretical background of engagement and implications how to co-create value with online brand advocates. Furthermore, this research provides broader understanding about the

customer engagement in online brand advocacy for the emerging literature of customer engagement.

### 1.3. Research question and sub-objectives of the study

The purpose of the thesis is to create a deeper understanding of the characteristics and role of online brand advocacy, and explore how to generate and utilize the engagement of online brand advocates in digital content marketing. This is conducted by an analysis of drivers of customer engagement and brand advocacy in the context of online environment. Furthermore, this thesis aims to illustrate the importance of the engagement of online brand advocates to digital content marketing of a wellness company and its services. The study is conducted by an empirical research. The research problem leads to the main research question: *how to generate and utilize the engagement of online brand advocates in digital content marketing?*

The research question is answered through following research sub-objectives. The sub-objectives of the study are as follows:

- (1) What are the key drivers of customer engagement intensity in online environment?
- (2) How and to what extend customer engagement generate online brand advocacy?
- (3) How companies can engage online brand advocates in their digital content marketing and why it is beneficial to their marketing communications?

The research question is approached mainly from the perspective of a wellness company, because the aim of this study is to illustrate how companies should generate the engagement of online brand advocates in their businesses. However, as brand advocacy is highly related to customer value and engagement, also customer point of view is addressed in order to gain a holistic and multi-faceted view to the subject. This approach is also highlighted in earlier research, where it is stated that as a phenomenon, brand advocacy requires focus on both, senders and receivers, of the advocacy interaction (Keller 2007). More specifically, the analysis and interpretation of the study are conducted from managerial point of view in order to bring implications and improvement suggestions to companies. Since the idea of the research is to form a holistic view of the online brand advocacy phenomenon and to gain deeper

understanding of it, the qualitative research methodology with hermeneutical approach is applied. In addition, since there is yet no clear understanding about the use of online brand advocacy in digital content marketing, one intention of the study is also to provide a framework to build this understanding, and to guide empirical part of the study and future empirical research.

#### 1.4. Structure of the study

The study is structured along with its sub-objectives and it aims to give a holistic view of online brand advocacy through an outline *what, why, and how*. First the main concepts are discussed. In order to understand brand advocacy, the concept of customer engagement is discussed in the chapter 2. The drivers of customer engagement, customer brand engagement and furthermore online customer engagement are elaborated.

In chapter three, the concept of brand advocacy is discussed in the context of online environment and digital content marketing. Also the drivers of brand advocacy are evaluated, as well as the engagement of online brand advocates. After the theoretical background is emphasized, the methodology chapter discusses about research approach, design and strategy. Data collection of the research is also presented and furthermore validity and reliability are discussed. In chapter 5 the empirical study and findings are presented and further evaluated, and finally in chapter 6 presents the conclusions of the study.

#### 1.5. Definition of focal concepts

According to Brodie et al. (2013), **advocating** can be seen as a form of customer engagement, which appears when customers actively recommend precise products, services, brands, organizations and, or, ways of using brands or products. Further from this, **brand advocacy** appears when customers are highly involved with a brand and provide irreplaceable positive word-of-mouth (recommendations) about it (Wragg 2004). This study proposes that brand advocacy is larger construct than loyalty and engagement and goes beyond these kinds of customer-brand relationships.

**Online brand advocacy** is apparent when brands use viral videos, post new brand information on their social media pages or profiles, court bloggers and customers to spread word-of-mouth (Ferguson 2008; Wallace et al. 2012). On the other words, online brand advocacy is brand advocating that occurs in online environment and through digital tools.

**Digital content** is defined as objects that are bit-based and distributed through electronic channels. The content is distributed through wireless or wired networks and it is downloaded for immediate consumption. (Koiso- Kanttila 2004: 46) On the other words, digital content is information, which is typically distributed through Internet. (Rowley 2008) Furthermore **digital content marketing** is defined as the management process of digital content. This process is profitably responsible for identifying, satisfying and anticipating customer demands in the context digital content. (Rowley 2008: 522) This definition of digital content marketing also applies in this research.

In this study, the **customer engagement** is seen as a multidimensional outcome of motivational, individual, and context- dependent experiences, which emerges from interactions between customer and brand. It is an iterative, dynamic and co-creative process of relationships and exists at an accurate intensity of specific point of time with behavioral outcomes dependent on engagement intensity levels. The definition is based on researches of Brodie et al. (2011) and Hollebeek (2011). Furthermore, the term *customer* engagement is seen parallel and equivalent to the term *consumer* engagement, and therefore only customer engagement term is used.

Exercise industry consists of all business that is based on exercise and sports content. The growing segments of exercise industry are health and wellness products and services, exercise travelling and events, and sport lifestyle products and services. This industry has more start-ups than any other industry in Finland, which can indicate an increasing growth. This growth of exercise and **wellness industry** stems from increasing lifestyle diseases in Western countries, increment of health awareness, healthy lifestyle trends and from sense of community and experiences related to exercise and wellness. (Ministry of Employment and the Economy 2014.)

## **2. CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT IN ONLINE ENVIRONMENT**

In this chapter the concept of engagement is discussed from the online environment point of view. First the concept of customer engagement is presented in order to understand the theoretical constructs behind the engagement phenomenon. Also the online customer engagement and its specific features are discussed. The engagement concept is further focused on customer brand engagement, drivers and management process behind it. End of this chapter a summary is presented from the wellness business perspective. By this discussion we are able to build a basis for the main discussion of this research, brand advocacy.

### **2.1. Concept of customer engagement**

The role of customer engagement (CE) in co-creating customer value and experience has reached increasing interest in today's highly interactive business environment since last decade (Bowden 2009; Brodie et al. 2011). By providing recommendations about brands to others, engaged customers play a major part in viral marketing activity, (Brodie et al 2011), and likely therefore the concept of engagement is linked to several positive consequences at both companies and customers (Bowden 2009).

Hollebeek's (2011) analysis of the engagement reveals that engagement represents a state or an outcome of motivational, individual- specific, and context- dependent variable, which emerges from two-way interactions between relevant object and subject. It is a process of phases existing at an accurate intensity of specific time- being with behavioral outcomes dependent on engagement intensity levels. (Hollebeek 2011.) Bowden (2009) further states that this process is psychological through which customer move to become loyal to a brand. Usually in marketing literature, the engagement subject is seen as a customer or consumer and the object is seen as brand (Spratt, Czellar & Spangenberg 2009; Hollebeek 2011). Moreover it can be concluded that engagement might lead into brand loyalty and provides insight about customer outcomes and service performance. This further supports the linkage between engagement and brand advocacy when the object of engagement is brand and the subject is a customer. Therefore the concept of engagement in this research is covered as customer engagement.

The theoretical roots of *customer engagement* is said to be laying on psychology and organizational behavior (Hollebeek 2011), and moreover in interactive marketing relationships and service experience (Brodie et al. 2011; Hollebeek 2011), partly because the specific co-creative and interactive customer experiences can be in seen as engaging act (Vargo et al. 2010) and because term engagement is used in discussions of interactions and marketing-based forms of service exchange (Brodie et al. 2011). Co-created value is also underlying conceptual foundations of customer engagement (Brodie et al. 2011), and therefore customer engagement comprehends customer co-creation (Van Doorn et al. 2010). However, it is stated that marketing literature lacks a consensus and clarity in the definition of engagement, and furthermore in the definition of customer engagement (Brodie et al. 2011; Hollebeek 2011). For that reason, Brodie et al. (2011) present a broad conceptual research of customer engagement, which through five fundamental propositions (P) provides an extensive overview of CE concept. The overview applies generally, and makes no distinction between the nature of new or existing customers' engagement as Bowden's model (2009), and therefore will also be applied in this research. Next we will go through the propositions and evaluate them from the viewpoint of this study.

First proposition (P1) states that customer engagement is a psychological state, which stems from interactive customer experiences with a focal object, such as brand, within specific service relationships (Browdie et al. 2011). This proposition is fully in line with the previously presented Hollebeek's analysis (2011), and therefore is fully supported in this research. Also the second proposition (P2) arguing that customer engagement occurs within an iterative, dynamic and co-creative process of service relationships (Brodie et al. 2011), is supported and applied in this research. This proposition is based on the theoretical roots presented, and therefore it has an essential impact on the customer engagement concept.

The proposition three (P3) continues to highlight the importance of service experiences by stating that customer engagement presents a vital role within a constructed network of service relationships between brand and customer (Brodie et al. 2011). However the most significant factor of the customer engagement concept is to understand that (P4) the concept of customer engagement has cognitive, emotional and/or behavioral dimensions and therefore it is multidimensional concept (Brodie et al. 2011). This fourth proposition concludes well the same multidimensional issues of customer engagement that Hollebeek's (2011) analysis sheds light into. Last and fifth proposition (P5) is concerned about different levels of customer engagement intensity generated

from situational circumstances (Brodie et al. 2011). Again the contextual or situational feature of the concept is highlighted and therefore it most not be underestimated when analyzing the customer engagement, and furthermore brand advocacy later on in this research.

Based on these five conceptual research propositions and Hollebeek's (2011) analysis of engagement, the greater understanding of the concept of customer engagement in the context of this research can be provided. Therefore in this study, *the customer engagement is seen as a multidimensional outcome of motivational, individual, and context-dependent experiences, which emerges from interactions between customer and brand. It is an iterative, dynamic and co-creative process of relationships and exists at an accurate intensity of specific point of time with behavioral outcomes dependent on engagement intensity levels.* In this study, the motivational, individual and context-dependent features are seen more as experiences rather than variables as Hollebeek (2011) states, because of the theoretical importance of service nature of the concept highlighted. By understanding and analyzing customer engagement, companies can build stronger relationships to their customers and furthermore, engage them to brand advocacy.

## 2.2. Online customer engagement

The importance of customer engagement in online applications such as social networks, social media tools and blogs cannot be underestimated (Smith 2009; Larson 2012). As Hoffman and Fodor (2010) mention, in today's world, customers are fully *controlling* their online experiences and their motivations lead them to connect with others while *creating* and *consuming* online content, which is mostly user-, not marketing-generated. Larson (2012) further argues that companies that are not able to gain customer engagement in online environment are left behind from others. Therefore, the customer engagement in online settings should be further investigated in order to companies to deepen their customer relationships and fully understand how to engage their customers correctly in online.

Online customer engagement refers to customer engagement process, which is personified by website or other digital entities that express brand values (Mollen & Wilson 2010). The common understanding is that, in online the interaction is more intensive than in offline (Koiso-Kanttila 2004). This intense interactivity might be one

reason why switching brand, and a company, is effortless and why customer relationships seem more shallow in online than in offline environment. Therefore it is vital to make it beneficial for customers to stay. (Koiso-Kanttila 2004.) This can be done through customer engagement. Engaging customers in online environment can consist of two kinds of engagement: engagement of online customers and engagement of offline customers who use online services but are not native in online environment. Through online environments, the real-time interactions and potentially richer, broader and faster customer engagement enables companies to build ongoing customer dialogues (Fotaki, Gkerpini & Triantou 2012).

Larson (2012) calls today's age as the vitally important era of online customer engagement. This means that the majority of the customers are creating meaning, not only content, and on the other hand, companies are enabling customer engagement in online environment. He states that Internet is nowadays more a tool for humanization rather than automation. Therefore making the content meaningful by personalization and engaging customer through emotional and motivational aspects becomes critical issue. According to Larson (2012), one solution to emphasize this aspect is to enable tools through which customers prefer to engage with the brand and company. The online environment is highly user-, and in this case customer- generated (Hoffman et al. 2010), and therefore customers are not willing to be limited by the time or ways / tools they engage (Larson 2012).

Fotaki et al. (2012) further discuss these online engagement tools from management perspective of online customer engagement. According to their academic report, the customer engagement tools in online channels can be divided into two main categories: (1) tools that assist *parts* of online customer engagement process and (2) explicit software tools that engage customers and facilitate *the whole* online customer engagement process. The engagement process will be discussed later on in this chapter. Tools that assist parts of the process are web analytics tools, social media monitoring softwares, web content management systems and audience targeting. These standards tools provide statistics and information about company's website visitors, their needs, activities, trends and demographic reports, and helps to categorization of the data. (Fotaki et al 2012.) Especially the use of social media tools and web analytics is the core issue when building engagement (Gambetti, Graffigna & Biraghi 2012).

The idea of using these tools is to deliver an efficient and right online experience to the right customer, on right time. On the other hand, the explicit tools that assist the whole

online customer engagement process are composed functions of dynamic segmentation, customer profiling, interaction management and analytics and reporting. These solutions encompass the right experience, real-time interactivity, personalization and providing relevant content to the website visitors, customers. In other words, also these tools try to provide the most personalized online experience to the customer as possible. The only difference between the tools is that the whole process tools include existing customers and also the anonymous visitors that approach the company through online environments. (Fotaki et al. 2012.) Additionally, this view of online customer engagement tools is supporting previously mentioned Larson's argument of humanization of Internet.

As Larson (2012) and Fotaki et al. (2012) mention, the online customer engagement is all about empowering right customers to engage with right tools and at right time. This can be called as optimization of online customer engagement. By optimizing the whole online customer engagement process, the interest of online customers can be improved. Fotaki et al. (2012) reminds that this kind of ongoing optimization requires also re-segmenting of customers with incremental and interactive customer-company dialogue. The most interesting fact that previous literature presented highlights is that even though companies are aware of the importance and the effectiveness of online customer engagement, only few of them are using it in their digital content marketing and to optimize the buying cycle. Also the evaluation of the online channels used for marketing, are paid little attention, although it is known that customers are not willing to be limited by the engagement tools. As significance of online customer engagement increases, companies might face problems in online environment if they are not willing to pay attention to the opportunities online customer engagement has to offer.

### 2.3. Building customer-brand relationships through customer brand engagement

In order to fully understand the dimensionality of customer engagement and customer-brand relationships, we need to build an understanding of customer brand engagement also. Additionally, this discussion helps to construct a holistic view of brand advocacy, which will be further discussed on chapter three.

According to Hollebeek (2011), the customer brand engagement is defined as *the level of a customer's brand related, motivational and context dependent state of mind designated by cognitive, behavioral and emotional activities in direct brand*

*interactions*. These interactions refer to customer's physical, and direct contact interactions with the brand, rather than customer-brand interactions through mass communications.

Gambetti, Graffigna & Biraghi (2012) question this traditional view presented by Hollebeek (2011) by highlighting the fact that customer brand engagement is based more on *social and experimental dimensions* than cognitive and conative dimensions as in customer engagement. They argue that the main elements of customer brand engagement are dialogue, attention, interaction, emotions, immediate activation and sensorial pleasure which all aim for creating brand experience. Therefore, Hollebeek's (2011) argument about the occurrence of customer brand engagement only in direct and physical customer-brand interactions in traditional dimensions might not be practical in today's digital world where increasing part of interactions occurs in Internet, meaning in non-physical interaction. It seems to be more important is to develop emotional bonds and experiences between customers and brands also in indirect interactions.

In order to gain insight into customer brand engagement, and furthermore brand advocacy, we need to understand the field it is related to. There are several key marketing concepts that are related and associated to the concept of customer brand engagement, but yet conceptually distinct from it (Fullerton 2003 & 2005; Bowden 2009; Mollen & Wilson 2010; Hollebeek 2011). For example concepts *involvement* and *interactivity* are seen as required precursors to the emergence of customer brand engagement levels. Bowden (2009) proposes that the higher the level of involvement with a brand, the greater the degree of trust leading to increased commitment is.

Fullerton (2003) and Hollebeek (2011) continue by stating that involvement is *positively* related to the concept of loyalty and moreover to customer brand engagement. According to Hollebeek's analysis, *flow*, in the other hand, is conceptually related to the emotional and/or cognitive dimensions of customer brand engagement, overleaping the motivational dimension, and therefore it makes it distinct from customer brand engagement. Furthermore, the concepts of *rapport*, *co-created value*, *customer value*, *trust*, *commitment*, *perceived quality* and *customer satisfaction* are categorized as potential consequences of customer brand engagement. In the case of existing customers, these listed concepts might also be described as precursors of customer brand engagement.

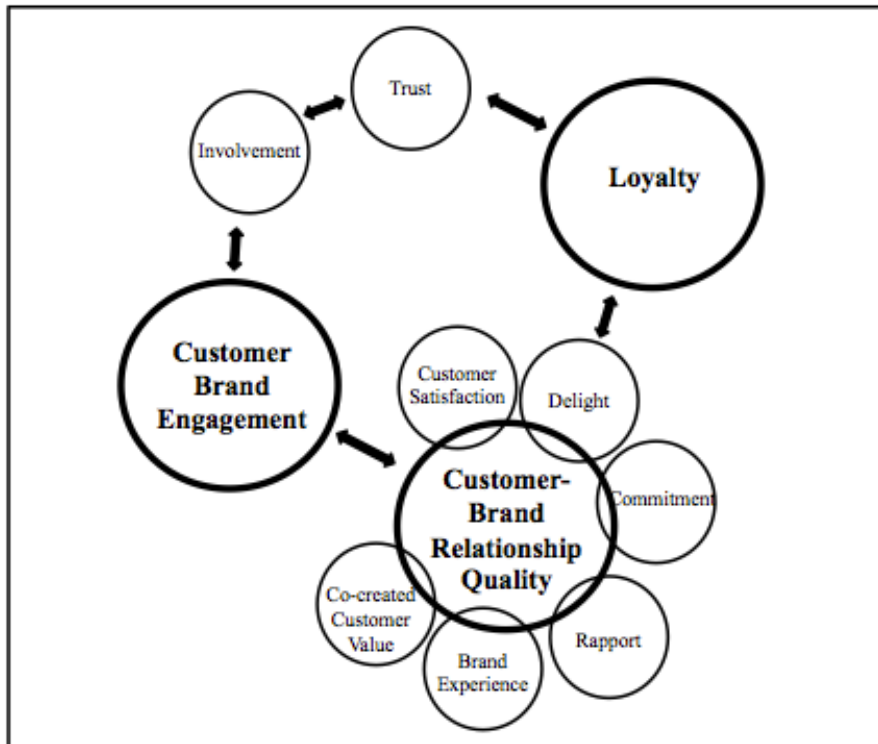
As the perceived quality is seen as larger construct from the other consequences, it is predicted to include them and to have positive relation to customer brand engagement. Also *brand experience* is labeled as a potential consequence of customer brand engagement, because of the motivational and/ or behavioral aspects of the concept and because customer brand engagement is seen as proactive concept rather than reactive as brand experience. (Hollebeek 2011.) Additionally, Hollebeek's analysis (2011) suggests that *loyalty* is seen more as a potential consequence of customer brand engagement, not as a precursor of it, and further to have positive relationship with relationship quality. Additionally literature states that loyalty is achieved through delight, trust, involvement, satisfaction and commitment (Fullerton 2005; Bowden 2009).

By making the distinction between customer brand engagement and the other concepts, and concerning the ways in which each of them operate to drive the engagement and loyalty, the process of customer engagement can be better understood (Bowden 2009). Hollebeek's (2011) conceptual vision of customer brand engagement has mainly a one-way interaction idea with the precursors and consequences of brand engagement. This approach might be helpful when understanding the concept, however it lacks the insight of the dynamic two-way process nature of the engagement, which also covers the concept of customer brand engagement. Therefore the figure 1 aims to highlight the dynamic roles of these concepts and how they are related to the customer brand engagement.

This presented model illustrates the interaction between three significant concepts related to customer-brand relationship: customer brand engagement, customer-brand relationship quality and loyalty. Customer-brand relationships are based on interactivity, and therefore, as Hollebeek (2011) argues, its role as precursor of customer brand engagement is justified. However, interactivity between the three concepts is the main component of the customer brand engagement relationships, and therefore it should be seen more as a positive driver of the relationships rather than just a precursor of them. In the figure, this role of interactivity is presented as two-way arrows between main concepts.

Additionally, involvement is seen highly related to the customer brand engagement concept and it creates trust, and these two concepts are important influencers of loyalty as well. Also the concepts of customer satisfaction, delight, and commitment are influencing on loyalty as parts of perceived, relationship quality. On the other hand, after Vargo et al. (2010), customer value and co-created value are seen as one co-

created customer value, because the customer is always a co-creator of value. Furthermore, this value can be seen as related to rapport and brand experience, which all as combined are influencing on customer-brand relationship quality. (See figure 1.)

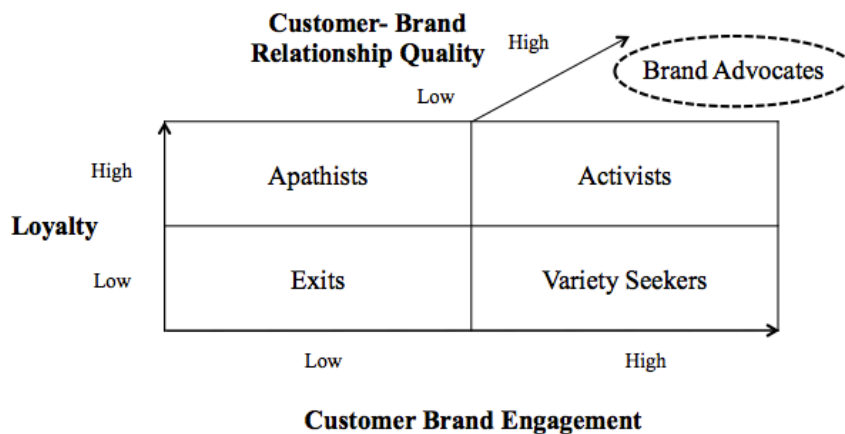


**Figure 1.** The conceptual relationships of customer brand engagement. (Adapted from Fullerton 2003 & 2005; Bowden 2009 & Hollebeek 2011).

Furthermore it is highlighted that the potential loyalty outcomes may vary across different engaged customer segments (Bowden 2009; Hollebeek 2011). Bowden (2009), makes a simple segmentation by dividing customer into new and repurchasing customers, e.g. existing customers, and further states that these segments follow unlike pathways to loyalty, and furthermore to customer engagement when it comes to satisfaction, commitment, involvement and trust. Hollebeek, on the other hand, makes more deeper analysis by stating that the excessive customer brand engagement levels in highly engaged customer segments may not be beneficial to the development of loyalty outcomes. This consequence a curvilinear relationship between customer brand engagement and loyalty when customer brand engagement increases beyond the optimum of customer brand engagement levels. (Hollebeek 2011.)

Previously presented model emphasizes this curvilinear relationship. The potential customer brand engagement segments, in which the loyalty can vary, are proposed to be apathists, exist, activists and variety seekers. The apathists have high levels of loyalty but relatively low customer brand engagement. Therefore this segment potentially appears in utilitarian product categories or with only few alternatives available situations. The exists, on the other hand, have both customer engagement and loyalty levels low, whereas activists have both them high. The activists segment is therefore desirable for the company, but it is also vulnerable for a customer fatigue and “burnout” meaning negative loyalty outcomes such as unwillingness to buy the brand again. Fourth segment, variety seekers, includes customers who do brand switching. (Hollebeek 2011.) It is to be remembered that these four segments are highly generalized, and therefore they might exclude other potential segments.

As presented earlier, additionally to loyalty, customer brand engagement is also related closely to relationship quality concept. Therefore it should be included to the segment thinking of customer brand engagement as well. In figure 2, the customer-brand relationship quality is taken into consideration as a third dimension of the matrix.



**Figure 2.** Customer segmentation based on customer brand engagement, loyalty and customer-brand relationship quality. (Modified from Hollebeek 2011).

As Hollebeek (2011) sees activists as most desirable segment with high levels on loyalty and customer brand engagement, mutually this research proposes that brand advocates are the most attractive and sought after segment with all three dimension

concepts high, also the relationship quality. This argument is supported by the proposition that brand advocates are more engaged to the brand and company in third dimension, relationship quality than activists. Brand advocacy will be further discussed in chapter three.

The conceptual models presented provide a deeper understanding about customer brand engagement concept and its relationships with other key marketing concepts, as well as the potential customer segments of customer brand engagement. However, the meaning of direct, physical contact interactions with the brand in Hollebeek's (2011) definition of customer brand engagement might be different in online environment, where the level and intensity of interaction is high. Also the interaction interface is in online meaning that the importance of physical contact might be questionable different.

#### 2.4. Drivers affecting engagement in online environment

There are several factors and drivers affecting customer engagement. Through understanding drivers of customer engagement, the identification of engaged customers can be done. The most naturally distinguished factors are customer-, company- and context -based factor types (Van Doorn et al. 2010). These can be also called as drivers of customer engagement in online environment, because the engagement process is always depended on customer, brand and the engagement context, which in this case is in online.

One of the most important *customer-based drivers* affecting customer engagement behavior are attitudinal factors such as brand commitment, customer satisfaction and brand attachment, which lead to engagement by very high or low levels (Van Doorn et al 2010). According to the presented conceptual relationships of customer brand engagement, also trust, involvement and the other related concepts might affect to the customer engagement as well. Furthermore, also customer goals are affecting customer engagement and they might influence to the usage of brand greatly. Naturally, also individual customer characteristics are affecting to customer engagement and some customers might even see brands as self- expressive. In that case, customers are likely to blog more and co-promote the brand, and help other customers as well. Moreover extreme experiences might affect to customer engagement by providing very strong positive or negative word-of-mouth. (Van Doorn et al. 2010.)

Van Doorn et al. (2010) name the brand and its characters to be the most important *company –based factors* affecting the drivers of customer engagement behavior. Brands with high levels of brand equity and reputation are likely to establish stronger brand commitment and attachment, which furthermore can motivate customers to engage, e.g. brand engagement, and join brand communities (Van Doorn et al. 2010), and furthermore into advocacy. In addition to the brand, company -based factors are also platforms and processes, which support customer activities and therefore enhance customer-to-customer interactions.

Online environment provides excellent platform for these kinds of interactions with countless of solutions. Also customer information environments and provided rewards can have powerful effect on customer engagement behavior. Furthermore, *context – based drivers* affecting customer engagement behavior can originate from society, media attention or competitive environment. (Van Doorn et al. 2010.) As a dynamic environment, online can be seen as very competitive environment where companies need to stand up in the battle of media attention. Therefore this environment driver cannot be underestimated when planning engagement process management.

However, these factors might facilitate and moderate each other's effects on customer engagement behavior as Gambetti et al. (2012) presents in their discussion of the drivers of customer *brand* engagement. As customer engagement and customer brand engagement are nearby concepts, the drivers might be similar to each other. These key drivers affecting customer brand engagement are the social context of customers and their relationships among others. This means that socialization, interaction and co-creation of content and brand values, between company and customers, are seen as important drivers of customer brand engagement also in online. In other words, the physical and value-based contiguity of brand and customer drives the engagement but on the other hand it requires long-time investment. Therefore customers need to be able to build a strong emotional bond with the brand so they are more willing to receive brand messages. This driver is the largest trigger for engagement, brand ambassadorship and advocacy on the other hand (Gambetti et al. 2012), and its role is even more meaningful in online customer engagement.

Another important driver is *customer himself*. In online environment, customers are more informed and therefore they lead the interaction with brands. According to Gambetti et al. (2012) customers as individualists try to achieve hedonic satisfaction from brand relationships. Since these hedonic and active customers, also *the integration*

*of brand communication* is seen as significant driver of customer brand engagement. The content of messages is more and more co-created and brand values are socialized. Furthermore, this means that the online social media has bigger role on communication among offline and classical communication. (Gambetti et al. 2012.)

All in all, these drivers do not go unambiguously into one with Van Doorn's category, however the aim of the drivers is the same: engage customers. This aim of "brand enacting" means that customers take part of the brands world, and the brand takes a place in customers world (Gambetti et a. 2012). Furthermore brand enacting refers to one form of brand advocacy, which is discussed in chapter three.

## 2.5. Managing the process of online customer engagement

The major challenge in customer engagement is to identify which customers may express customer engagement behavior. To overcome this challenge, the drivers of customer engagement were discussed before the elaboration of managing the process of engagement.

Van Doorn et al. (2010) remind that customer engagement behavior might exist only in small amount of customers and further the engagement might change over time. This on the other hand means that engagement behaviors may not be assessable by the company. However, because the customers can have a powerful influence on the company and its brand by maintaining and nurturing relationships with each other, companies could manage proactively customer engagement by creating processes. Stated by Van Doorn et al. (2010) this management can be done by identifying, evaluating and reacting. Fotaki et al. (2012) furthermore calls this as the online customer engagement management optimization, which we discussed briefly earlier in this chapter.

Firstly, in this kind of online customer engagement process management, companies should identify the different forms and channels where customer engagement is manifested. These channels may include offline and online places with variety of audience. (Van Doorn et al. 2010.) In online this means identification of visitors of websites, blogs, emails etc. and the understanding of their online behavior through statistical data collected through keywords, interaction with campaigns, visitors interests and persona (Fotaki et al. 2012). In order to identify the engaged customers, the drivers

of customer engagement must be elaborated as discussed earlier. Furthermore, companies should recognize the most and least engaged customers in order to evaluate the financial value of customers. However, this evaluation should be done in consideration of short -, and long- term objectives. (Van Doorn et al. 2010.) This means tracking and grouping customers interactions with campaigns and listening engagement manifestations.

As Fotaki et al. (2012) remind, evaluation should count also the less obvious interactions so the errors in customer experiences can be improved. In this phase, reporting cannot be under estimated either. After identifying and evaluating customers, companies should develop capabilities to manage customer engagement, meaning that positive customer engagement behavior must be leveraged, nurtured and harnessed in order to stimulate it. Reacting also means the need to listen customer feedback. (Van Doorn et al. 2010.) This listening is important so specific content can be created for each customer through dialogues. The engagement of customers can be promoted by individual messages in multiple online channels when the communication effect is the highest. (Fotaki et al. 2012.)

After identifying, evaluating and reacting to online customer engagement, superior customer value can be created which further might act as a competitive advantage. However, this requires ongoing optimization of online customer engagement management. The most relevant question for this study is to consider if this management process is suitable for online brand advocacy process as well. Similar theoretical backgrounds advocate using the same process for management and gaining better understanding of brand advocacy phenomena. This idea is discussed later on.

## 2.6. Summary

The aim of this chapter was to build an understanding of customer engagement intensity and its drivers in online environment. Previous research builds a linkage between engagement and brand loyalty, which further supports the linkage between engagement and online brand advocacy.

The theoretical roots of customer engagement are based on psychology and organizational behavior, and furthermore on interactive marketing relationships and service experience, where the value is co-created. This background puts customer into

the center by emphasizing the role of a customer as a value co-creator. All in all, customer engagement and brand advocacy has similar kinds of theoretical backgrounds, which provides a good basis to examine these two concepts in a light of others. Additionally, the customer engagement has its own features in online environment.

In viral world, customers are completely controlling their online experiences, building social networks with each other, creating meaning and consuming online content. Therefore also the online content is customer-centric and should be made meaningful by personalization, emotional and motivational aspects. This can be implemented by enabling the right engagement tools to customers such as social media tools and web analytics tools. Despite the tools, the customer engagement is all about empowering right customers to engage with right tool and at right time. Therefore the online customer engagement process needs to be optimized and evaluation of the selected online channels should be highlighted. This study proposes that process of identifying, evaluating and reacting might work as well for online brand advocacy management.

In order to gain holistic view of the background of advocacy, the customer brand engagement was discussed. The experimental nature of customer-brand relationships was emphasized, by stating that the customer brand engagement is based more on social and experimental dimensions, rather than traditional dimensions. The model constructed, figure 1, highlights the meaning of interactivity and relationship quality, and illustrates three most important concepts of customer-brand relationships: customer brand engagement, customer-brand relationship quality and loyalty. The model provides a good background for building an understanding for brand advocacy, because it also takes relationship quality into consideration as a dimension of customer segmentation.

The drivers of the customer engagement in online environment were presented to gain perspective on engagement management process. The most important drivers of customer engagement behaviors in online environment are *customer-, company-, and context-/ environment based*. Besides these three drivers, also *social* context of the customers and their relationships with others form a significant driver of online customer engagement. In other words, the interaction, socialization and co-creation of content and brand values through relationships and brand communication are important drivers of online customer engagement. Alongside these drivers also the factors of this drivers were discussed. Table 1 summarizes the drivers and the main factors of them.

**Table 1.** Key drivers of online customer engagement.

<b>Drivers of online customer engagement</b>	<b>Factors of the drivers</b>
Customer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brand commitment</li> <li>• Customer satisfaction (hedonic)</li> <li>• Brand attachment</li> <li>• Trust, Delight &amp; Rapport</li> <li>• Involvement</li> <li>• Customer goals &amp; characteristics</li> <li>• Value</li> <li>• Experiences</li> </ul>
Company	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brand equity and reputation</li> <li>• Brand characteristics</li> <li>• Brand engagement</li> <li>• Platforms and processes</li> <li>• C2C interaction</li> </ul>
Context / environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online and Offline Society</li> <li>• Media attention</li> <li>• Competitive environment</li> </ul>
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Socialization</li> <li>• Interaction</li> <li>• Co-creation of content and brand values</li> <li>• Strong &amp; active customer- brand relationship</li> <li>• Integration of brand communication</li> </ul>

As customer engagement and brand advocacy constructs have similar kinds of theoretical backgrounds, it was arguable to look at the online customer engagement first before discussing about the main construct of this study, online brand advocacy. Through the discussion of the drivers of online customer engagement, the characteristics of online brand advocacy can be deeper discussed later on in this study. Moreover deeper understanding of these drivers and the factors of them is important when constructing theoretical framework of online brand advocacy and further when analyzing the empirical results of this study.

### **3. ONLINE BRAND ADVOCACY IN DIGITAL CONTENT MARKETING**

In this chapter online brand advocacy in digital context will be discussed. The chapter aims to shed light into the concept of brand advocacy, online brand advocacy and customer-brand relationships in online environment. This discussion continues with the drivers of the phenomenon and with the elaboration of the nature of digital content marketing. The chapter focuses on building an understanding of online brand advocacy and how it could be used in digital content marketing.

#### **3.1. Concept of brand advocacy**

Advocating can be seen as a form of customer engagement, which appears when customers actively recommend products, services, brands, organizations and, or, ways of using brands or products (Brodie et al 2013). Furthermore, advocacy is the act in which customers give positive comments about and motivate others to use or purchase the product or brand (Fullerton 2005). Naturally, customers who are advocating brands are called as brand advocates, also called as brand evangelists.

Brand advocates are said to “live” a brand through high involvement and also to have emotional bonds with a brand that go beyond the typical relationships of customer and marketer (Wragg 2004). They endorse the brand enthusiastically (Rusticus 2006) and have willingness to try the other products of the brand and to forgive the brand in greater extent (Wallace et al 2012). Furthermore brand advocates defend the brand if necessary (Soat 2012), because they support it (Becerra & Badrinarayanan 2013). This forgiveness of brand wrongdoing can be argued to be the most important factor of brand advocacy (Wallace, Build & de Chernatony 2014). This unique, passionate and deep relationship between brand and its advocate distinguishes brand advocates from engaged customers and presents a deeper level of customer-brand relationship. To reach out these potential brand advocates, companies should target into special segment (Rusticus 2006).

In order to build advocacy in long period and generate advocacy, the identification of customers is necessary (Ferguson 2008: Stok-Sauer, Ratneshwar & Sen 2012). When customer identifies himself into the brand, one effect is brand advocacy in social context and the other one is customer loyalty (Stokburger –Sauer et al. 2012). In their

research, Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012) argue that the customers will greater advocate the brand if they identify strongly with the brand. Therefore it is necessary to recognize the customers who will identify to the brand in order to achieve long-term customer-brand relationships. After this identification the needs of the advocates should also be filled out and acknowledged in order to activate the brand advocates, gain reach, drive innovations and sales (Soat 2012). This can also be called as evaluating and reacting phase, as the management process of customer engagement has: identification, evaluating and reacting.

It is widely known that word-of-mouth has the most powerful influence for customers (Wragg 2004), and that furthermore word-of-mouth advocacy is a valuable tool for brand development and marketing (Wallace et al. 2012 & 2014). However, as it is most favorable seen as positive, it also can be neutral or negative communication between customers. Additionally, the increased word-of-mouth activity is linked to the increased satisfaction and dissatisfaction. (Anderson 1998). In the case of brand advocates, the word-of-mouth is highly positive by its nature. Moreover, according to Marsden et al (2005) brands with positive word-of-mouth grow faster than brands with negative one, and therefore advocating customers assists business performance. Furthermore, word-of-mouth as a form of consumer contact might the highest power to create customer engagement which further highlights the linkage between customer engagement and brand advocacy. This possible linkage between the concepts is discussed later on in this chapter.

### 3.2. Customer-brand relationships in online environment

In the center of customer relationships in online environment lays brands, which are connected with messages, values, loyalty and personality (Rowley 2008). Moreover, the primary support of brands and companies are customers who want to connect the brand and their friends, by creating positive word-of-mouth (Keller 2007), which can be easily generated in online environment platforms.

The development of strong and meaningful relationships with customers in online environment requires also time because online relationships embody “conversations” that are interactive by nature (Hoffman & Fodor 2010). In addition to this conversational aspect of online customer-brand relationships, also the special nature of the customers of online brands must be understood. These customers are more diverse

and less predictable than brand customers of other channels, and therefore these relationships must be handled differently. The customers in online are not only receivers of content but they also are commentators and publishers of it (Smith 2009). Moreover, the role of a brand as a search key in locating websites and the understanding of alignment of online branding with other branding channels must be taken into consideration when building strong customer-brand relationships in online. (Rowley 2008.) It is obvious to state, that when the customer-brand relationships in online are not typical and they stand on strong emotional basis, online brand advocacy can be generated.

In order to drive brand advocacy, marketers should consider both online and offline channels among other digital media approaches as well (Keller 2007), and listen and further engage the customers in those channels (Smith 2009). Keller's research (2007) states that only 10% of the word-of-mouth activity occurs in online in which most activity happens in email, instant text and blogs. However, the digital media solutions and use of them have ballooned in recent years extensively and therefore the share of 10% of word-of-mouth activity might not be relevant anymore. The use of user-driven digital solutions such as social networks, blogs and video sharing platforms has increased. In order to gain and use the online advocacy, also the offline advocacy must be emphasized. In online environment, highly engaging customer-generated content is likely to create customer commitment, encourage brand loyalty and make customers more likely to perform additional effort to support the brand (Hoffman & Fodor 2010). Therefore the content is the key for both offline and online brand advocacy.

### 3.2.1. Online brand advocacy

Online brand advocacy is apparent whenever brands use viral videos, post new brand information on their social media pages or profiles, court bloggers and encourage evangelists', meaning brand advocates, to spread word-of-mouth (Ferguson 2008; Wallace et al. 2012). On the other words, online brand advocacy is brand advocating that occurs in online environment.

Monitoring of the effectiveness of word-of-mouth in online environment is encouraged by internet's accessibility, transparency and reach (Kozinets, de Valck, Wojnicki & Wilner 2010). As brand advocacy is the basis of word-of-mouth (Wragg 2004), these features also empower the measurement of brand advocacy. Furthermore online advocacy has argued to have an influence on offline purchase decisions, as

conversations about brands in online environment may be an empowerment for offline conversations (Godes & Mayzling 2004). Therefore the effectiveness of online brand advocacy might have an impact on the effectiveness of offline brand advocacy as well, which further underlines the linkage between online and offline advocacy.

In online context, value co-creation happens when a brand enables customers to express themselves through online profiles (Wallace et al. 2012). Moreover, it can be stated that also an online network of other customers has an influence on the value co-creation. Therefore social networking has a great impact on customers' lives and accordingly also to their purchase decisions. Thus the relational structure of network must be understood by branding theory in order to further understand relationships between brands online and customers in practice. Wallace et al. (2012) also propose that customers with strong social ties are more likely to express true brand preferences in online environment and moreover advocate that self-expressive brand. This view is in line with the previously presented argument of having social context as a significant driver of online customer engagement.

These similarities of the theoretical backgrounds and features of the online customer engagement and brand advocacy furthermore have an influence on the drivers of these concepts as well. The identifiable drivers of customer-brand engagement have also an influence on brand advocacy drivers: customer-, company-, environment-, and social context-based drivers of engagement also can be recognized in online brand advocacy through engagement driver of advocacy. Furthermore the similarity can also be seen when managing these two processes. The process of identifying, evaluating and reacting (Van Doorn et al. 2010; Fotaki et al. 2012) could also be implemented in online brand advocacy. Next the drivers of online brand advocacy are discussed and the similarities between the concept of online brand advocacy and online customer engagement are further elaborated.

### 3.3. Drivers of online brand advocacy

In order to build a holistic view of the online brand advocacy the drivers behind it must be elaborated. This study sees brand identification, loyalty, customer-brand relationship quality with affective commitment, customer-brand engagement and trust and involvement as most important drivers of online brand advocacy.

Brand consumption becomes part of customers' life and identity when a brand offers something meaningful to customers. Wallace et al. (2012) present that brands, which modify customers' online identity have more strong emotional responses, such as brand advocacy. Moreover these self- expressive brands increase brand advocacy on social networks (Wallace et al. 2012), which further indicates the increase of online brand advocacy as well. In addition Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012) argue that *brand identification* is strongly linked to brand advocacy through five identification drivers: brand distinctiveness, self-brand similarity, brand warmth, brand social benefits and experiences. Also Becerra & Badrinarayanan (2013) highlight the meaning of brand identification as a driver of brand advocating.

Moreover, the need for being unique and building warm, emotional, and lovable relationships with brands, are the most important factors of identification (Stokburger-Sauer et al. 2012). These factors affect most to the brand identification, which by itself furthermore produces valuable advocacy for the company. As in online the interaction is more intense (Koiso-Kanttila 2004), this study argues that the brand identification might be even greater in online advocacy than in offline advocacy. Therefore the brand identification is seen as a driver of online brand advocacy.

Also *loyalty* is seen as a consequence of customer-brand identification (Stokburger-Sauer et al. 2012), but moreover this study sees loyalty as a driver of brand advocacy. The greater identification with the brand and customer, the greater the degree of both loyalty and advocacy will be (Stokburger-Sauer et al. 2012; Wallace et al.2012). However, it is stated that loyalty comes before true advocacy (Soat 2012), partly because of the more intensive and deep nature of customer-brand relationship of advocacy. In other words, it can be argued that brand advocacy requires loyalty and more, whereas loyalty does not require advocating. Based on these arguments and as presented earlier in chapter 2.3., this study argues that brand advocates have the highest levels of customer brand engagement, brand relationship quality and loyalty, and therefore the loyalty is seen more as an enabler of advocacy, not as a separate construct or consequence of it without any related effect on brand advocacy.

The customer-brand relationship has a great impact on strong brand endorsements and furthermore to brand advocacy which therefore can be seen as an outcome of customer-brand relationship (Becerra et al. 2013). Moreover *customer-brand relationship quality* is larger concept than brand identification meaning that customer-brand relationship quality driver might overlap with brand identification driver of online brand advocacy.

This overlapping is possible for example in brand experience factor, which it argued to be a part of a brand identification (Soat 2012) as well as relationship quality (Hollebeek 2011). However these drivers are seen as distinct because of the different factors causing them. In the discussion of customer-brand engagement, this study identified the factors of customer-brand relationship quality as satisfaction, delight, rapport, experience, customer value and commitment (see chapter 2.3). Brand experience has said to have a great effect on customers online purchase decisions (Becerra et al. 2013) and therefore it can be considered as a driver of advocacy.

As a part of relationship quality, also commitment has a great impact on advocating act. Fullerton (2003) states that especially affective commitment impacts positively on advocacy and purchase intentions of a brand. However the research show that continuance commitment has negative impact on long-term advocacy (Harrison- Walker 2001; Fullerton 2003 & 2005) and therefore companies should achieve affectively committed customers in order to gain brand advocates (Fullerton 2003). Moreover the brands should fill the self-definitional needs of customers and be worthy of identification (Stokburger-Sauer et al. 2012) and brand advocating. Based on these arguments, this study sees affective commitment as a part of customer-brand relationship quality to be one driver of brand advocacy.

Even though the concepts of *customer engagement* and brand advocacy are distinct from each other, they are closely related. Brodie (2013) sees advocacy as a sub-process of engagement, and Fullerton (2005) furthermore reminds that advocacy itself encompasses processes such as brand commitment and brand attitudes. As discussed in chapter two, these processes are also related to customer engagement. For example, in B2C relationships, term engage is linked to brand experience, creativity, emotion, collaboration and brand community interactions (Brodie et al. 2011), in which all brand advocacy is also related to. This further highlights the multidimensional nature of brand advocacy (Wallace et al. 2012), and the close relationship between these two concepts.

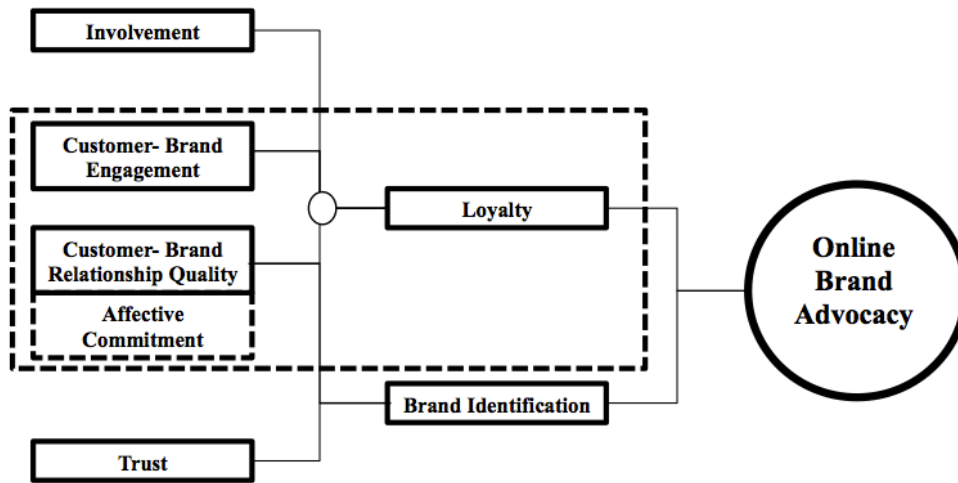
The question which one is a sub-process of other is not seen as relevant in this research, however more important is to understand that customer-brand engagement creates brand advocacy and on the other hand customer-brand advocacy creates more deeper engagement. In online environment, the social media enables many ways to engage customers to the brand, and to leverage the creation of brand advocates (Lawer & Knox 2006). For example Wallace et al. (2014) present that customers that present brand love and brand acceptance in social context are more likely to become brand advocates

which highlights the customer and company driver of customer-brand engagement. Therefore this study argues that customer-brand engagement acts as a driver of brand advocacy in online environment through the drivers of customer brand engagement: company, customer, environment and social drivers.

*Trust & involvement* are highly related to engagement concept (Fullerton 2003; Hollebeek 2011) and therefore these concepts are also seen as drivers of online brand advocacy. This view is also supported by Becerra et al. (2013), who maintain that trust cultivates brand advocacy by influencing on positive recommendations and purchase intentions of customers. Furthermore the impact of brand trust is related to positive customer advocacy behavior both in offline and online settings (Becerra & Korgaonkar 2011), and it is claimed that in online brand trust especially increases customers online purchase intentions and intention to contribute information (Becerra et al. 2011 & 2013). In addition, Becerra et al. (2011 & 2013) present that trust mitigates the risks that brand advocacy might develop, especially in online context where uncertainty and vulnerability can be considered higher of customers point of view.

Furthermore Reichheld (2003) points out that if customers trust the brand to fulfill their expectations, they are more willing to promote the brand, e.g. advocate it. Naturally brand trust also influences positively to the brand identification driver of brand advocacy (Becerra et al. 2013). This means that in order to advocate the brand, customers need to trust and identify the brand first. On the other hand also involvement can be seen as an significant driver of advocacy value (Lawer et al. 2006), because it is needed to build long-lasting customer-brand relationships, which furthermore cultivates brand advocacy as argued previously (Wragg 2004; Wallace 2012). In addition, as Bowden (2009) states, involvement plays an important role in customer engagement process and drives loyalty, and therefore it can be assumed to be a driver of online brand advocacy as well.

Naturally customer-brand relationships and furthermore brand advocacy needs brand identification, good quality of customer-brand relationships, engagement with commitment and trust and high involvement from the customer side to exist. High use of Internet, mobile and tablet devices, information searching and commenting on social networking sites have a meaningful impact on how customer-brand relationships are developed and maintained, and on that way to the construction of brand advocacy as well (Lawer et al. 2006). Therefore this study sees these discussed constructs as important drivers of brand advocacy in online environment as presented in figure 3.



**Figure 3.** The drivers of online brand advocacy.

The significant relation of customer-brand engagement drivers, loyalty and customer-brand relationship quality is presented as a dashed box. Given that this study concentrates on online brand advocacy, emphasis on customer engagement is discussed over singular engagement drivers, meaning that the whole concept of customer-brand engagement is seen as a driver of advocacy. Further affective commitment is presented as dashed box besides relationship quality to emphasize its special nature on quality. Moreover online brand advocacy is presented as a circle from other constructs to highlight its importance in this study. Next digital content marketing is discussed.

#### 3.4. Nature, opportunities and challenges of digital content marketing

In today's digital marketing landscape, the brand- customer relationship and customer loyalty are highly relevant as mobile and Internet have become vital tools of customers' communication. Merisavo (2008) strongly argues that frequent communication with customers through email, Internet, digital TV, mobile and other developing communication channels helps to achieve positive customer relationships and furthermore, customer loyalty. Therefore it is obvious that the content company produces for digital marketing is essential tool for building company's brand image, and additionally brand advocacy.

Before discussing about digital content marketing, the nature of digital content should be highlighted. Digital content, referring to information, digital product and service feature where both the delivery and entity are digital (Koisola-Kanttila 2004), have lots of same characteristics than customer engagement concept. As mentioned earlier, the engagement is seen as an interactive context- based process which co-creates value. Also digital content is argued to have *contextual value*, which can vary over the time, and to be *interactive* by its nature (Rowley 2008). Koiso-Kanttila (2004) further concludes that exactly accessibility and navigation interaction are the cornerstones of digital content characters. Most importantly, like customer engagement, also digital content is *intangible* by its nature (Koiso-Kanttila 2004; Rowley 2008).

It is stated quite obviously that as a communication channel, interactive Internet media is very different from other channels where relationships and value is created (Koiso-Kanttila 2004; Merisavo 2008; Rowley 2008). Internet and social media have empowered customers in many ways (Smith 2009; Labrecque, vor dem Esche, Mathwick, Novak & Hofacker 2013), which also has changed the marketing communications of companies. Partly concluded by this, and according to the previous literature presented, also digital content has its own differences and characteristics and this affects on digital content marketing activities in numerous ways. For example, because of the intangible nature of digital content, marketing communications should make the content more concrete mentally to customers (Koiso-Kanttila 2004).

Moreover, digital content marketing concentrates more on the nature of the content, which is being marketed, and its consequences (Rowley 2008). The content itself is not company-driven, but rather customer-driven (Smith 2009). According to Koiso-Kanttila (2004), also the mixture of product and service elements that digital content includes makes the marketing of digital content more challenging. Rowley makes a deeper analysis about digital content marketing and defines it as follows:

*“Digital content marketing is the management process responsible for identifying, anticipating, and satisfying customer requirements profitably in the context of digital content, or bit-based objects distributed through electronic channels.”*

(Rowley 2008: 522).

In order to illustrate the opportunities and challenges of digital content marketing better, Koiso-Kanttila (2004) applies five Ps, of marketing mix, product, place, process, promotion and price that can be employed in this scope of digital marketing. From

*product* aspect, the multidimensionality implemented with hypertexts and links is on focus, and therefore marketing should concentrate on recombination of digital content and division of it into smaller parts. The *place* dimension on the other hand highlights the before mentioned importance of accessibility of digital content. The customers can choose when and from whom they want to purchase from wider range of companies than is available in offline. (Koiso- Kanttila 2004.) Rowley, on the other hand, further divides place dimension of digital content marketing mix into two main issues: the customer experience in supply chain, and the online service nature in the customer-company interactions. In digital content, the customer experience is dependent upon a complicated network of relationships in the marketing channel. Furthermore in online, web-based services include customer interaction through technology, such as Internet, which offers a small window to apply experience and marketing communications (Rowley 2008).

As Koiso-Kanttila (2004) highlights the meaning of navigation interactivity, Rowley emphasizes the need to go beyond web design and clear instructions in order to develop a deeper understanding of learning processes in which customers engage to e-service (Rowley 2008). Additionally, the *process* of digital content includes normally no direct physical human interactions, and therefore the online interface needs to be well-designed, informative and guide customer how to proceed the purchase (Koiso-Kanttila 2004). This way the interface can attract new customers and work as a competitive advantage as well. As a conclusion, it can be stated that the process dimension of digital content marketing requires personalization of the content in order to build customer loyalty (Merisavo 2008) and furthermore brand advocacy.

Direct response advertising, such as digital downloading and channel interactivity, play a vital role in *promotion* of digital content. However, in order to use such an advertising form, permission on customers' side is required. As mentioned earlier, in online environment customers tend to switch brands easier than in offline and therefore it is essential to build two-way relationships with customers and show also the benefits of it to them. (Koiso-Kanttila 2004.) Thus, the role of engaging customers into brand advocacy becomes topical.

Rowley (2008) further reminds that in online environment, also the communication channel is digital information, and therefore the line between digital content and marketing communications is indefinite. The informative marketing communication tools, such as web portals, can also assist on creation of communities and attention, and

therefore digital content can be used both as an attractor and as at the core of the marketing exchange in marketing communications. (Rowley 2008.) The fifth P of digital content marketing is *price*, which in digital context can include unit-, or access-based pricing (Koiso-Kanttila 2004) or even be free of charge (Rowley 2008). Rowley (2008) further remarks the importance of pricing by stating that getting the customers to pay is one of the key issues in the digital content marketing. The other key issue she appoints is volatile understanding of value, which further affects on all the five Ps of digital content marketing presented by Koiso-Kanttila (2004).

Previous researches claim that marketing communications in online environment is related with creating relationships, presence, value (Rowley 2004) and customer loyalty (Merisavo 2008). In virtual channels, the customer-brand relationships are built through customer service, communications, customization and communities, where value can be added to the offering (Rowley 2008). Merisavo (2008) also highlights the meaning of value by stating that through frequent and relational content in brand communications, customer loyalty can be achieved. Moreover in brand communication of digital content marketing, the influence of personalization and interactivity are highly important as main moderators of brand communication on customer loyalty, commitment and the noted value (Merisavo 2008), which all furthermore are linked to brand advocacy.

Even though there are various aspects on the nature of digital content marketing, the importance of information in its marketing communications cannot be underestimated. Rowley (2008) argues that the main challenges creating meaningful and effective marketing communications for digital content are the need to develop intrinsic notion of value, the necessity to design and support messages communicated by marketing communications and branding through e-service experiences, and the obligations and requirements of using web-site as a platform for marketing communications.

Another challenge is to change the online channel customer experience from firm-centric into individualized and customer-centric (Fotaki et al. 2012). To overcome these challenges, companies can assist customers in value formulation and association by developing value propositions, communicating them to customers and finally supporting the value creation of customers (Rowley 2008). Also frequent and related content in brand communications of digital content marketing might help to cope with the challenges information places because it allows the change from selling content into telling content (Merisavo 2008). To sum up, Rowley (2008) argues that, in digital content marketing, a multidimensional understanding of customer value is essential, and

the consumption values that shape customer experiences and the underlying values of decision making processes should be embraced and developed.

### 3.5. Theoretical framework

As defined earlier, digital content marketing is all about identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirements. In order to use brand advocacy in digital content marketing and to satisfy the customer needs, it is necessary to identify the key factors that affects on digital content marketing. This study sees creating experiences and communities, value formulation and brand communication as these key factors.

In order to leverage brand advocacy and to drive the engagement of them, companies should create superior experiences to their customers in every touch point of the service or product. In digital environment, the experiences are based on very complex network of relationships, which makes it even more important to emphasize this factor of digital content marketing. Further Soat (2012) stresses the importance of having a story or a context for the brand so the customers can relate to it. It is also necessary to keep changing the practices around customers to gain successful advocacy and to make the customers feel priceless, special and exclusive to the company and brand. This can be done by pursuing customer feedback and creating online customer panels, chat rooms, brand communities, social media tools and other ways to share in online. (Soat 2012.) By providing good basis of creating these superior customer experiences through the ways Internet has to offer, customers can easily move from just being a customer to an advocate.

The sharing aspect Soat (2012) highlights should be taken into real consideration when using brand advocacy in co-creation of networks and communities in online environment. According to Lawer et al. (2006) novel marketing methods must be integrated throughout the customer experience by facilitating and developing interactive environments, communities and contexts for customers so that they can build and share involvement with the brand. This involvement built through experiences and communities furthermore can drive customer-brand engagement and moreover enable the creation of deeper brand advocacy.

In addition, all members of the community should feel like they are trusted and part of creating brand value together with other members of the community (Lawer et al 2006).

Therefore also value formulation can be seen as a key factor of digital content marketing. As Koiso-Kanttila (2004) emphasizes, the understanding of value has a great impact on all five Ps of digital content marketing, which further highlights the important of value formulation in online environment. Additionally Lawer (2006) argues that the brand values should be in align with customer value drivers so that the common understanding can be formed. This on the other hand puts great emphasis on the drivers of customer engagement and brand advocacy when co-creating the value with customers. It can be argued that brand advocacy creates unique value to the customers, and therefore value formulation can be seen as a one key factor of using brand advocacy in the digital content marketing.

Since the line between marketing communications and digital content is indefinite, brand communications can be seen as really important factor of leveraging brand advocacy into digital content marketing. Through brand communication also better customer experiences, communities and value formulation can be achieved in greater extent. According to Merisavo (2008) the key elements of digital marketing communications are precisely brand communication and its personalization and interactivity. These elements interact strongly with loyalty (Merisavo 2008) and therefore also with brand advocacy.

In order to leverage the use of brand communication through brand advocacy in digital content marketing, the communication should preferable be frequent, informative, transparent and trustworthy besides personalization and interactivity. Merisavo (2008) argues that interactivity contributes value formulation by providing better ways to search information and to spend time with a brand by allowing customers to play games, participate activities on websites and learning new ways of using the service or product.

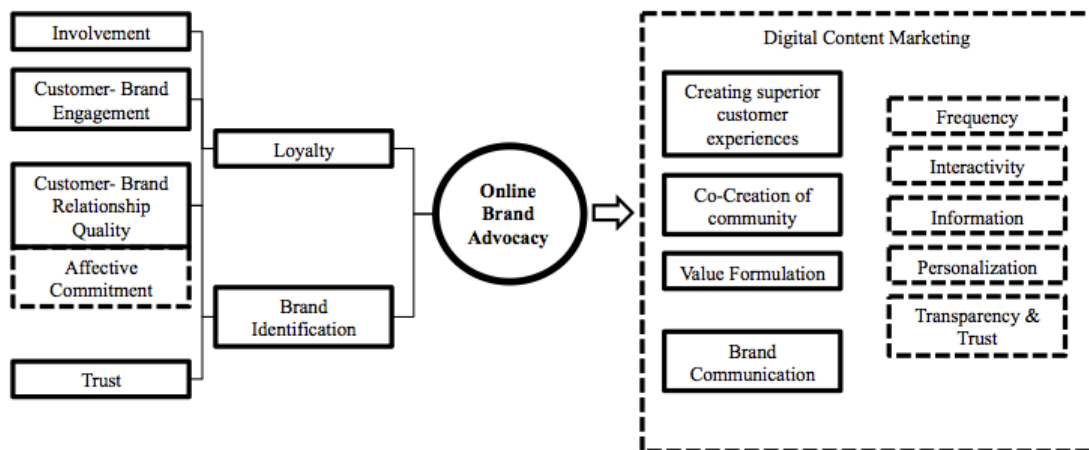
Transparency, and particularly trust on the other hand can be seen as a driver of brand advocacy and therefore it leverages the use of brand advocacy in digital content marketing also. This also supports the view to creation of long-lasting two-way relationships in marketing: without trust and transparency the creation of these kind of relationships can be hard. Furthermore previous research highlights the meaning of personal and relational content in digital marketing as important element of digital marketing communication (Rowley 2008; Merisavo 2008). Brand advocacy is strongly customer-centric as should digital content marketing be as well according to the previous literature. This required switch from company-centric to customer-centric

could be operated through personalized content. To sum up, all these elements of brand communication have an initial purpose to create and support communicated brand messages.

As a conclusion of this discussion, it can be stated that digital content marketing has its own challenges, which stem from the informative nature of the digital content and from the indefinite line between digital content and marketing communications. When it comes to concurring these challenges brand advocacy can play a vital role. The processing of information initiated by brand communications generates commitment and customer value (Merisavo 2008) and this way also brand advocacy. Therefore, the value formulation of the content has to be in the center of digital content marketing.

To overcome with the challenges digital environment has to offer and to support the value formulation, the marketing of digital content should be accessible, transparent, trustworthy, interactive and personal by its nature. In order to build long-lasting relationships, presence and value, the marketing communications should emphasize the experiences and co-creation of communities and make the digital content more concrete to customers. This can be done through customized, frequent and relational content of brand communications of digital content marketing. Through these factors of digital content marketing brand advocacy can be facilitated and further used in marketing activities in online environment.

Based on this discussion the theoretical framework can be formulated, and presented as figure 4. The framework gathers the main theoretical findings of the study together and tries to build a better understanding of the online brand advocacy and how it can be used in digital content marketing through its drivers, and by the factors and elements of digital content marketing. The drivers and main elements are presented as boxes whereas dashed boxes represent features that are importantly linked to the subject but are not as vital for the online brand advocacy as the black boxed ones. Again, the main construct of online brand advocacy is highlighted as a circle and bolded font. The empirical part of the study will be based on this theoretical framework.



**Figure 4.** Framework of the study: the usage of online brand advocacy in digital content marketing.

In order to use the online brand advocacy in digital content marketing, it could be necessary to know the drivers that enable the creation of advocacy on customer's side. Customer-brand engagement drivers of customer, company, context and social context have an impact on customer-brand engagement and throughout engagement to online brand advocacy. In addition customer-brand relationship quality is the key element when segmenting customers from activist to advocates as discussed in chapter two. After identifying these drivers, the understanding of online brand advocacy can be formed and furthermore considered as a tool for operating digital content marketing. Moreover this means that evaluation and reacting to this phenomenon of online brand advocacy could be done. Digital content marketing on the other hand is a wide concept with various factors affecting on it. Based on the theoretical discussion, this study proposed the most important factors of digital content marketing in which online brand advocacy can have most influence on. The validity of these factors will be further examined in empirical part of the study.

### 3.6. Summary

The aim of this chapter was to build understanding of online brand advocacy in digital content marketing. The conceptual discussion defined that willingness to forgive brand wrongdoing and defending the brand from others are important features of brand advocates. These features form unique and deep relationship between brand and its

advocate which distinct brand advocates from engaged customers. Moreover the discussion shed light into the concept of online brand advocacy itself and its drivers. Further the study proposes that the most important drivers of online brand advocacy could be brand identification, loyalty, customer-brand relationship quality with affective commitment, customer-brand engagement and trust and involvement.

Through the elaboration of the drivers the second research sub-objective, *how and to what extend customer engagement generate online brand advocacy*, was answered and shed light into the discussion of the linkage between customer engagement and brand advocacy. Moreover, this research proposes that brand advocacy is larger construct than loyalty and engagement and goes beyond these kinds of customer-brand relationships because of the unique characteristics of the phenomenon. Therefore online brand advocacy might have the most meaningful influence on the nature of digital content marketing.

Additionally the discussion of third research question, *how companies can engage online brand advocates in their digital content marketing and why it is beneficial to their marketing communications*, was grounded through the chapter two and the deliberation of the nature, opportunities and challenges of digital content marketing in chapter three. Since there is yet no clear understanding about the use of online brand advocacy in digital content marketing, this study tries to build this understanding through the theoretical framework built (see figure 4) and with the empirical part of the study. The notion of managing process of identifying, evaluating and reacting was made and considered to be used in examination of the research question. Based on this theoretical framework the empirical research can be concluded and furthermore the main research question can be answered.

## 4. METODOLOGY

The empirical part of the study is based on the theoretical discussion presented in the previous chapter. In this chapter, the methodology of the study is presented. The research approach, design and strategy chosen for empirical part of the study will be discussed and after that the research methods will be elaborated. In addition, the data collection and analysis will be discussed and last research validity, reliability and ethics will be deliberated.

### 4.1. Research approach, design and strategy

The purpose of the study is to create a deeper understanding of online brand advocacy, and explore how to generate the engagement of online brand advocates in digital content marketing. Previous researches have evaluated brand advocacy and digital content marketing mainly as separate constructs. Also the concept of online brand advocacy has yet not gained much recognition among advocacy research either the ways it can be facilitated in digital content marketing.

This study is descriptive-analytical by its nature but it also has exploratory features since it aims to understand the linkage between two usually separately discussed construct of online brand advocacy and digital content marketing. Both exploratory and descriptive research is trying to describe the selected phenomenon without putting any notion on the causal relationships of variables.

The logic and means in which the theory is used in the research is called as research approach. The research logic of this study is seen as deductive because the theoretical framework guides the whole research, and determines how the empirical part of the study is conducted. In deductive research first the theory is developed and hypotheses are presented and then empirically tested (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009: 124-127). Further the conclusions are made based on logical reasoning (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009: 124- 127; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008: 21- 23). Moreover, the theoretical framework of this study is based in previous literature and therefore this study has deductive approach. (Saunders et al. 2009: 125). With deductive reasoning this study aims to build a deeper understanding of the online brand advocacy phenomenon through qualitative research design and method.

The research design of this study is qualitative mainly because of the purpose of the study, the exploratory nature of it and because of the main research question aims to understand *how* the phenomenon occurs. Moreover, there is only modest information about online brand advocacy phenomenon and the information is gathered from humans, which furthermore makes qualitative research relevant for this study. (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2005: 202; Silverman 2006: 44; Eriksson et al. 2008: 4 -5, 51.) In qualitative research the data is naturally occurring data, which is based on words that express human's feelings. (Silverman 2006: 44.) As this study tries to develop a deeper understanding of the online advocacy phenomenon through examining human actions, the qualitative research with hermeneutical approach was relevant for research design. In hermeneutical approach, interpretation and more in-depth understanding of human actions are in the core of research process (Eriksson et al. 2008: 20).

The research strategy is performed based on the approach and design of the research. The strategy is to first identify the brand advocacy phenomena and see how the engagement of online brand advocates can be generated in online environment. This is followed by evaluation of the phenomena. After evaluation, the research aims to build a better understanding how these online brand advocates can be used in the digital content marketing of the company, i.e. the study reacts to the phenomenon. The case context of the study is wellness start-up Yoogaia, which will be introduced later on in this chapter.

#### 4.2. Interview as a research method

This qualitative study was conducted by theme interviews -method performed among case context Yoogaia. Since the aim of study, it is convenient to use empirical source of theme interviews to collect and analyze the data (Carson et al. 2001: 71). In order to truly identify the online brand advocates this method was used to make sure that the phenomenon genuinely exists. Through interviews the study gathers deeper information about the online brand advocacy and tries to build more holistic understanding of how it can be leveraged in digital content marketing.

Interviews are widely used in qualitative research partly because they allow exploring respondent's representations of experiences and because they conduct a rich source of data (Silverman 2006: 114: 148). Generally, interviews are conducted between the interviewer and the interviewee(s) and they take place face to face, online or in phone. (Eriksson et al. 2008: 78, 80.)

Interviews range from unstructured, informal interviews designed to reveal deep understanding and insights to more structured interviewing with standard questions for all interviews (Carson et al. 2001: 73; Eriksson et Kovalainen 2008: 80). Interview can also be guided and semi-structured by its form meaning that there is a prepared outline of topics, themes or issues but having still a possibility to change wording or question order of each interview (Eriksson et al. 2008: 82). Despite the form of interview, the idea of interviewing is to get inside respondent perspective and to explore how respondents have experienced the phenomenon through feelings, interpretations and memories etc. without guiding the respondents. The most important thing when interviewing is to gain trust from the respondent (Eskola & Suoranta 1998: 94), for example by actively listening, keeping eye contact, allowing respondent to decide how topics are covered, not interrupting and giving time to the respondent (Carson et al. 2001: 76).

In this research the guided and semi-structured interview form was applied. The interviews were implemented as theme interviews with some prepared outline of themes that were based on theoretical framework built. Each theme had some questions, which were planned to guide the conversational talk with respondent without blocking them arising important topics of their own. The themes allow conversational talk and furthermore some kind of structure for analysis. (Eskola & Suoranta 1998: 87-88.) After Carson et al. (2001: 76) guidelines, first question of every theme were broad to make the respondent comfortable and willing to talk about their experiences. Followed by the opening question the themes were covered in the order, which were natural for the respondent in every interview (see appendix 1 and 2). With semi-structured interview form deeper responses were shown among the outlined themes covered, which furthermore gained rich insight to the topic.

In theme interviews, laddering technique was used to get deeper information about the phenomenon researched. The technique tries to understand how respondents translate the attributes into meaningful associations in the case of product or service. (Reynolds & Gutman 1988.) Through “why” –questions, the laddering technique aims to determinate the linkages between the key elements of attributes, consequences and values. Through laddering, the motivations of online brand advocacy phenomenon and the customer-brand relationships can be examined, and therefore the purpose of the interviews in this study was to figure out attribute-consequence-value linkages customers have with the Yoogaia brand.

### 4.3. Case context: Yoogaia

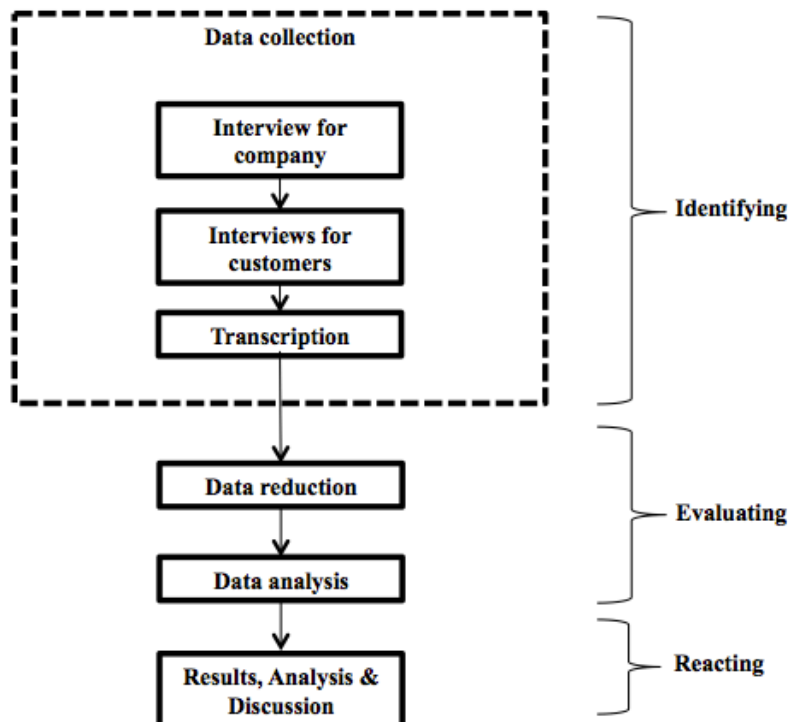
Yoogaia is a Finnish based Start-up company, which offers yoga, pilates and other kinds of exercising classes in online. The company is the first in the world offering live, real-time yoga classes in which customers can participate from home. Classes have an instructor who personally guides the customers through web-cameras. The customers are invisible to each other and only instructor is seen in class recordings. The company was established on 2013, and nowadays it has approximately 20 employees. In the future, Yoogaia aims to reach international markets with the online yoga and wellness services (Yoogaia 2014.)

Given that the online company is a small start-up aiming for international markets, deeper knowledge and insight about its customers is essential for the reached growth. Additionally, the company has gained some enthusiastic customers and fans during its early stages, which makes it interesting for investigating brand advocacy phenomenon. Further, Yoogaia's marketing activities happen mostly in online and through word-of-mouth, making the digital content marketing the most important marketing channel of the company. Moreover the wellness and exercise industry has been increasing strongly for several years in Finland, which means that there are many start-ups making the competition more dynamic (Ministry of Employment and the Economy 2014). The dynamic business environment further implicates the need for more engaging brands and deeper customer-brand relationships, loyalty and brand advocacy to build greater business performance and growth.

Based on these facts, Yoogaia as case context was fascinating and relevant choice for this study. One of the most increasing segments of wellness and physical education industry are products and services related to health, wellness and lifestyle (Ministry of Employment and the Economy 2014), in which Yoogaia's services are included. However what is most relevant for this study is that these services Yoogaia offers are in online and they answer to the needs and values of customers today. This enables good basis to make empirical research about online brand advocacy and offers a valid knowledge to make implications how this phenomenon could be used in digital content marketing.

#### 4.4. Data collection and analysis process

The process of collecting and analyzing data in the light of answering the research question and sub-objectives in this study is presented in figure 5. The data collection phase, presented as dashed box, aims to identify the possible online brand advocates and their drivers in the case context. The study seeks to find out how they advocate the brand in online and also aims to understand why. Data reduction and analysis phases on the other hand seek to evaluate these online brand advocates and their role for digital content marketing. Moreover, reacting is made in discussion of results and analysis where contributions about how online brand advocates can be used in digital content marketing are elaborated.



**Figure 5.** Data collection and analysis process.

The identifying phase of data collection is marked as separate dashed box, because it is the most important part of the process. Based on identifying, evaluation and reaction can take place with arguments.

#### 4.4.1. Data collection

In this study the data was collected through theme interviews, which were conducted among the case company Yoogaia and its customers. Personal interviews acted as a primary data source whereas secondary data source were for company websites. Both primary and secondary data sources include textual and visual naturally occurring materials (Eriksson et al 2008: 78). By interviewing respondents personally richer data was able to be collected.

Before conducting the interviews for customers, a semi-structured theme interview was made with the chief marketing officer of Yoogaia (see appendix 1). This interview provided good amount of knowledge about how the company sees the phenomenon and how it occurs in their business. During the interview online brand advocacy phenomenon was discussed and identified among the company. Since the Yoogaia and its business model is an online based, all brand advocates identified can be seen also as online brand advocates. After this tentative interview, actual theme interviews with customers were implemented (appendix 2). Recruiting for interviews were done through social media channel Facebook where the Yoogaia customers tend to be most active. Customers were first contacted through the Facebook –page, where these active customers were asked to participate the research. All customers who contacted were selected to the research as interviewees based on their activeness and advocacy towards Yoogaia brand (appendix 3). Total of thirteen theme interviews with these advocates were conducted between October 2014 and November 2014. The interviews lasted from 28 minutes to 55 minutes. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed for analyzing. The field notes were taken during data collection besides recorded and transcribed materials to ensure not to miss any important details arising from the interviews.

#### 4.4.2. Data analysis

According to Carson et al. (2001: 176) there are two stages of analyzing data. The first stage is ensuring that all the suitable data has been collected by the research methods selected. The second stage of the analysis is to think how to integrate all the aspects of analysis between theory and empiric. The purpose of analyzing qualitative data is to create clarity to the material collected by increasing the informative value of it and this way to produce new information about the subject researched (Eskola & Suoranta 1998: 138).

The data collected from interviews was analyzed by using content analysis methods. Since the interviews were conducted with laddering technique the use of content analysis were suitable. Through content analysis, wider conceptualization can be made (Reynolds et al. 1988). When analyzing interviews it is important to put emphasis on inter-textual references among texts and individual experiences of respondents to analyze the phenomenon as a whole. In qualitative content analysis the data is categorized based on extracts and instances, which illustrate particular categories in particular item of text. Based on the number of instances the categories are confirmed and established. (Silverman 2006: 158.) The categorization in this study was made according to the themes selected for interviewing.

When analyzing the data collected from interviews the hermeneutical approach was applied meaning that the interpretation and analysis were closely connected throughout the whole analyzing process (Eskola et al. 1998: 151).

#### 4.5. Reliability, validity and ethics of the research

The evaluation of qualitative research consists of the reliability of the research data and methods and the validity of the research findings (Silverman 2006: 289; Eriksson et al. 2008: 291). Reliability refers to the extent in which the research can be repeated with same results, findings and interpretations by different researchers (Silverman 2006: 282; Eriksson et al. 2008: 292). Furthermore, Eskola and Suoranta (1998: 211) claim that the most important criterion of reliability is the researcher, meaning that the evaluation of reliability affects the whole research process.

Validity, on the other hand, refers to the extent the research conclusions are accurate and represent by evidence the phenomenon examined. (Eriksson et al. 2008: 292.) Internal validity refers to the consensus among theoretical and contextual definitions and it shows how competent the researcher is about the research subject. External validity in turn refers to the competence of the linkages between interpretations, conclusions and data. (Eskola et al. 1998: 214.) External validity or generalization might be little controversial since the small amount of participants of the research (Saunders et al. 2009: 327). Given the time schedule of this study and the lack of other resources making generalizable results might be difficult in this qualitative study.

Reliability criteria of qualitative research can be satisfied through transparency in the research process, strategy and data analysis methods. Transparency can be provided with detailed research report. (Silverman 2006: 282; Saunders et al. 2009: 156 -157.) This study corresponds to the reliability criterion by using content analysis with somewhat standardized categories and field notes. Also pre-testing of interview guide, tape-recording of each interview, careful transcription, cross checking of transcriptions and long extracts of data are used. The reliability criterion was also noted when designing question guide based on previous literature as well. However due to the researcher's lack of experience as an interviewer some important questions might not have been noted. Thus, the theoretical framework was built before conducting the empirical part of the study to avoid this problem. In this study, the validity question of qualitative research is corresponded by using triangulation of theories and research methods. By using multiple theories, more accurate and objective representation of the subject researched can be provided. (Silverman 2006: 291-295.) The validity criterion was also taking into consideration by applying transparent logical reasoning throughout the research process of making conclusions.

When conducting any kind of research, the research ethics must be elaborated. Ethical research should make sure that people are participating the research voluntarily, ensure that the comments and behavior of participants are confidential and makes no harm, and secure mutual trust between researcher and participants. (Silverman 2006: 327.) Furthermore, it is ethically polite to inform the respondent about the purpose of the research (Carson et al. 2001: 75). In order to act ethically, the researcher must ensure that the privacy of the participants is confidential and no identity information is shown in materials used. (Eriksson et al. 2008: 106.)

In this study all participants were asked a verbally agreement to participate the research. This way it was ensured that all participants were attending voluntarily. Before the interviews the purpose of the study was clarified to the participant without revealing the exact research question to avoid leading participants responses. In addition, permission to tape-record the interview was requested. All participants were also informed about the confidentiality of the data. Furthermore the anonymity of participants was secured through careful handling of the data and with covering all personal identity information from the data extracts. With ensuring these aspects, the possible harm was reduced and mutual trust built. Moreover, in every interview, the interviewing conditions were made comfortable to participants to make the situation more natural for them.

## 5. RESEARCH RESULTS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter the results of the study are presented and analyzed in the light of theoretical framework built. The results will be presented in order of themes discussed with the interviewees. In addition, the main research question will be answered. The four themes discussed were customer engagement, loyalty & customer-brand identification theme, brand identification and trust theme, online brand advocacy theme and finally digital content marketing theme. The findings are presented in this order. After the results are presented, the key findings of the study are highlighted through research analysis and discussion.

Altogether fourteen semi-structured theme interviews were executed. First the company's chief marketing officer (CMO) was interviewed and then total of thirteen interviews were carried out with active Yoogaia customers who consider themselves as Yoogaia advocates. Five of these interviews were performed as phone interviews since the long distance between interviewee and interviewer, and the rest as face-to-face interviews. All interviewees attended to research happened to be women. For more background information about Yoogaia customer interviewees please see appendix 3. Overall the purpose of the interviews was to provide an answer to the research question *how to generate and utilize the engagement of online brand advocates in digital content marketing?*

### 5.1. Overview of online brand advocacy phenomenon in Yoogaia

The marketing of Yoogaia is based on online activities due to the fact that the company wants to be there where the actual service is, in online environment. The CMO clarified that no clear digital content marketing strategy exists however the company has asked from their customers what kind of content they would prefer to have from Yoogaia. Further the company says to value its customers in great extent, nevertheless the role of customers could be even more important. This on the other hand highlights the possible usage of online brand advocates.

As a fast-growing start-up the company has limited resources to react to customer-to-customer communication meaning that at this phase reacting is mainly just "liking" on social media channels. Also the interaction and conversation between customers is monitored but not actively.

*“[...] at the moment we are kind of on that level where we follow what people write about us and we react on that if we can. Just on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter we try to be somehow present” (CMO of Yoogaia.)*

Mainly company says the conversation around the brand has been positive, and what is surprising is that also people that have not even tried the Yoogaia service are talking positively about the brand.

*“In my opinion, we can clearly see it (online brand advocacy). As I mentioned, it is as much as overwhelming that people who have not even tried our service are giving good recommendations and talking positively about us.” (CMO of Yoogaia.)*

This interesting fact questions the argument of theoretical literature that brand advocates are customers who are highly involved to the brand and recommend it to others enthusiastically. However it has not been argued that brand advocate needs to purchase the product, just motivate others to use or purchase the brand (Fullerton 2005). Again, it can be questioned how brand advocate can truly recommend the brand without purchasing it.

According to the CMO, the online brand advocacy can also been seen as the interest of bloggers. Most of the bloggers who have written about Yoogaia have contacted the company, not the other way around as usually when making blog co-operations with brands. Further these blog posts created are gathered to the company websites to leverage the value of them. Moreover the CMO highlighted that all company operations aim to be public and transparent to the customers, which furthermore drives generation of online brand advocacy. The company has experienced also loyalty and commitment among its customers, which also drives online brand advocacy. CMO stated that they have noticed that the customers are willing to forgive even though the service is not working properly occasionally. This willingness to forgive is a main definition for brand advocacy as discussed earlier in this study and therefore it supports online brand advocacy phenomenon among Yoogaia customers from company's perspective.

*“We can already find quite many loyal customers among our service. [...] when we get emails where customers thank us about properly working voice system it tells us that customers are willing to forgive us lots of technical challenges maybe because the brand is experienced as close to yourself. Maybe it is a question of*

*brand warmth and closeness so that people are willing to forgive such small technical mistakes. This is how we see it.” (CMO of Yoogaia.)*

Further the company said that they have noticed that Yoogaia Facebook –page is really active and communal by its social media nature. Although this has been taken into notice, the way of how to generate and be part of the emerging Yoogaia community by the company is still under consideration.

*“We have considered different solutions (for creating community) [...] thus far we think that our community forms there, in Facebook, since it is quite active community. I have a feeling that people have low barrier to comment there all sorts of things ” (CMO of Yoogaia.)*

From the interview with Yoogaia’s CMO it came clear that the company identifies online brand advocacy phenomenon among their customers, however it might not be leveraged to its full potential yet. Yoogaia has tested the quality of recommendations by giving free extra day of service to those who have recommended the brand. However, according to the company, there has not been big increase in the amount of recommendations, which further might indicate that the Yoogaia customers really recommend the brand by true advocacy, not because of their own benefit. However it might be that the financial benefit of giving recommendations has not been great enough for true customers to do it just because of the financial benefit.

*“It would be nice to utilize more these customers who use our service actively and talk a lot about us [...] however we have not found out a way to utilize them yet. Except for Facebook recommendation from which we give one extra day. However we have noticed that people does not recommend because of one day [...] or people recommend just because they want to. And I think that the value behind it (recommendation) is actually that people see it as good for themselves and they want to make good for others as well by telling people to try Yoogaia. So there is nothing that I as a customer could get something from it.” (CMO of Yoogaia.)*

When it comes to generating online brand advocacy by company’s perspective, the CMO identified two big challenges: 1) how to get the most loyal customers who are elderly customers to be Yoogaia online brand advocates and 2) how the get the minority of younger customers to be more active and to recommend the brand as online brand

advocates to other younger target group. Yoogaia has tried to generate the advocacy of younger customers however the generation is still small and the company does not yet recognize the best way to use it. In other words there is a need to understand online brand advocacy better and generate it to practice.

To sum up it can be stated based on the company interview that the company recognizes the phenomenon of online brand advocacy and some of their actions, such as transparency and customer's willingness to forgive, have even generated the increase of brand advocacy subconsciously or consciously. However even though the company identifies the phenomenon, it is the customers who define, create and leverage it. Next we will go through the research results derived from customer's point of view and analyze the results.

## 5.2. Customer engagement, loyalty and customer–brand relationship quality

In theoretical part of this study the possible drivers of online brand advocacy were identified. The discussion of drivers is relevant in order to answer the first two research sub-objectives of this study. Therefore these drivers formed two themes of the interviews: theme of customer engagement, loyalty and customer-brand relationship quality and brand identification & trust theme. Among all the interviewees these themes were clear, especially the engagement, customer-brand relationship quality and trust factors of the drivers.

Several interviewees stated that they had preconceptions about yoga and also Yoogaia before trying it out first time. They also mentioned that this might be one reason why some of their friends did not feel as excited about Yoogaia and as willing to try it as they were. One interviewee had even got a negative response back from friend after telling about the brand. They also thought that the high expectations and these preconceptions are so strong that for some people it is a real barrier to start using the brand and were astonished by it. Some of the interviewees also admitted that they had also questioned workability of Yoogaia because they did not have anything to compare it however, after trying the brand couple of times they were positively surprised and amazed about the brand.

*“I am surprised that people who I have recommended this have not tried it out still so maybe it is not that wow –thing for all.” (Interviewee 3.)*

*“For now none of my friends has yet purchase it, I do not know maybe they are wondering something [...] but maybe generally they do not have same interest to yoga as I do.” (Interviewee 9.)*

Moreover this addresses the fact that the interviewees tend to be more open to the brand because of their positive attitude towards what the brand represents. This kind of receptiveness on the other hand is linked to customer characteristics, which theoretically were seen as factors of customer driver of customer engagement. Furthermore this might indicate that in order to even engage and further advocate customers might need to have an open mind towards a brand and what it represents. Since people might have preconceptions, the importance of hearing about from someone else increases and highlights the meaning of advocating. Especially when it comes to brands and services in online, the preconceptions might be really high and by advocating the brand can be brought closer to potential customers. However if the person to whom recommendation is directed is not interested or is not receptive towards the brand, recommendation is harder. This is a fascinating finding and therefore customer receptiveness could be argument to be an important driver of customer engagement and furthermore online brand advocacy.

*“If you have no experience, it is really hard to explain this because everyone do not know the amazing feeling yin yoga does to you. So I cannot force, the person needs to be open-minded to realize that after a workday yin-yoga is much better option than glass of wine.” (Interviewee 8.)*

*“[...] sometimes people have preconceptions that they do not dare to trust any websites before they hear from others what kind of place it is or some good experiences.” (Interviewee 9.)*

*“I would assume that people would not use this kind of service if they do not have background for the topic, it might feel strange with all the breathing and basic asanas. So you must have a background from other classes.” (Interviewee 12.)*

*“All in all you also must have interest and enthusiasm doing things via Internet so if you really protest Internet, it (advocacy) does not maybe originate the same way.” (Interviewee 13.)*

Another interesting result from the interviews was that nine out of thirteen interviewees had used online videos for exercising before using Yoogaia. The previous usage of online videos, such as Youtube videos and DVD videos, has been one factor why they gained interest toward Yoogaia at the first place and why their preconceptions were surpassed. This factor was not asked directly, however majority of the interviewees mentioned this while discussing interview themes. These nine interviewees brought up that they have moved from “normal” offline exercising to online exercising. One of them even mentioned this shift to be part of her lifestyle. This represents well the context /environment driver of customer engagement and furthermore the division between online and offline society of it.

*“[...] I have done quite a lot Youtube things and other yoga practices you can find from Internet at home. I like to exercise at home and that is one reason why this Yoogaia works so well for me.” (Interviewee 7.)*

*“I have done yoga with videos and Youtube videos also quite a lot, I am this sort of home trainer” (Interviewee 8.)*

Furthermore when asking if the interviewees had achieved own goals through Yoogaia, nine out of thirteen interviewees said that they had. These goals varied from learning to listen oneself, to increased amount of exercising and own wellbeing. Interviewee 4 also mentioned the importance and value of achieving own, personal goals through the brand:

*“I hope that with Yoogaia I could exercise more regularly, and I could feel myself a little bit better person again and also achieve my own personal goals [...] and take better life habits to myself because this is so easy way to do it.” (Interviewee 4.)*

In addition interviewee 10 also mentioned that she had noticed some changes even in her personality while using the brand, which indicates also high brand commitment, attachment and even self-brand similarity. Further self-brand similarity was named as a factor of brand identification in theoretical discussion of this study.

Altogether customer characteristics and goals were found to be significant factors of customer engagement and furthermore advocating. This supports the theoretical model built previously in this study where customer goals & characteristics were named as factors of customer drivers of online customer engagement. What became apparent from

the interviews, and was not found in the theoretical review, was the importance of customers' receptiveness towards the brand in question. The results also show that the receptiveness also influences on recommendation and that way further to online brand advocacy.

When analyzing customer engagement also brand love, rapport and delight were apparent among majority of the interviewees. As mentioned in the previous discussion of engagement results, the interviewees were astonished about the fact that some of their friends did not show same interests towards Yoogaia as they did. Some of the interviewees even said that the brand is cool in their eyes and thought that the concept was perfect which indicates also rapport between the brand and customer. All in all the expressions how the interviewees described the brand and usage of it were quite strong as "fallen in love" or "superior". Interviewee 9 even said that the brand in question is so great that she wants all to be users of it. Additionally delight was noticed since many of the interviewees told about overall and long-lasting good feeling they get from using the brand, which furthermore made them happy.

*"[...] I want that everybody starts this since it is so cool thing." (Interviewee 9.)*

*"[...] I am so deeply fallen in love with deep-stretching and yin yoga. The feeling is something that I would not change for anything, I do not want to give up for it." (Interviewee 10.)*

*"[...] I don't see why someone wouldn't even try, for me it something insuperable that I do not see why. For me, I would even say virtual yoga is a lifestyle for me." (Interviewee 10.)*

When it comes to customer engagement from other perspective, four of the interviewees specially mentioned the fact that the brand has Finnish background to be one of the most important factors why they are using the brand. Therefore this brand character can be considered as a company driver of customer engagement as categorized in theoretical review. Also the fact that the company is a start-up company was noted by the interviewees. Moreover the brand reputation seemed to be good because many interviewees though the brand is superior in their eyes and though that the brand is engaged to its customers as well.

All in all, customer engagement was identified among interviewees. Since one criteria for the interviewees was to have a discussion with those customers specifically who considered themselves as online brand advocates and because customer engagement was found to be relevant among the interviewees, it can be stated that customer engagement plays a role in online brand advocacy also from empirical point of view.

What became clear from the theme interviews was that the interviewees were not only engaged but also loyal at some point to the brand. Majority of the interviewees mentioned that they would not change away from Yoogaia. The reasons why they would keep using the brand varied from good instructors, quality, diverse offering, user friendliness and background of the brand to simply good price- quality relation of the brand. Some of the interviewees also mentioned the fact that they consider themselves extremely loyal when they find something that suits for their needs. Also involvement and commitment were present in the discussions with interviewees.

*“I think that Yoogaia has so much variety in their classes that no competitor would have something to add into it so then it comes to instructors and service flexibility with recordings and so on. When you are used to use one service you do not definitely change it easily if you are satisfied with it. So the barrier to change is quite high [...] in some women’s magazines there were some similar kinds of services but I didn’t even consider those since Yoogaia is so good.” (Interviewee 4.)*

*“[...] I do not easily change away from good instructors even though there would be some kind of offer freebie included. I am that loyal and self-indulgent person so if I find good I stick to it and I’ll change it only if I have to.” (Interviewee 10.)*

Yet not all interviewees experienced as strong loyalty emotions towards the brand. Minority of the interviewees considered themselves as engaged customers but the word loyal was seen too powerful for this meaning. However, the inter-textual references across the discussion showed some subconsciously loyalty among those interviewees and couple of them said they could be loyal customers of the brand in the future if not quite yet felt like loyal customers. This indicates potentially high loyalty levels among the interviewees even though it is unconscious loyalty.

*“[...] with the same live class concept there is none similar but lots of videos and recordings can be found from Internet, but then I haven’t used them so it tells in a*

*way that there is something about Yoogaia that keeps me using their videos”*  
(Interviewee 5.)

One factor that also stated interviewees' high loyalty levels was that some of them considered Yoogaia as a long-term brand to be used. Interviewees also clarified that they believe to continue using Yoogaia if nothing changes dramatically in the brand. This mentality and other relevant results of loyalty discussion stated highlight the meaning of satisfaction, delight, trust, involvement and commitment as factors of loyalty, which theoretical part of the study also named as significant factors of loyalty. Some of the interviewees though they were loyal since they trust the good quality of the brand and some were just committed to use it in the future as well. Satisfaction was also explicit among interviewees and also delight of using the brand.

Altogether customer engagement and loyalty were also seen in general level among interviewees. In the theoretical review of this study it was proposed that with high levels of customer brand engagement and loyalty customers could be segmented as activists. When contacting potential Yoogaia brand advocates through Yoogaia Facebook –page post, total of eighteen customers were contacted to be interested in participating to this study. All of them contacted rapidly and with enthusiasm towards helping Yoogaia to gain more customer insight.

The interesting fact is that in the Facebook post written by the researcher was no trigger for customers to participate to the research meaning that there was no promised beneficial “reward” for those who would be interviewed. Even though all of them did not respond back, total of thirteen customers were interviewed due to their true willingness to help. This further indicates that the company does have a lot of customers that can be called at least as activists because of their genuine enthusiasm and willingness to help without getting any compensation in money for themselves. However active customers are not yet advocates of the brand. In order to generate the creation of brand advocates, the theoretical part of this study argued that active customers should also have high level of customer-brand relationship quality.

The results indicate that customer-brand relationship quality was apparent among the interviewees. What was pointed out in almost every interview was the warm, cozy and friendly feeling that the brand causes on interviewees even though the brand is in online environment. Many of the interviewees thought that there were real people behind the

brand and they could be easily contacted. This further refers to a good relationship between the brand and its customers.

*“ If I have wrote some feedback to them they have answered really quickly and I have had kind of . . . like caring feeling.” (Interviewee 2.)*

*“In my opinion it stands out that they do it by heart, they like the service themselves and they feel like they have come up with something good. I think it shines through there and I have had positive feeling, of course this is based mainly on my own feeling about it, really positive feeling about this company, what they offer and want to offer.” (Interviewee 5.)*

Some of the interviewees also said that the feeling the brand creates reaches not only live classes but also recorded ones. They also stated that the instructors feel also present or close on both forms of classes, which might indicate good brand presence despite the fact in which way the brand is presented to the customer. Since in this case the brand is shown to its customers mainly through instructors and classes, the importance of instructors for creating customer-brand relationship quality is undeniable. Couple of the interviewees also had their favorite instructors in Yoogaia which classes they attend almost every time. And what was also pointed out as a good thing was that the instructors also remember their customers. The result of closeness is also seen on how the interviewees described their relationship with Yoogaia compared to regular gyms. Interviewee 3 stressed well that Yoogaia feels more familiar and friendly than those gyms they have attended many times for so called face-to-face classes:

*“[...] actually those Yoogaia instructors feel more familiar to me than those gym or fitness center instructors whose classes I used to go regularly. Even though I have visited those fitness center instructor’s classes several times I do not know her name, and she does not know my name, she never say anything directly to me whereas in here (Yoogaia) via Internet I do know instructors’ names of course and they call me everything by name and instruct me directly [...] and if the instructor does not call you personally it does not feel that personal anymore so then I feel little bit disappointed or think the class was boring.” (Interviewee 3.)*

Alongside coziness, friendliness, presence and closeness the interviewees also said there is something about Yoogaia that they cannot explain but is one reason why they use it. Couple of the interviewees called it feeling or personal contact, which furthermore

refers to a nature of relationship between customer and the brand. This unexplained thing, almost like spirit, might be the core of the customer-brand relationship Yoogaia has among the interviewees.

*“[...] in spring I went to a yoga retreat but I do not know what it was but I did not feel it, I didn't get the same kind of, cannot say in-time feeling, but social cohesion there. It lacked the something I get from Yoogaia.” (Interviewee 10.)*

*“[...] there is a contact, kind of personal contact even though you are not communicating all the time [...] but when you know that you are visible on the other side of the screen it is kind of the same thing than the instructor would be in the same room.” (Interviewee 11.)*

Overall the results of the theme of customer engagement, loyalty and customer brand – relationship quality showed that all three concepts were relevant and existing among the interviewees. Customer engagement was strongest on customer characteristics and goals, which of course is a relevant result concerning that the interviews focused on customer's perspective. Also loyalty was found among the interviewees as a clear concept or as subconsciously loyalty. However the most important finding was that the customer-brand relationship concept was so strong among the interviewees. The results show that the relationship is almost as a relationship between friends, which indicates high quality. More importantly, the interviewees discussed about the concept together and also as overlapping which means that all three concepts are linked to each other as stated also in the theoretical part of the study.

All in all, these results support the theoretical framework of this study about the customer segmentation since all three concepts were high among the interviewees. Therefore the argument is supported and it can be stated that in this case customer-brand engagement, loyalty and customer-brand relationship quality form the basis for online brand advocacy segment of customers.

### 5.3. Brand identification & trust

The theoretical discussion of this study stated that brand identification is linked to brand advocacy through brand distinctiveness, self-brand similarity, brand warmth, brand social benefits and experiences. The interviewees were asked if the brand had fulfilled

their expectations and why they use the brand in order to discuss about identification and trust towards Yoogaia.

Brand distinctiveness was apparent during the discussions. The interviewees stated clearly what separates Yoogaia from others and the most common features mentioned were interactivity, quality, easiness and affordable price. Since the preconceptions many have had, the interviewees said to be also delighted that the Yoogaia is not so called hippie yoga, as many might have thought. Also the fact that Yoogaia is familiar and suits to the interviewee's life was mentioned several times. What was highlighted in theory of brand identification was uniqueness of a brand. This fact was also apparent among interviewees as they described their usage of the brand. Some of them mentioned that the brand represents something that they have never before experienced, which furthermore makes Yoogaia distinct from others.

*“They have managed to mix physical service into online environment well.”  
(Interviewee 6.)*

*“Maybe some people need the presence of others but I am that kind of person who like to do alone things so it is not necessary to have hundred other people around me. Maybe that is the thing, doing at home in your own peace.” (Interviewee 7.)*

*“[...] I do not know many Finnish yoga services on Internet, or at least I have not bump into those. So in that matter it is unique for my understanding.”  
(Interviewee 12.)*

Brand identification became apparent among the interviewees also in the form of self-brand similarity. Many of the interviewees said that the Finnishness of the brand brought the brand closer to them. They also stated that this fact was one reason why they purchased the brand in the first place: it felt closer and more enjoyable. As mentioned before, this feature of the brand also played a vital role on customer engagement and therefore can be considered as a notable finding.

*“Youtube is always available as well as web videos and this Yoogaia also. Why I tried Yoogaia is that of course I want to favor Finnish and when you watch some videos on Youtube you never know about the quality of it. And even though I have learned to yoga in English, I prefer to do it in Finnish.” (Interviewee 8.)*

Self-brand similarity arose from the discussions also in how the interviewees talked about the brand. For example interviewee 3 stated that she has done Yoogaia instead of doing yoga, which emphasize the meaning of the brand to the interviewee and how she sees the brand distinct as well. Furthermore one interviewee also said that she had gone through a very hard life situation with the help of Yoogaia. Through the brand she had find the inner peace and wellbeing, which had helped her to go through difficulties in life. This highly represents the self-brand similarity and furthermore brand identification among advocate. Additionally three interviewees also mentioned the proud feeling they have had when they see Yoogaia for example in media. The feel of proud can represent strong emotional link between customer and brand and therefore it also represents self-brand similarity on its own way. Moreover brand warmth was seen among interviewees as the discussion of customer-brand relationship results showed previously.

Alongside the discussion of brand distinctiveness, similarity and brand warmth, the interviewees were asked if they have had gained benefits or new experiences through Yoogaia. Some of the interviewees mentioned that they have had even some changes in their personality, through a feeling, after using Yoogaia, which might also just indicate the power of yoga:

*“Many times after a lesson I have a feeling that I love all or that kind of good feeling. Strange” (Interviewee 2.)*

This kind of description of a strange feeling represents something new to the interviewee, as like an experience. Two of the interviewees also stated that they have gained social benefits from using Yoogaia. Both of these interviewees were really happy about this opportunity that the brand has offered to them and their friends: opportunity have fun and share experiences. As interviewee 11 put together, Yoogaia has offered her an opportunity to “meet” her friends without seeing each other:

*“[...] we have coordinated this with my friend, who does Yoogaia regularly, so that we have also hooked our friend from Rovaniemi into this and we try to coordinate all of us to same class. So that one does this from Helsinki, one from Härmä and one from Rovaniemi. And then we try to coordinate all of us to the same class. So if sometimes you hear teacher saying that someone is now sleeping there we tease each other and ask if it was you who were sleeping. If it is a hard class you have a social pressure because you know that your friend is in the same class even though you do not see or hear her, but you know she is there [...]*

*yesterday we attended same class and after it we commented on WhatsApp that it was not that relaxing and easy as we both has though beforehand. We both were soaking wet after the class. So yes, after classes we compare our experiences also.” (Interviewee 11.)*

Despite this social experience Yoogaia had created for couple of the interviewees, many of the interviewees mentioned that the brand has not created that much new experiences to them or significant social benefits. In this case it might be that for Yoogaia, brand identification is based more on brand distinctiveness, self-brand similarity, brand warmth and uniqueness than on social benefits and experiences. All in all the results indicate that brand identification were apparent among the interviewees, which furthermore support the theoretical framework of this study even though the identification was not that strong on social benefits and experiences factor. However it is clear that Yoogaia has brought something meaningful to the interviewees’ lives: a strange feeling or spirit, something unique, an answer to needs or opportunity to share something with friends. Furthermore, that is what brand identification is all about.

Together with brand identification trust was discussed with the interviewees as well. No questions about it were presented; rather the subject was mentioned directly or passed by the interviewee. Talking about a difficult subject such as trust might not be easy and by not asking about it directly the interviewees could bring it up if felt like and the feelings could be specified with laddering technique. All things considered the brand was seen as trustworthy. When discussing about trust some of the interviewees couldn’t say where from it arises but for others it was obvious:

*“ It is hard to say, it (trust) just arises ” (Interviewee 1.)*

*“Somehow the way that they response honestly, appropriately and they apologize what have happened creates trust.” (Interviewee 2.)*

*“[...] maybe the behind the scenes blog posts increases trust because then you realize that the people behind this brand are regular people who do good stuff and also they have bad times and so on.” (Interviewee 3.)*

One of the interviewee also mentioned the good intentions behind the people and the brand as a one reason why she trusts Yoogaia whereas one though that having no barrier to end or continue again builds better trust. Interviewee 9 also pointed out that through

other customers maybe trust could be built among others as well. This is an interesting observation since it highlights brand advocacy, especially in online environment, and therefore also speaks for the theoretical framework of this study. By hearing or seeing others using the brand, the initial trust starts to build towards the brand.

The results of the first two themes indicate that the drivers of online brand advocacy stated in theoretical part of the study were relevant among interviewees. Especially the customer engagement with receptiveness and the customer-brand relationship quality drivers seemed to be significant for advocacy but also to other drivers as well. Furthermore brand identification and trust with brand distinctiveness, warmth and brand social benefits played vital role among interviewees supporting the theoretical framework.

#### 5.4. Online brand advocacy among brand advocates

Most of the interviewees mentioned that they heard about the brand through some kind of advocating, offline or/and online. They said to have heard about the brand from another person, for example relative, or friend, or have seen the brand on blog post, a friend liking on Facebook or through another brand's Facebook post. If the recommendation had come from someone who had same kind of life situation, it was considered as more convenient among interviewees. Majority of the advocating has happened in online through Facebook. Only three interviewees had seen the brand through advertising solely and two of them through searching on Internet. This result highlights the significance of advocating, and especially online advocating, when the brand is at its early stages. When the brand is novel, brand advocating might be even vital for the brand's success at the beginning of the establishment in order to gain awareness among target group and potentially new customers as well.

*"[...] maybe I would not have found this if my friend wouldn't have recommend. And she recommended because she is interested in yoga and had found this by herself." (Interviewee 11.)*

As one criterion for the interview was advocacy, all the informants naturally said that they have also recommended the service to someone. The most common reason for advocating was, of course that the interviewee felt like the brand is worth recommending, but a real want to help the company to keep improving the service and

the willingness to share the good feeling they have had through Yoogaia. Several interviewees also mentioned that they have recommended the brand to others since they know it would help them somehow, for example to maintain health or provide help to spine problems etc. In the other words, they have recommended because they want to provide an answer to people's problems, which highlight altruism among interviewees. The interviewees also understood that by recommending the brand Yoogaia has better options to keep operating in the future as well.

*“I have experienced this (Yoogaia) so good and I get so much good feeling from this so I have told all my friends about it. That this kind of opportunity exists” (Interviewee 1.)*

*“Nowadays I tend to think that people do not talk enough about good things so therefore I would prefer to talk good about things that I think are good. Of course I also want that Yoogaia exists and keeps working because I like it and the more customers they have the more secure it is that they keep working in the future as well.” (Interviewee 2.)*

*“I have recommended a lot because I now those people who face difficulties to go to some gym. Oh I had so many scenarios at the beginning that me and my daughters would put a big screen to the yard on summer time and do this together” (Interviewee 6.)*

The way of recommending however varied from offline channels such as conversations on coffee table to online channels meaning mostly social media channels and email. Many of the interviewees mentioned that they have recommended the brand in both ways, through offline and online channels. The most important notification from the online brand advocacy results was that all the interviewees were enthusiastic about the brand and telling others about it with excitement. Generally, the interviewees were also excited to tell others what they gave done with Yoogaia and to participate this research to help the brand development. As mentioned in theoretical discussion, the enthusiasm of advocate is central feature of the brand advocacy phenomenon and this analysis of results indicates that Yoogaia has real brand enthusiasts as advocates.

*“I think Facebook is quite easy way to recommend so I do not need other ways [...] of course I have friends who are not in Facebook to whom I have advertised this, I think to almost every person I am even a little bit in contact with, because I*

*am so excited about this. So this kind of old-fashioned face-to-face recommending works also.” (Interviewee 4.)*

*“Yess!! Through Facebook because it is so easy! I have talked a lot about this to relatives and to those who face exercising issues with time problems. I tell them that I use this kind of thing and it exists and so on” (Interviewee 5.)*

*“[...] I have held harangues when I get excited about this issue so there is not a single person at work who would not have heard my long speech about this. I have explained this in coffee tables and during lunch hours, and sort of three times a week they have to listen my yoga stories.” (Interviewee 11.)*

Recommending online and further online brand advocacy was apparent among interviewees as forms of sharing links, writing recommendations to Facebook or blogs, or sending invites through Yoogaia website to friends. Another online method was sending recommendation emails with a link to friends. As mentioned before, most common ways of recommending in online were through Facebook meaning writing status update or sharing links to friends there. Couple of the interviewees also mentioned that free trial campaigns on Facebook have been one push factor why they recommended the brand to a friend in online. Furthermore Facebook liking was also noted as recommendation and some of the interviewees had even noticed Yoogaia through friend’s like. However just liking on Facebook does not indicate online brand advocacy, but can identify potential future advocates.

*“ In Facebook I have written a public post update that this is a good thing, you should try it or something. Then I have also wrote about this on Facebook to friends of mine who I know to practice yoga that this is forth trying and then of course I have also spoken friends that I like this.” (Interviewee 2.)*

*“When I have noticed the ‘one free trial week for friend‘ – campaign on Facebook I have written about it to some of my friends that ‘hey here is a link, click it and tell me so we can go to same lesson‘.” (Interviewee 3.)*

*“It is a recommendation of its own way if you like on Facebook and it is shown to my friends. That way I noticed that a friend of mine from Helsinki had liked this.” (Interviewee 12.)*

Several interviewees told that people they have recommended have asked more information about the brand. This of course indicates interest towards the brand but might indicate uncertainty towards the brand as well. Interviewee 10 called online recommending as “hying after euphoric feeling” which summarizes the nature of online brand advocacy brilliantly:

*“I have recommended this to almost everyone [...] the recommendations have been in face-to-face and of course in Facebook I do blaze it and if I have totally euphoric feeling after class I of course hype it there and recommend others to try it. And some of the friends have asked that what is this thing and so on and I have told more about it. I also have a personal blog where I write about exercising and other hobbies of mine so there I have also hyped Yoogaia and said it is worth trying and cool thing [...] and now at work we have wellness –campaign and I was asked to write to our blogs at work about Yoogaia and how awesome it is to be in virtual classes there.” (Interviewee 10.)*

Interesting finding was also to analyze how the interviewees mentioned the recommending and further advocating. Many interviewees used word “advertising” when talking about giving recommendations. This might indicate the fact that also online brand advocates do know the value of their advocating. Couple interviewees even mentioned that they consider themselves as spoke persons of the brand and therefore “advertise” it to others as well.

*“One friend I have just advertised this because she has a lot of problems with her back. So I have tried to say her that this is really good thing and you can do this at home at any time.” (Interviewee 7.)*

*“Every now and then I have a phase that it is exceptionally nice or so. So then I do advertise a lot and sometimes not that much.” (Interviewee 11.)*

*“[...] must say that I have done pretty much advertising because on country side I have a lots of customers to whom I recommend yoga and many of them has got exited about this.” (Interviewee 13.)*

What was pointed out by couple of interviewees was that they were actually delighted and even surprised that some of the people they had recommended the brand tried it and started to use it as well. Interviewee 4 even mentioned that she does not usually get so excited about something that would recommend it online, however in this case with

Yoogaia she did and the result was surprising to her. This might indicate that there are some barriers to customers to advocate if they are not familiar doing it in online however the result of recommending delights greatly:

*“After I had tried it (Yoogaia) for awhile I posted a status update in Facebook about it telling that I have tried it and it is really good and people should go and check it. So I put it forward to my friends in Facebook and then two of them actually told me that they had tried it after my recommendation and like it, which is really good! And after a while the other one told me that she has bought the year from Yoogaia so I am really glad that this social media thing actually works since I am not super active in social media. So when I wrote something there and it actually created this kind of effect it’s really funny in my opinion.” (Interviewee 4.)*

In addition to getting recommendations from other customers, two of the interviewees mentioned that they have got a recommendation about Yoogaia from another brand. This is really interesting finding and supports the company idea to have co-operations with other brands that go well together with Yoogaia values as CMO of Yoogaia mentioned. This however can be considered more as brand ambassador activity than brand advocacy activity since it is strategic co-operation.

Another rather interesting result concerns customer activeness. As CMO of Yoogaia mentioned, the company had noticed that people who has not even tried the brand recommend it. Interviewee 3 said that for her, it is not about activeness of using the brand whereas it is more about the good concept.

*“I think it is more about the really good concept than the fact how active user I am why I have talked so much about this to my friends and tried to get them to try this but for some reason people haven’t been so excited about this” (Interviewee 3.)*

This questions traditional conceptualization of advocating by stating that recommending and enthusiasm towards brand, meaning together advocating, do not require active relationship between customer or brand, or even purchase. Furthermore it means that this kind of advocate is not that engaged to the brand. However, among thirteen interviews only one mentioned this issue, which might indicate that this kind of advocating is minor activity among Yoogaia customers. Nevertheless it should be

identified as advocating and further activeness of customer as an indicator of brand advocating might not be that relevant. Again the receptiveness of the customer counts more when it comes to brand advocating in online environment.

As theoretical discussion of online brand advocacy stated, forgiveness of brand wrongdoing is considered as important factor of brand advocacy. The results of the empirical part of the study showed that forgiveness was also apparent among the interviewees. Many of the interviewees told that they do not think the little problems they have had with the brand or service are only fault of Yoogaia. This is in line with the discussion had with the CMO of Yoogaia as she stated that many of their customers are willing to forgive.

*“Sometimes there have been some technical problems so that the connection has cut off or the stream has stopped but then you do not know, it might be my Internet connection not working properly. All the blame cannot be put on Yoogaia’s end either.” (Interviewee 2.)*

## 5.5. Digital content marketing

Last theme discussed with the interviewees considered digital content marketing and how the interviewees consume content in online environment. In this research this theme was discussed with customers since digital content marketing is seen more as customer- driven not company-driven. Alongside with communication and marketing discussion also improvement ideas and wishes to Yoogaia were asked to find out if there is something to improve in their current marketing activity. Value and experiences, brand communication, awareness and social aspect of the brand were key elements that occurred the discussions with interviewees along all themes. The results from this theme are gathered below. Compared to other themes of the research, this theme was definitely the most difficult to discuss and to analyze since the multidimensionality and complexity of it.

### 5.5.1. Value & Experiences

As the theoretical review of the phenomenon showed, both customer value and experiences play significant role in online brand advocacy. From customer engagement perspective whereas from digital content marketing perspective as well.

Generally it was really clear to all interviewees what is the value of using Yoogaia and how the value consists to them as users. All of them named several reasons why they use the brand and what they have benefit of using it. Most of the interviewees said that the value Yoogaia gives them is time or answer to a need, meaning to be frankly; it increases their own time usage. This is in line with the view of CMO of Yoogaia as she said that the value proposition of the brand is based on easiness and saving of time, which indicates that both parts of the customer-brand relationship do understand why the relationship exists. This forms a good basis for online brand advocacy and might even be considered as a prerequisite for leveraging online brand advocates in digital content marketing.

Interviewee 5 managed to crystallize how the value formulates in Yoogaia well by saying:

*“Sometimes people can think if it is real yoga since it happens in online but in my opinion also yoga needs to answer to the needs of that time and how people have time to do yoga.” (Interviewee 5.)*

Despite the fact that value formulation was clear to all thirteen interviewees, three of them realized some undiscovered value insight, at least to them, on Yoogaia. One stated that the brand could bring value to lonely people and two said it would be great to keep in touch with friends and relatives abroad through Yoogaia. All of them were really excited about their ideas and this hidden new value Yoogaia could offer to them and other people as well. This supports the value formulation in both ends of the online brand advocacy phenomenon, on drivers side and on digital content marketing side. Value can act as a driver on customer engagement to online brand advocacy and through advocates new value formulation can be created.

*“After one class I had an inspiration that this creates value not only to busy people who do not have time to go to gym, but also to lonely people, which are a big majority nowadays, to give a social aspect to them. So I thought that hey they should market this to busy people and to lonely people as well.” (Interviewee 3.)*

*“[...] she (relative) does not interact with Finnish persons that much and suddenly she could do yoga with Finnish persons in Finnish company classes, this would be great to her! This kind of campaigns they could do in Facebook that they would market this to those persons who are far away” (Interviewee 6.)*

*“[...] my brother lives in Mexico so if I could tell those relatives to come to the same class we would be there then. It would be quite fun, that even though you are physically far away you can attend same class.” (Interviewee 13.)*

Couple of the interviewees also mentioned that the current state and value Yoogaia can give is only a beginning and there is a lot of potential to grow still. This kind of attitude describes well the positive, hopeful and trustful thinking of brand enthusiasts, online advocates.

Alongside value, eight interviewees mentioned experiences as talking about Yoogaia. They thought the brand is experimental and the experience has been amazing to them. Interviewee 11 said that everything in the brand were new to her and totally different but in a good way. She and couple other interviewees said the brand is exceptional to them which indicates truly something novel and experience like.

*“[...] even the idea of virtual yoga fascinated me, how it can be possible and how instructor can guide you, it just fascinated me so I tested and discovered it was a really pleasant experience. . .I wasn't that much interested what I was doing in the first class, more I was interested how the instructor handles the situation” (Interviewee 10.)*

*“[...] it was incredible the live class. I was so amazed how it can work like that.” (Interviewee 12.)*

As theoretical discussion stated, online marketing communications is related with presence, creating relationships and value, it can be stated based on the results that Yoogaia has managed to build all of them to their communications. However a lot of opportunities to develop the value formulation still exist.

#### 5.5.2. Brand communication

As line between marketing communications and digital content marketing is indefinite in online brand advocacy, brand communications were also discussed with the interviewees. All of them were asked how they see the quality of marketing content, how they would develop communication to customers and how they have now communicated with the company.

Generally brand communication of Yoogaia was seen as clear, friendly and understandable. All interviewees stated that the visual appearance of the brand is really clear and you easily find what you want from websites. Two interviewees associated this easy-to-use attitude to yoga and said that the brand nature reflects yoga as well. This indicates that the navigation interactivity and web design of the brand are on good level. Moreover the brand was seen as approachable and several interviewees thought Yoogaia really listens to its customers. This further highlight brand responsiveness and the results discussed in customer-brand relationship theme and also that the brand has good basis to build loyalty, engagement and online brand advocacy among its customers.

*“[...] the way they contact you feels like they really want to hear what you have to say and they want to react on that as well [...] for me it is really important thing when it comes to company’s image if they really do listen to their customers and genuinely care.” (Interviewee 10.)*

Many of the interviewees mentioned that they use both Facebook and Yoogaia websites to communicate with the brand. Three interviewees even said to use Facebook as primarily channel of communication with the brand. As interviewee 6 said, Facebook gives information what is the status right now but for more information about the content you go to website. The results show that majority of the interviewees did not go directly to visit Yoogaia Facebook-page, instead of the interaction with the brand happened through news feed on Facebook platform. They said that if post from Yoogaia happens to be on news feed on that time they visit the platform then they read it but otherwise they do not go to the brand page to find and see posts.

This is really interesting finding because of the changes on Facebook marketing. Organic brand visibility is lower than ever meaning more emphasis on Facebook advertising and/or on content should be made in order to be visible to right target audience. One interviewee also stated that people you have heard by name on classes get faces and online identity in Facebook. This furthermore highlights the meaning of social media tools for e-company. Even though social media was considered as a great communication tool among the interviewees, couple of the interviewees said to avoid or reduce the use of Facebook. They mentioned it to be more personal statement but in the future these non-users of social media should also be taken into consideration when thinking about Yoogaia’s brand communication.

Alongside Facebook and websites, also email and chat pop-up were mentioned as communication channels with the brand. However about half of the interviewees stated that they would like to have a possibility to comment and ask more advice. Mainly more content and interactivity was hoped to be added on the website. Communication and interaction level on Facebook –page was considered as good. Further four interviewees said that interaction during lessons between all parties could be also improved. Despite this hope, some of the interviewees were concerned how the interactivity could be added without bothering other class attendees at the same time. This is a dilemma CMO of Yoogaia also mentioned. Couple of the interviewees had good ideas how the interaction could be improved on websites, which indicates that they have really thought about the brand and how it communicates with them.

*“I have thought that it would be really useful but then if I ask during the class it might bother all other attendees. And after the class I would need to have a one-on-one session so I could show how I do it because just by explaining it is really difficult.” (Interviewee 8.)*

*“[...] I would want more interactivity so that if you want to clarify something you could ask. I think the basis of the blog disappears if you comment on Facebook since they are two different platforms [...] they (Yoogaia) are pioneers and they developed this new concept so it could be that more Facebook-like elements could be brought to the own site if possible.” (Interviewee 10.)*

Along with interaction, content wise majority of the interviewees stated that they would like to have more interesting content on the website, and specifically to blog posts published on the site. They said not to usually comment on posts, however if the posts are interesting and emotive or the writer asks something then the interviewees might comment. Many interviewees stated that content which interests them is about wellness, sports or something else relevant for wellbeing, something that goes deeper to the subject. Usually interviewees said to read Yoogaia’s blog posts through Facebook or when going to classes on website. However if blog post does not seem interesting, interviewees told that they skip it quite easily.

*“[...] sometimes they have put blog posts on Facebook but they have not been that interesting to me. I do not know why, for some reason I do not know.” (Interviewee 9.)*

*“[...] there have not been anything particularly interesting to me, it has been quite embracing. Maybe it would be interesting to me if there would be more emphasis on health impacts or some summary of researched information. Then I might read them more easily [...] I do not even remember what they have wrote because I have passed them so happily.” (Interviewee 11.)*

This kind of behavior is really common in nowadays when information load is massive, however it can create advantage if the content really appeals to the customers as discussed in theoretical part of the study. Moreover several interviewees saw lots of potential in Yoogaia blogging and how it could be improved content wise. Alongside interest, they said to prefer blog content in which they could easily relate to, content that feels approachable and warm. As results from brand warmth showed, this aspect should not be problematic to Yoogaia since the brand is considered as warm already among the interviewees. However, how this same feeling could be brought into digital content marketing might not be as clear as it could be.

Additionally to interesting content, also informational part of content was mentioned among the interviewees. Majority of the interviewees said to look information by Google or blogs, which furthermore indicates that the content the brand produces should offer information to its customers as well. Theoretical discussion highlighted information to be on the core of digital content marketing, and based on the empirical discussions, the importance of informational and relevant content is supported. Interviewees stated that usually they find information for a solution to something, to ease the everyday living. For digital content marketing this is something significant to keep in mind when planning the content on websites.

*“I am a fact-based person so that is why I for example follow sport- and fitness blogs, to find new information. Therefore in my opinion Yoogaia blog posts could be more like what is the benefit for you to open your hips or so, communicate that kind of holistic benefit you can get.” (Interviewee 8.)*

Personality of communication was also mentioned by couple of the interviewees. For example interviewee 3 mentioned that by more personal communication she would maybe keep attending the classes more frequently and it would keep her connected to Yoogaia. This also supports the theoretical framework built previously by emphasizing the meaning of personal messaging when it comes to digital content marketing. Furthermore brand personality was mentioned in the brand communication discussions

in over one third of the interviews. Five interviewees mentioned that the story behind the brand had made an impact to them. They told to have read about the story of Yoogaia from the blog and found it really interesting. For them it showed that the brand does understand its customers' needs. Furthermore the interviewees that said to have read the story also stated to understand the brand better because of the story behind.

*"[...] I think it is fun that something like that originates from someone's real need and becomes something bigger." (Interviewee 12.)*

*"I thought when I read the history that somehow this is a great idea" (Interviewee 13.)*

This further highlights the personalization feature of digital content marketing and supports the theoretical framework built. Both providing personal communication to advocates and communicating brand's own personality helped to increase personalization of brand communication in this case.

Alongside with these results of brand communication, the most interesting finding of this theme considered the use of online brand advocates in digital content marketing. Based on the discussions, there can be identified two different ways how they, brand advocates, could leverage brand communication: to engage existing customers and advocates more and to get new customers. Total eight interviewees said that it would be interesting to read what other customers think about Yoogaia and thought that using customers on brand communication would be a good thing. All of them said that it would benefit both parts of the relationship, the brand and themselves, which further highlight common value formulation as well. However the level of engagement seemed to define how much time and effort the interviewee was willing to put on reading others comments.

*"Why not to use customers in company's communication, there is some benefit for all since everyone of us experiences things on their own way" (Interviewee 1.)*

*"There is no harm to take customers along to the communication since more you involve customers the more you can create with them which would be a good thing here as well." (Interviewee 7.)*

Couple of the interviewees also stated that information and experience sharing would work among Yoogaia customers if brand communication would include advocates into it. They mentioned that it could offer peer support to them, give another perspective for own exercising, and bring social cohesion between Yoogaias and furthermore community aspects into it. Some of the interviewees had even fears what to talk with others even though they thought information sharing as a good thing. This might indicate that the communal aspects are not relevant yet. This will be discussed more later on.

*“It could work that there is sharing of information also [...] it surely would create some added value [...] but I do not know would I use it or I do not find anything to talk to other customers.” (Interviewee 3.)*

*“It would bring communal aspect into it if there would be more we –spirit. And it would maybe create some collective improvement ideas to the company, some good ideas and new approaches, which could be further modified.” (Interviewee 5.)*

Based on the discussions with interviewees, another reason for generating customers into brand communication would be getting new customers. Generally interviewees thought that it would be good to have customer recommendations on brand communication so people considering Yoogaia could be convinced and offered some relative opinions.

*“[...] I think it (customers in communication) would be good to someone who considers to start using Yoogaia or is using it first time or so. For those people it would be a trigger that makes it even easier to start using the service.” (Interviewee 7.)*

*“I am interested what other users have said and even to see these other users so you realize that they all are not skinny, really firm shaped super flexible super yogis. You would see that they are normal people and the barrier to come along is low [...] if the people would see that there are all sorts of people doing this it would be easier to them to relate themselves that hey I am exactly like that, if she can I can.” (Interviewee 10.)*

Many of the interviewees also said that they have also checked the reviews on Facebook and websites before starting to use Yoogaia. This supports the idea of having customer

testimonials and furthermore usage of online brand advocates in digital content marketing.

*“If I remember right even before thinking if I should start it I checked the Facebook-page and read some reviews and other stuff there” (Interviewee 9.)*

All things considered the results show that at the moment of research brand communication of Yoogaia is seen more as company- driven than as customer-driven. This might indicate that the full potential of digital content marketing is not leveraged yet and there is willingness from customers‘ side to use content marketing driven by them more. Even though value formulation was clear to the interviewees, there is still potential to develop it further with customers. Moreover, according to the interviewees digital content of the brand should more be informative, relevant to the reader in order to have their interest in digital information flow. This further emphasizes the role of social media tools and web analytic tools in order to leverage fully the brand communication in digital content marketing of Yoogaia.

### 5.5.3. Awareness

When asking about improvements or wishes to the brand, several interviewees mentioned the lack of awareness to be something they would enhance. Minority of the interviewees had seen Yoogaia ads or articles about it on Internet, most of the interviewees had not. Overall the interviewees mentioned to hope the brand would be more visible to others as well so they could know about it also. This further emphasizes the meaning of brand advocacy if the awareness of the brand is low.

*“ I would like them to be more visible so that others can find out about it also, because in my opinion not that many people know about it.” (Interviewee 9.)*

*“It is quite un-known actually, I have not faced it that much and when I have talked about this to others they do not know it. One of my colleague studies to be a yoga teacher and when I started to advertise this and held my harangue she said she had never heard from this. Then I thought that it might be so marginal people who actually know about this.” (Interviewee 11.)*

Furthermore interviewee 8 had noticed a clear need for being present on blogs for example:

*“I have not seen Yoogaia on Internet, in blogs for example, for which I am really surprised because the sport- and fitness blogs I read are excellent tools for brain washing, or at least on my case, so I think it is incomprehensible what effect they have on me. And I have also found some sport blogs where they have wrote that the have no time for yoga even though they would like to do it so this would be great for that niche” (Interviewee 8.)*

Many of the interviewees also thought that the brand is now quite social media centric by its marketing. This further links to customer engagement and environment driver of it with limited media attention. Some of the interviewees were even a little bit concerned will other people find it from elsewhere than on Facebook. On the other hand the interviewees did not know about Yoogaia’s other social media accounts, meaning that based on these results the social media presence of the brand seems to be highly dependent on Facebook on customers eyes.

*“In my opinion they have done marketing really well, however only on Internet of course. So if you do not like their Facebook –page then I do not know how people will pump into the brand and if they know about it.” (Interviewee 3.)*

*“[...] it is quite Facebook centric, so what if I wouldn’t be on Facebook so then I wouldn’t even have heard about Yoogaia. Hmm. . .do they put the same things on their websites as they have in Facebook, I think no, so if someone does not use Facebook just Googles online yoga or something yoga, and they end up to Yoogaia’s website, do they find there all the information as Facebook users find [...] I wasn’t Facebook user a year ago so that is why I though those people.” (Interviewee 4.)*

As said, only couple of the interviewees had seen articles or bloggers writing about Yoogaia, however the conversation had been positive then. These interviewees though it is a really good thing that people are writing about the brand so that the message about it spreads. In order to gain awareness and leverage online brand advocacy this result of awareness is significant and therefore analyzed and discussed as separate from brand communication.

#### 5.5.4. Social aspect of the brand

Theoretical framework of this study presented that community is one key element of generating online brand advocacy into digital content marketing. However the results of the empirical part of this study showed that instead of communal perspective, the interviewees comprehended the brand more as social than communal. Community - word was mentioned only few times, however social cohesion was mentioned in several occasions in the discussions. Total eight out of thirteen interviewees thought the brand is social by its nature and social to use. As interviewee 1 said aptly, people with similar interests do have some kind of link between them:

*“People who have similar hobbies also experience some kind of social cohesion”  
(Interviewee 1.)*

Sociality of the brand was mostly seen through the instructors, which is obvious result since the instructors are almost the only link between the brand and customer. However the fact that the interviewees felt like part of a group with other Yoogaias was interesting since there has not been any possibility to communicate with other customers during the class at that time. Even though the exercising was done alone at home, most of the interviewees thought that it was important to know that there are others doing the same thing at same time. Two of the interviewees even used word *Yoogaias* when talking about others using Yoogaia as well, which represents also communal features. This definitely supports the impact of sociality when it comes to digital content marketing in this case.

*“[...] it is really pleasant to have others around there. It is really nice idea. If you are in hurry you do not have time to talk or even notice to others because it is so concentrated in inside your mind. Even though yoga is your own practice you still need some others to do it at the same time with you.” (Interviewee 6.)*

*“In the classes I have a feeling of fellowship with the other Yoogaias although I do not see them [...] even though I do nothing with the other participants, I do not even know them and I do not communicate with them I still have a feeling that we are all in this same space, we all see the same teacher who talks to all of us at the same time.” (Interviewee 10.)*

*“[...] it is quite fun that at the end you give thumbs up so you see how many was on that class with me at that day and you also see that others liked it as well. It is like feel of cohesion, it is new way of being interactive.” (Interviewee 13.)*

One interviewee even had told others about Yoogaia’s social feeling when recommending the brand. This shows that at least for one interviewee this social aspect was so important that she even recommended the brand based on it. For her the brand represented not only exercising or relaxation but also sociality and interaction with others. This well highlights the potential of using brand sociality in digital content marketing of the brand.

Moreover many of the interviewees mentioned the closeness of the instructor but also how it felt lonely without live connection. This further emphasizes the social feature Yoogaia had on the interviewees. Some even mentioned that they have never used recorded classes of Yoogaia since the social element of live classes is so important to them. Also the CMO of Yoogaia mentioned that the core of the brand is to have personal interaction with the customers and the results of this study showed that this kind of interaction do exists among the interviewees and actually has generated little bit social cohesion and communal aspects around the brand.

*“[...] even though the instructor is on the other side of the screen, as one time when I had to shut down my camera since the stream wasn’t good, it started to feel like damn I am alone here now even I saw the instructor all the time but there was no interaction without the camera. I felt really lonely so I put the camera back on.” (Interviewee 2.)*

Also controversy opinions occurred among interviewees when discussing about communities and sociality of the brand. Total of five interviewees did not see communal features in the brand at all. However they thought it as a good thing because otherwise they would have felt outsiders from possible Yoogaia community. For example interviewee 4 said that she has never used camera since the brand is more personal to her than communal or social. However the interviewee understood that the brand might well be that to others and named this multidimensionality as a benefit of the brand:

*“Personally Yoogaia for me is more personal than communal however I can imagine that some people experience it more communal. And that is what is so*

*great about this, everyone can take it to own as wanted so I am not forced to be part of something shared if I do not want to and on the other hand those who want it can have it also so these to approaches are not conflicting to each others.”*  
(Interviewee 4.)

To sum up, the interviewees did not see the brand as communal yet, however they saw it more as social even though they did not know other Yoogaia users. The online brand therefore has managed to build personal link not only between the brand and customer but also between customers. As Van Doorn (2010) stated, it might be that women are more motivated to the common good of the group and have communal focus so as mainly female based advocates Yoogaia has good basis to start building community around it. The interviewees also had ideas how and what kind of community it could. Since the existing link between customers, Yoogaia community might be relevant to its customers in the future and possible way to generate advocacy into digital content marketing.

#### 5.6. Summary of the main findings

The aim of this chapter was to present the empirical results of the study and further to discuss and analyze these results. The discussion and analysis of empirical results showed that theoretical framework is mainly supported.

Table 2 summarizes the main findings of all four themes. Some of the features such as trust, delight and brand uniqueness were mentioned in several categories however to simplify the findings and phenomenon in general, these features were categorized below that theme in which they were mentioned most often.

**Table 2.** Summary of the main findings.

Themes	Main findings
Customer engagement, loyalty and customer-brand relationship quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open mind: customer receptiveness and achieving own goals</li> <li>• Tendency to use online videos for exercising</li> <li>• “Brand is cool” – brand love, satisfaction, trust, involvement, commitment, rapport, brand reputation and delight</li> <li>• Finnish background plays a role</li> <li>• Loyalty apparent also as subconsciously loyalty</li> <li>• Brand causes friendly, almost like spiritual feeling</li> </ul>
Brand identification & trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brand distinctiveness through interactivity, quality, easiness and affordable pricing</li> <li>• Uniqueness of the brand - the feeling</li> <li>• Self-brand similarity and proudness</li> <li>• Good intentions behind the brand builds trust</li> </ul>
Online brand advocacy among brand advocates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Majority of the interviewees had heard about the brand through advocating</li> <li>• Brand enthusiasm</li> <li>• Online brand advocacy activity was apparent as sharing links, writing recommendations to Facebook or blogs, or sending invites through Yoogaia website to friends. Another online method was sending recommendation emails with a link to friends.</li> <li>• Using word “advertising” when talking about giving recommendations</li> <li>• Taking recommendations from other brand</li> <li>• People who has not even tried the brand or do not use it actively recommend it</li> <li>• Forgiveness of brand wrongdoing</li> </ul>
Digital content marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Value &amp; experiences</li> <li>• Brand communication – interesting content</li> <li>• Awareness</li> <li>• Sociality –the brand was not seen as communal yet, however it was seen as social</li> </ul>

As mentioned in this chapter on customer engagement driver, customer characteristics such as customer goals were identified but also new features such as receptiveness of the customer were found. Further brand trust were highlighted as well as brand distinctiveness in theme brand identification and trust. Further brand enthusiasm was clear and the word advertising was associated to recommending. Moreover awareness and social aspect were found to be elements of digital content marketing. Next the conclusions of the study are presented based on the results, discussion and analysis built in this chapter.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

This chapter summarizes the study and presents the conclusions made in the light of key results and discussions of the study. The research sub-objectives and main research question will be evaluated in the context of the research findings. Further theoretical and managerial implications are made, and the limitations of the research are discussed. Finally, implications for future research are presented.

### 6.1. Engagement of online brand advocates

The benefits of true brand advocacy cannot be underestimated. Based on this study it can be concluded that the value of engagement of online brand advocacy is undeniable especially when it comes to new business and start-ups. Despite this fact the full potential of online brand advocates is not yet fully leveraged and used in digital content marketing. The knowledge about advocacy in online environment might not be understood since the complex nature of the phenomenon or reaction to it might be lacking information when it comes to digital content marketing.

Online brand advocacy has its own features when it comes to the way and environment of advocating. Based on the results of this study it can be concluded that online brand advocating generates quite naturally if the company enables it and offers good basis for customers to become online advocates. This means understanding of drivers behind the phenomenon and knowledge how to leverage it further. However, what can also be concluded is that the true brand advocacy does not see clear line between offline and online advocacy in customers' eyes. The brand advocacy is always a powerful asset for the company, nevertheless if it happens in online or offline environment. Therefore, again, the most important thing is to understand the drivers behind the phenomena. Why certain customers tend to engage and become advocates and why they tend to advocate in online environment. The aim of the study was to shed light into this subject and to find out how the engagement of online brand advocates can be generated and utilized in digital content marketing.

The foundation for answering to the research question and sub-objectives was based on the theoretical part of the study and to the qualitative empirical results of fourteen theme interviews. The first research sub-objective aimed to provide an answer to what previous literature highlighted to be a need for: *(1) what are the key drivers of customer*

*engagement intensity in online environment.* This study showed that there are several key drivers of engagement and divided them into four meaningful ones. Customer-, company-, context/ environment- and social -driver showed to be the most significant drivers of customer engagement when it comes to online environment.

Further each driver showed to have many factors behind it. As in online environment customers are controlling their own experiences, the drivers of customer and social relationships seemed to be a little bit stronger than company- and context based drivers. Based on the interviews, receptiveness of the customer showed to have important meaning in customer characters, whereas tendency to online activities, such as exercising, and Finnish background were highlighted in company and context/ environment drivers.

Moreover all customer driver factors were identified from the interviews and therefore support the theoretical model created. From company driver, brand reputation, engagement and platform alongside with the background characteristics were supported. Context wise online society with competitive services such as Youtube was identified as well as media attention with worry about awareness. Furthermore it can also be concluded that socialization plays a vital role in engagement where as interaction and strong customer-brand relationships.

The research shows that all drivers moderate and facilitate each others and the line between is not as clear as showed in the figure illustration. However the aim of the all drivers is of course to engage customers and increase intensity of it in online environment. Therefore empowering right customers at right time with right tools is in the core of optimizing online customer engagement process.

Table 3 presents a revised summary of the most important drivers and factors behind online customer engagement based on the theory and empirical findings of this study with a bolded font.

**Table 3.** Revised model of the key drivers of online customer engagement.

<b>Drivers of online customer engagement</b>	<b>Factors of the drivers</b>
Customer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Brand commitment</b></li> <li>• <b>Customer satisfaction (hedonic)</b></li> <li>• <b>Brand attachment</b></li> <li>• <b>Trust, Delight &amp; Rapport</b></li> <li>• <b>Involvement</b></li> <li>• <b>Customer goals &amp; characteristics</b></li> <li>• <b>Value</b></li> <li>• <b>Experiences</b></li> <li>• <b>Receptiveness</b></li> </ul>
Company	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Brand equity and reputation</b></li> <li>• <b>Brand characteristics -&gt; background</b></li> <li>• <b>Brand engagement -&gt; brand love</b></li> <li>• <b>Platforms and processes</b></li> <li>• <b>C2C interaction</b></li> </ul>
Context / environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Online and Offline Society</b></li> <li>• <b>Media attention</b></li> <li>• <b>Competitive environment</b></li> </ul>
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Socialization</b></li> <li>• <b>Interaction</b></li> <li>• <b>Co-creation of content and brand values</b></li> <li>• <b>Strong &amp; active customer- brand relationship</b></li> <li>• <b>Integration of brand communication</b></li> </ul>

The second research sub-objective aimed to find out (2) *how and to what extent customer engagement generate online brand advocacy?* Theoretical discussion and the interviews of the study identified that three concepts of customer engagement, loyalty and customer-brand relationship quality does generate together online brand advocacy and segment brand advocates from other customer segments. Previous understanding has been that engagement and loyalty solely affect on brand advocacy, however based on evaluation this study concludes that by taking into consideration also customer-brand relationship quality more better understanding of online brand advocacy can be achieved (illustration on figure 2). The empirical results of the study especially highlight the meaning of customer-brand relationship quality on customers' side and therefore it needs to be taken into account when talking about generating online brand advocacy.

However in order to generate the phenomenon, all three concepts needs to be on high level. Therefore customer engagement generates online brand advocacy only if the engagement level is high. This furthermore requires that previously discussed drivers of online customer engagement are understood and leveraged brand wise. Through high engagement, customers feel more loyal and build warm relationship to the brand, which

furthermore affects higher possibility to become an advocate of the brand. Further the analysis of empirical results showed altruism among online brand advocates, which highlights unselfishness features among advocates.

Therefore this study derives that online brand advocacy is bigger concept than customer engagement and loyalty and forms deeper customer-brand relationships as well. Further that is why customer engagement and loyalty are seen as drivers of advocacy, not as outcomes of it. However it does not block the chance that online brand advocacy generates engagement and loyalty as well, but the importance of them is more significant as drivers than as outcomes. Based on the interviews it can be also drawn that the case company Yoogaia does have online brand advocates because of customer engagement, loyalty and friend-like relationship with its customers.

After gaining understanding about engagement of online brand advocates third research sub-objective concerned *(3) how companies can engage online brand advocates in their digital content marketing and why it is beneficial to their marketing communications*. The research results showed that by providing good basis for online brand advocacy drivers and elements of digital content marketing brand advocates can be generated into digital content marketing. Moreover the elements of digital content marketing appeared to have more emphasis on engaging online brand advocates into digital content marketing and using this beneficially in company's marketing communications.

Value formulation was clear to all the interviewees and some of them seemed even to have more value insight to the brand. This indicates really engaged online brand advocacy. Also providing experiences to the advocates appeared to increase their involvement to the brand. Many interviewees had seen brand messages on Facebook for example, but it has not triggered their interest if the messages have not been interactive, personal or relevant to them somehow. However there is a need from advocates' side for content. The results show that in the case of wellness company, online brand advocates could be engaged to their digital content marketing with informational content that addresses wellness, sports or wellbeing with greater depth to the subject. By providing good content to brand advocates, the advocacy could be leveraged further.

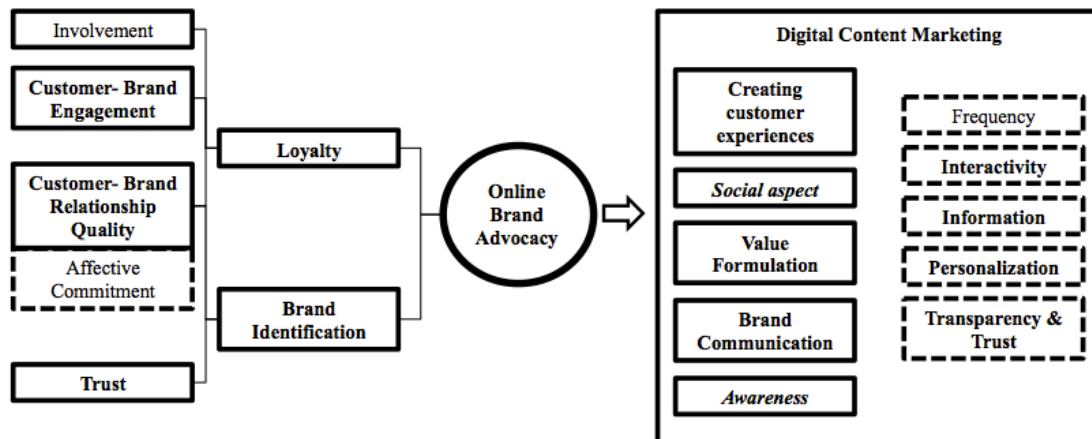
Furthermore the research showed that engaging online brand advocates could be beneficial to company's marketing communications when the aim of it is to engage existing customers or get new customers to join the brand, and furthermore brand advocacy. In both cases it would bring benefit to advocates and other customers but for

the company as well. For existing customers the benefit mentioned by interviewees was information and experience sharing, peer support, social cohesion and having new perspectives to own exercising in online. In case of getting new customers, engaging online brand advocates into marketing communications would help to convince those who are considering to start using the brand over.

All in all, these research sub-objectives offered a good basis to answer to the research question, *how to generate and utilize the engagement of online brand advocates in digital content marketing?* Based on the research results this study concludes that the engagement of online brand advocacy can be generated and utilize through its drivers and digital content marketing elements. The most important drivers of online brand advocacy showed to be customer engagement and its drivers, customer-brand relationship quality, loyalty, trust and brand identification. Involvement and affective commitment were also visible but as linked to other drivers and therefore not discussed as separate constructs.

The most significant elements of digital content marketing when utilizing online brand advocates were value and experience formulation, brand communication, awareness and social aspect of the brand. These elements varied a little bit from the theoretical ones. Brand awareness was experienced so impactful among interviewees and therefore it is seen as distinct from brand communication. Also co-creation of community was not greatly supported by empirical results however it was experienced and identified as sociality of the brand. Nevertheless in the future social aspect of the brand might cultivate into brand community.

Figure 6 presents modified theoretical framework, which has been revised after empirical research results. Bolded concepts were supported by the empirical research and italic ones were added to the framework based on the empirical results. Non-bolded drivers and elements on the other hand are not supported by empirical results. Further the dashed boxes represent same meaning as in theoretical part of the study: they are importantly linked to the subject but are not as vital for the phenomenon as black boxed ones.



**Figure 6.** Revised theoretical framework.

As a conclusion, the best way to generate and utilize the online brand advocates is to leverage and facilitate their engagement. This can be done through the customer engagement drivers and other drivers of online brand advocacy to support the engagement. Customer characteristics and goals with receptiveness towards the brand showed to be one of the most important factors of engagement. Customer engagement, loyalty and customer –brand relationship quality forms a good basis to the phenomenon however they require also trust and brand identification in order to generate online brand advocacy to the fullest.

Online brand advocates can then furthermore be generated into digital content marketing of the company by providing clear value and good content through interactive brand communication, enabling social aspects inside the brand and provide some kind of experiences to the advocates as well. With personal, transparent and trustworthy communication online brand advocates can easily relate to the brand and further advocate the brand even more to existing and new customers. The research results showed that online brand advocates themselves also understand the value of their advocating. Most importantly all of this requires trust both on drivers side whereas in digital content marketing elements side.

## 6.2. Theoretical contributions and implications

The conceptual discussion of this study sheds light into the definition of customer engagement. Theoretical discussion concludes the most important definitions of customer engagement and links it to brand advocacy. Further this discussion also implicates that customer engagement and brand advocacy has similar kinds of theoretical backgrounds, which provides good basis to research the online brand advocacy phenomenon.

Furthermore this study implicates that among high customer engagement and loyalty, also customer-brand relationship quality on high level has a significant role when segmenting online brand advocates among customers. This provides new insight on segmentation, targeting and positioning strategies of customers, since among active customers also enthusiastic brand advocates can be identified and positioned as a separate and significant group. This study further implicates that over activists, brand advocates should be the most sought after customer segment. Moreover this study identifies features such as customer receptiveness and altruism as parts of customer engagement and brand advocacy which previous literature had not yet implicated. Based on the findings of this study, this research also implicates that brand advocacy is larger than engagement and loyalty because of special customer-brand relationship it builds.

Theoretically also relevant is linking the constructs of online brand advocacy and digital content marketing. Previous literature has mainly discussed about these constructs as separate without finding links between them or presenting how online brand advocacy could be used in digital content marketing as well. Building this linkage is one important implication of this study. In addition, awareness and relevance of sociality over community were something previous literature has not mentioned as significant elements of digital content marketing, but were relevant findings in this research and gained more insight into the subject.

However it should be remembered that these theoretical conclusions are based only for one particular case and environment. It might be that in other context drivers of advocacy and the elements of digital content marketing might vary.

### 6.3. Managerial implications

The research clearly claims that the positive consequences of customer engagement and online brand advocacy are well-known, however the understanding of the concepts lacks a consensus and companies are not applying the information into practice with full potential. In wellness business, the competition is dynamic and constantly ongoing. The customers are always looking ways to improve their wellbeing, and therefore the wellness companies should emphasize and implement the customer engagement process in online environment even more. Therefore the understanding of the online customer engagement drivers is vital. This study identified these drivers in order to help managers to evaluate and react to their brand performance.

By right and ever-changing engagement tools, such as social media and web analytic tools, wellness companies could identify, evaluate and react better to their customers needs. Furthermore re-segmentation could be a key to engage customer better and to keep in the competition. For this reason this study provides managers better tools to understand all online advocacy drivers. However even though the drivers would be identified and reacted, the phenomenon is not utilized if companies do not leverage it into their marketing. In case of online brand advocacy digital content marketing elements are the key to better performing brand. The advantage of having online brand advocates vanishes if the needs of advocates are not heard content wise. Therefore the companies should also gain better awareness about experiences, value and social aspects their brand can offer together with online brand advocates. Further brand communication should be informal and gain awareness to and through advocates as well.

In the case of Yoogaia the company has managed to build a good basis for its customers to become brand advocates. The empirical research also showed that the phenomenon does exist in this company as CMO of Yoogaia assumed as well. However brand communication and digital content marketing is more as company driven than customer driven at the moment, which might have effect on the use of advocates.

For the two challenges of 1) how to get the most loyal and elderly customers to become Yoogaia online brand advocates and 2) how to get the minority of younger customers to be more active and to recommend the brand as online brand advocates to other younger target group, this study provided more insight into. To get new online brand advocates from the elderly part of the target group all drivers of the phenomenon should be

supported from their point of view. This might mean that the brand needs to go outside of online environment with existing online brand advocates to activate the other customers as well. For activating younger target group the elements of digital content marketing are more important, meaning providing right and personal content with good awareness so that online brand advocacy will leverage naturally.

All together, this study provides managers tools to understand the whole process from engaging online brand advocates to generating and utilizing them in digital content marketing of the brand. As mentioned before in digital content marketing the data used might not be used as efficiently as it could be. This study showed that for example using content marketing frequently might not be as relevant as though, rather emphasis on awareness should be built. It also sheds light into online brand advocacy phenomenon itself. The framework can further be modified depending on the industry and environment in question. Moreover this study helps companies to identify and leverage the full potential of their advocates.

#### 6.4. Limitations of the study

This study was conducted in Finnish culture and context, which naturally affects to the results. For example trust is really appreciated feature in Finland and might therefore be emphasized in the results. Moreover the results of this study cannot be generalized to other environments without further research. Further the methodology represents qualitative approach, which itself has faced criticism about lack of generalization, as an example. This research is empirically based on one case study, and therefore it is limited to one business strategy and industry as well. The implications of this research might be applicable to other industries as well, but it would need further research to be made.

The perspective of customer engagement and brand advocacy phenomenon are purely on marketing strategy, and therefore behavioral and psychological perspectives of the phenomenon are less discussed. Further this study proposes that brand advocacy is larger construct than customer engagement and loyalty, which also defines the research. Concluded by this, also the digital content marketing discussion is linked to marketing approach, not taking technical aspect into wide consideration.

Furthermore, in this study the concept of customer, over consumer, is applied when discussing about the customer engagement and customer brand advocacy. The terms

consumer and customer are used parallel in the previous literature of this specific field of engagement and therefore this study defines these concepts as equal. This is something to bear in mind when evaluating the discussion of this research.

Also the criterion of choosing interviewees to the research needs to have closer evaluation when concerning other brands and industries. As mentioned, the criteria of customer activeness towards the brand might not be the most relevant indicator of online brand advocacy. In order to identify online brand advocates even better in the future, the criterion should concern more receptiveness and engagement factors instead. Furthermore all the interviewees of this research were women, which might have affected the end result of the research as well since women are more communal focused than men (Van Doorn 2010). In addition to these limitations, also external limitations such as access to resources and time limit are considered as limitations of the study.

#### 6.5. Implications for future research

This study aimed to shed light into online brand advocacy phenomenon and to its nature, role and features in digital content marketing. Since the study concerns only one case context, it would be highly recommended to test the theoretical framework and results in other context as well. For example, as awareness and social aspect were added to the research based on empirical findings, future research would be needed to prove the significance of them in other case as well.

The research results brought out the question, does brand advocate need to be active user of the brand. Some of the interviewees were advocates even though they did not actively use the brand. This study put customer receptiveness ahead of activeness however this would need more careful research to be made in order to evaluate it more profoundly.

Furthermore usually advocating has been considered as a C2C interaction, however the empirical results of this research indicated that advocating could also be done between brand and customer. Therefore future research could concentrate on advocating that happens between different parties and compare these drivers of advocating to find differences and similarities between. This way even more insight to online brand advocacy could be achieved.

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**APPENDIX 1.** Interview guide with the chief marketing officer of Yoogaia

**THEME 1: MARKETING**

How is the marketing managed in Yoogaia?

What are the main marketing channels used? What is the role of online?

Do you have own content strategy for Yoogaia?

**THEME 2: CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIPS**

What is the role of customers in the marketing of Yoogaia?

How do you see the role of C2C communication? Do you track and follow it somehow?

How active are your customers?

**THEME 3: ENGAGEMENT, LOYALTY & COMMUNITY**

Do you think that you have engaged and loyal customers?

Have you noticed any community features among your customers or have you tried to create a community around Yoogaia brand?

**THEME 4: ONLINE BRAND ADVOCACY**

Is there any sight of online brand advocacy in Yoogaia?

How do you see the online brand advocacy occurs?

**APPENDIX 2.** Interview guide for Yoogaia customers.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Could you tell about your yoga history and how did you find Yoogaia?  
How long have you been customer of Yoogaia?

**THEME 1: ENGAGEMENT, LOYALTY & CUSTOMER-BRAND  
RELATIONSHIP QUALITY**

How often you use the service and why?  
Would you replace Yoogaia as a service to another wellness service easily? Why?  
Have you achieved your own goals through Yoogaia?  
Why you use the service? / Why you have remained as a customer?

**THEME 2: BRAND IDENTIFICATION & TRUST**

Describe how you see exercising and wellness as a part of your life? Yoogaia's part?  
How Yoogaia differs from other exercising formats you have used / are using?  
Have you gained some benefits or new experiences while using Yoogaia?  
Has the brand fulfilled your expectations? Why? Why not?

**THEME 3: ONLINE BRAND ADVOCACY**

Have you recommended Yoogaia? Why? *How?* To whom?

**THEME 4: DIGITAL CONTENT MARKETING**

How do you interact/communicate with the company?  
How do you see the quality of the marketing content in your opinion?  
Tell how you would develop Yoogaia's brand communication towards its customers?  
Do you find communal aspects among Yoogaia and its customers?  
Do you have any wishes or improvement ideas to Yoogaia?

**At the end, are there any issues that you would like to discuss more or some points that didn't raise from the conversation? Thank you for your time!**

**APPENDIX 3.** Background information of Yoogaia customers interviewed.

All interviewees were women.

<b>Interviewee number</b>	<b>Interview point of time</b>	<b>Time of the interview</b>	<b>Description about advocate</b>
<b>Interviewee 1</b>	October 2014	30min phone	Pensioner, have used Yoogaia for one year, uses the service 4-5 times a week.
<b>Interviewee 2</b>	October 2014	35min phone	Student, have used Yoogaia for 3 months, uses the service 1-4 times a week, has changed gym to Yoogaia.
<b>Interviewee 3</b>	October 2014	51 min face-to-face	Office worker, shareholder of Yoogaia through crowd funding, calls herself as non-super yogi, does not use Yoogaia actively.
<b>Interviewee 4</b>	October 2014	42min phone	Housewife, mother of two small children, has used Yoogaia for a year, exercises only via Yoogaia.
<b>Interviewee 5</b>	October 2014	28min phone	Housewife, mother of a baby, has used Yoogaia for a year, Yoogaia enables yoga classes for her after two years cap.
<b>Interviewee 6</b>	November 2014	50min face-to-face	Office worker, does not use Yoogaia continuously because there is no single payment anymore, yoga has helped to spine problems.

<b>Interviewee 7</b>	November 2014	44min face-to-face	Student, has used Yoogaia for 4 months, but has known Yoogaia for longer time, exercise mainly at home via Yoogaia.
<b>Interviewee 8</b>	November 2014	54 min face-to-face	Busy housewife, has exercised before Yoogaia through online videos. Is really excited about startups.
<b>Interviewee 9</b>	November 2014	29min phone	Student, has used for 8 months, says she is not good in sports which is why likes to exercise at home.
<b>Interviewee 10</b>	November 2014	55min face-to-face	Office worker, calls herself as an extroverted social media advocate, loves web technologies, Yoogaia supports well her other hobby. Writes blog.
<b>Interviewee 11</b>	November 2014	40min phone	Researcher, has had problems with neck and spine, Yoogaia has provided help, does sports a lot. Loves home exercising.
<b>Interviewee 12</b>	November 2014	45min face-to-face	Doctor, does not use Yoogaia actively, has times when uses it several times in a week.
<b>Interviewee 13</b>	November 2014	40 min face-to-face	Consultant, has used Yoogaia for 2 months. Travels a lot.