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**Perceptions of Marketing Specialists on the  
Implementation of Omnichannel Marketing  
Strategies in the Finnish Pharmaceutical Industry**

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**TIIVISTELMÄ:**

Nykyisin yritysten asiakkaat toimialasta riippumatta odottavat yhtenäisiä ja saumattomia asiakaskokemuksia, koostuen useista eri kanavista ja kommunikaation muodoista yrityksen ja asiakkaan välillä. Kyseistä kokonaisuutta kuvaa omnikanavaisuus, mukaan lukien sekä online-että offline-kanavat. Omnikanavaisella markkinoinnilla puolestaan tarkoitetaan edellistä asetelmaa, keskittyen nimensä mukaisesti yrityksen markkinointikanaviin ja niiden yhtenäistämiseen. Vaikka yritykset ovat yhä enenevässä määrin omaksuneet omnikanavaisen markkinoinnin osaksi toimintaansa, hyödynnetään sen tuomia mahdollisuuksia lääkealan yrityksissä vielä suhteellisen niukasti verrattuna moneen muuhun toimialaan. Tästä johdettuna tämän tutkielman tavoitteena on ollut selvittää lääkeyritysten markkinointiasiantuntijoiden kokemuksia omnikanavaisten markkinointistrategioiden soveltamisesta lääkealan yrityksissä Suomessa. Tutkielma toteutettiin laadullisena tutkimuksena ja siihen osallistui markkinoinnin asiantuntijoita lääkealan yrityksistä Suomessa. Haastateltavia oli yhteensä neljä henkilöä kolmesta eri Suomessa toimivasta lääkealan yrityksestä. Lisäksi tutkimus oli rajattu koskemaan reseptilääkkeiden markkinointia, jättäen ulkopuolelle kuluttajiin kohdistettavan, ilman reseptiä saatavien lääkevalmisteiden markkinoinnin. Haastattelut toteutettiin puolistrukturoidun haastattelumuodon avulla, mahdollistaen samalla kysymysten mukauttamisen haastattelukohtaisesti tilanteeseen ja haastateltavan aihekohtaiseen tuntemukseen sopivaksi. Keskeisten löydösten mukaan omnikanavainen markkinointi Suomessa toimivissa lääkeryrityksissä on globaalien trendien mukaisesti kasvussa ja esimerkiksi digitaalisen markkinoinnin positioiden määrän on huomattu kasvaneen yrityksissä viime vuosina. Toisaalta omnikanavaisen markkinoinnin omaksumiseen liittyviä tunnistettuja hidastavia tekijöitä Suomessa toimivissa lääkealan yrityksissä on esimerkiksi tehokkaiden omnikanavaisen markkinoinnin strategioiden suunnittelussa tarvittavan datan puute markkinan pienestä koosta ja asiakkaiden, lääkäreiden, suhteellisesta määrästä johtuen. Lisäksi omnikanavaisten markkinointistrategioiden omaksumista hidastaviksi tekijöiksi tunnistettiin asianmukaisten digitaalisten työkalujen ja alustojen puute sekä perinteisiä markkinointikanavia korostavat vallitsevat asenteet Suomessa toimivien lääkeyritysten työntekijöiden keskuudessa. Toimialakohtaisista rajoituksista omnikanavaisen markkinoinnin implementointiin tunnistettiin vaikuttavan merkittävimmin tarkasti rajattu sallittujen markkinointikanavien valikoima koskien reseptilääkkeitä sekä erityisesti reseptilääkkeistä tietoa sisältäviä digitaalisia markkinointikanavia koskeva vaatimus salanasuojauksesta. Toisaalta on ennakoitu, että myös lääkealalla tekoälyllä tulee lähivuosina olemaan ennennäkemättömän merkittävä vaikutus niin omnikanavaisten markkinointistrategioiden integroinnissa osaksi lääkeyritysten liiketoimintaa kuin sen hyödyntämisessä toimialan markkinoinnissa laajemminkin.

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**AVANSANAT:** Omnichannel, Omnichannel marketing, Pharmaceutical marketing, Pharmaceutical industry

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background of the Study

The last decade has enabled significant unforeseen opportunities for the pharmaceutical industry in terms of targeting marketing operations to healthcare professionals. On the other hand, the growing number of new tools has also made it complex to implement these tools effectively. Therefore, companies are forced to align the usage of traditional key activities together with omnichannel marketing, while onboarding new tools. As omnichannel approach, which briefly explained consists of various pathways such as print advertisements, direct mail and in-person-visits for example, has taken over the pharmaceutical industry in the recent years, is directing pharmaceutical companies towards integrated marketing channels and therefore forcing them to place customer experience as the center of their attention. The shift from a more traditional multichannel approach, where marketers mass-produce messages to as many standard channels as possible, has strongly moved towards an actual omnichannel concept. These days, marketers should do their best to enable the availability of relevant content across all the active channels, and by doing so, they ensure that customers will seamlessly find the information they are looking for, despite the channel they prefer. Once the harmonization of both physical and digital worlds is done effectively, it will enhance the engagement between pharmaceutical companies and their customers as a result. Having multiple different marketing channels in use simultaneously is desirable, but it may still cause challenges to companies in terms of the agility of marketing operations, if the processes are not managed effectively. Finally, as Paul Dixey, Multichannel Lead at Novartis UK, highlighted, the importance of aligning new technologies and innovations in line together with business goals is crucial in order to deliver more efficient and valuable experiences to healthcare professionals and further, their patients. (Quilici, 2020, pp. 19-21).

Pharmaceutical companies dedicate substantial time and financial efforts in the development of marketing strategies and campaigns to increase the demand of their brands and products. Furthermore, previously gathered data shows that healthcare professionals engaged to the brand story as a whole, are also more likely to convert. Despite the previous, majority of marketing campaigns and models measuring the engagement, still focus on volume and efficacy instead of profundity and excellence. While pharmaceutical companies transition from utilizing multiple channels simultaneously to omnichannel approach, it is also crucial to evaluate how to develop and construct the campaigns, and through that to be able to more efficiently measure and maximize the benefits gained from the gathered engagement data. Omnichannel marketing leverages data as well as channel variance to build a brand story, therefore also responding to customers' expectations more efficiently. Recognizing and identifying the way healthcare professionals interact at each possible touchpoint they might have with the company, as well as at which level it is done, indicates the value of providing variance in channels. Thus, whereas some healthcare professionals prefer emails, others desire printed materials, whilst the rest are committed to consuming video and website content. (Carickhoff, 2021, p. 7).

When it comes to previous research within the field of omnichannel marketing, Nguyen et. al (2022) introduce the theme to have grown significantly after COVID-19, specifically due to the rapid changes in customer behavior during that time. Therefore, a significant number of omnichannel marketing research focus on the definitions as well as literature development, more in detail regarding omnichannel retailing, derived from the need to explore the field of retail due to the transformation in customer behavior. Moreover, previous studies have dealt with sub-topics including customer experience, informational challenges, marketing communication as well as consumer behavior. (Nguyen et al., pp. 232-234).

On the other hand, studies of pharmaceutical companies performing marketing activities have been conducted, especially from the perspective of evaluating the relationship

between marketing activities and prescription behavior of healthcare professionals. For example, Hailu et. al (2021, p. 1), conducted a study including physicians working in hospitals in Ethiopia targeted with marketing mix strategies by pharmaceutical companies, and further the impact on their prescription behavior. Also, Aqif & Mumtaz (2023, p. 78) executed a research in which they seek to explore the influence of pharmaceutical marketing, including various marketing techniques such as advertisements and direct marketing, on physicians' prescription behavior, while considering the ethical perspective of this relationship. Additionally, Al Tabbah et. al (2022, p. 1), conducted a study, which aims to evaluate how physicians located in Jordan perceive the influence of the four marketing mix strategies, including product, price, place and promotion, on their prescription behavior.

Based on the studies introduced above, a conclusion can be derived that it would be both beneficial and necessary to view pharmaceutical companies performing marketing activities, especially omnichannel marketing, from within, focusing on the experiences of marketing specialists in pharmaceutical companies implementing these activities, instead of concentrating on the targets, physicians, being influenced by these activities.

## **1.2 Research Question, Objectives and Delimitations**

The main research question of this study is:

- *How marketing specialists perceive the implementation of omnichannel marketing strategies within the pharmaceutical industry in Finland?*

Further, research objectives were defined in alignment with the research question. The first objective is:

1. To define omnichannel marketing and evaluate the challenges and advantages of different omnichannel marketing strategies.

Furthermore, this involves concentrating on research and theories in relevant areas such as strategies to enhance the effectiveness of omnichannel marketing and the integration process of implementing omnichannel marketing strategies.

The second research objective is:

2. To analyze the specific features of pharmaceutical marketing in Finland.

It is done by first defining a medicine and a medicinal product, explaining the special characteristics of pharmaceutical marketing, introducing different independent entities monitoring pharmaceutical marketing operations, further deepening into limitations set for marketing operations as well as channels of prescription medicines in Finland.

The third research objective is:

3. To explore how pharmaceutical companies in Finland perceive the implementation of an omnichannel marketing strategy.

This is done by interviewing marketeers from pharmaceutical companies operating in Finland, holding different roles in marketing units with product portfolios consisting of prescription medicines.

To keep the length of this study within the limits of a master's thesis as well as its structure clear and easy to follow, some delimitations are made. More in detail, the study focuses on utilizing omnichannel marketing strategies, further integrating various marketing channels into one omnichannel strategy, to enable pharmaceutical companies to perform efficient marketing operations for prescription medicines, specifically in Finland. Therefore, self-medication products sold without a prescription and further, marketing operations targeted to consumers are excluded from the study. Thus, the interviews executed as a part of this study included respondents only from pharmaceutical companies

operating in Finland, holding different roles in marketing units with product portfolios consisting of prescription medicines, therefore targeting their marketing operations to healthcare professionals only.

### **1.3 Structure of the Study**

The structure of this thesis aims to be consistent to make it easy for the reader to follow. Moreover, the structure of the study is divided into five main chapters. In the first chapter, the background of the study is built by introducing the topic of the thesis, further defining the research question and objectives as well as specifying delimitations. In addition, the structure of the thesis is introduced in chapter one.

The second main chapter of the thesis is the theoretical part of the study, first defining the concept of omnichannel marketing, then continuing with introducing various omnichannel marketing strategies, further discussing optional ways for implementing the integration process of moving from multichannel to an omnichannel marketing strategy within an organization. Additionally, in the second main chapter of the study various identified challenges related to integrating an omnichannel marketing strategy are introduced. On the other hand, the advantages gained through adopting an omnichannel marketing strategy are presented.

The third chapter focuses on the methodology of the study. More in detail, qualitative research method is introduced as this study was conducted by utilizing qualitative research strategy, aiming to provide context specific insights in terms of omnichannel marketing within pharmaceutical industry, specifically in Finland. Thus, the data for this master's thesis was collected by utilizing a qualitative research approach. Moreover, this chapter covers both the data collection, which consisted of four semi-structured interviews, as well as explaining the data analysis process included as a part of the study. Furthermore, the data gathered through the executed interviews was analyzed by utilizing thematic analysis.

In the fourth chapter of the thesis, the empirical part of the study is discussed. Also, the fourth chapter provides a comprehensive introduction of the pharmaceutical industry in Finland based on secondary data sources. To support the secondary data, findings and evidence from semi-structured interviews are presented from the perspective of companies the respondents are employed at. Also, the findings are analyzed in relation to the research question and theoretical framework.

Finally, in the fifth chapter of the thesis, updated framework of the study, theoretical contributions, managerial implications that are intended to offer practical advice for marketing specialists, as well as limitations and suggestions for future research are discussed.

## **2 Omnichannel Marketing**

This chapter covers the theoretical part of the study, first defining the concept of omnichannel marketing, then continuing with introducing various omnichannel marketing strategies, further discussing optional ways for implementing the integration process of moving from multichannel to omnichannel marketing strategy within an organization. Additionally, various identified challenges related to integrating an omnichannel marketing strategy are introduced. Finally, the advantages gained through adopting an omnichannel marketing strategy are presented.

### **2.1 Omnichannel Marketing Strategies**

Omnichannel marketing, as a term, can be summarized as a way of integrating various marketing channels to deliver a seamless and unified customer experience. In order to be able to successfully implement omnichannel marketing as a part of daily operations, organizations should focus on the following key areas of the strategy: aligning goals and strategies throughout various channels, providing a seamless experience across both online and offline platforms and touchpoints as well as harmonizing efforts on all the different channels in use in order to enhance customer commitment (Kotler et al., 2016, p. 140). In addition, Berman & Thelen (2018, p. 600) specify that in omnichannel marketing, customers have the flexibility to use various combinations of channels and devices throughout the customer journey, at each stage of it.

In the recent years, Cui et al. (2021, p. 104) were the first to officially introduce omnichannel marketing as a concept of synergistic management of all possible touchpoints as well as channels, including both internal and external ones. More in detail, this approach acknowledges that the customer experience across channels, along with activities such as marketing mix and marketing communications in forms of owned, paid and earned, for example, are all optimized from perspectives of both the company and its customers.

Omnichannel marketing has become a crucial concept especially in the retail and service business fields, fueled by the growing complexity of customer behavior and the need for companies to understand and track their behavior, to enable a seamless and integrated customer experience throughout each channel (Verhoef et al., 2015, p. 176). To build an effective omnichannel strategy, marketers should view the customer journey on a more detailed level to be able to identify all the potential touchpoints as well as channels. Therefore, considering all the possible combinations and mixes of single channels and touchpoints, it is crucial to identify the most preferred and effective ones and finally, to focus on aligning and uniting those selected ones (Kotler et al., 2016, p. 145).

## **2.2 Building an Omnichannel Strategy**

According to Mansurali et al. (2024, p. 616), companies continuously face challenges adapting new and keeping their existing marketing strategies agile to meet the rapidly changing needs as well as demands of customers. Moreover, in the review article they state that in recent years omnichannel marketing has become a significant paradigm. Mansurali et al. (2024, p. 632) divided different omnichannel marketing strategies into three categories as follows: channel-specific strategies, technology-centric strategies and lastly, customer-centric strategies.

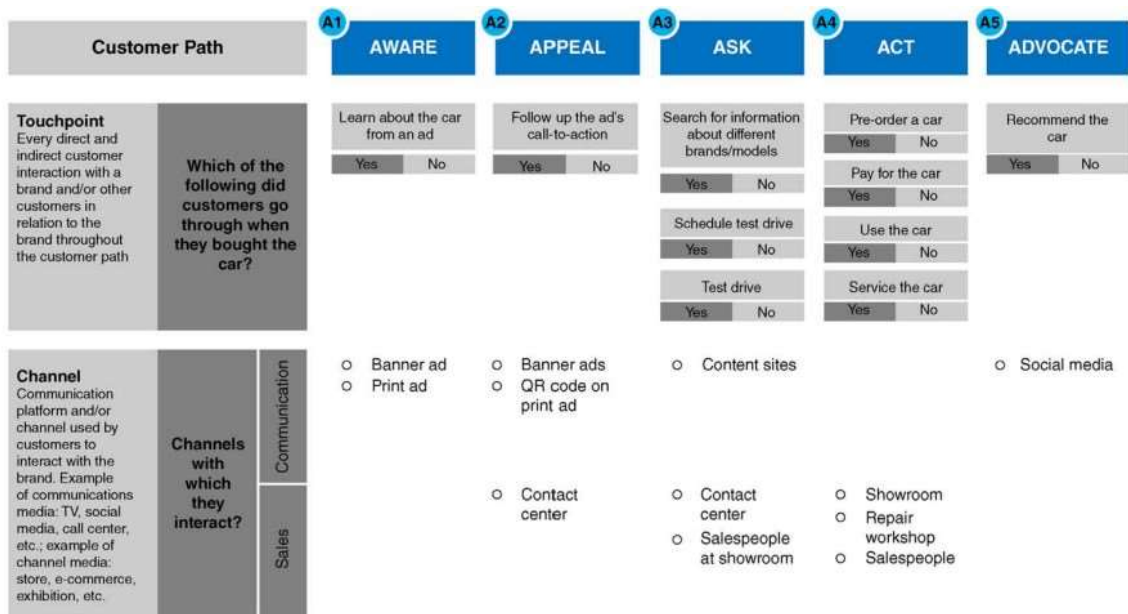
For example, Mansurali et al. (2024, p. 628) introduced a channel-specific strategy focusing on integration, visibility and internet accessibility where more in detail advanced distribution centers are the main drivers for customer analytics enablers while also enhancing customer engagement and providing a comprehensive and seamless experience for the customer. Another way of implementing an omnichannel marketing strategy is to measure the performance of individual channels, and based on the results, then remove the underperforming channels regularly and replace them with more efficient ones, if needed (Robertshaw, 2017, p. 128). Despite that most of the customers expect satisfaction and fulfillment from brand experiences, they also give high value to the direct benefits they receive through goods or services purchased and therefore, marketers should divide the marketing efforts somewhat equally between omnichannel activities,

customer needs and experiences as well as brand objectives (Zhang et al., 2018, p. 1). On the other hand, product delivery is vital for creating successful e-commerce activities as high-quality service across channels throughout the customer journey leads more likely to customer satisfaction, better sales results while also giving justification for the customer to pay more for superior service and therefore, direct customer insights contribute to marketing success (Colla & Lapoule, 2012, pp. 858-861). In addition, nowadays omnichannel strategies can be implemented through technologies such as QR codes, which facilitate the integration across channels and makes it easier for customers to switch from channel to another, from printed marketing material to a website online, for example (Rajaiah, 2017, pp. 12-13).

No technology or specific strategy does automatically guarantee success in omnichannel marketing. It depends on the situation whether a simplified strategy would be preferable rather than utilizing completely new technology, for example, as a part of omnichannel strategy implementation. Sometimes applying high quality technology inventions to maximize the coverage of a marketing campaign may turn against itself, as the active messaging and communication may turn into a spam in the eyes of customers. Nevertheless, technology is one of the key factors in reaching success in omnichannel marketing. Moreover, tracking customers and collecting preferences of them as users within and across channels is crucial, since the company can later make strategic decisions based on customers' activity. In the current digital era, the importance of mobile optimization should be in the focus of companies reaching customers, since it enables them to engage with the brand wherever and whenever. (Compton, 2014, pp. 25-28).

As introduced previously, the process of building an omnichannel strategy begins with mapping all potential touchpoints and channels. More specifically, a single touchpoint can be, for example, either a direct or an indirect interaction between the brand and its customer occurring online or offline. Additionally, interactions between the brand and/or other customers are also considered as touchpoints, if they are related to the brand along the customer journey. Identifying the touchpoints and channels throughout

the customer path can be done by implementing the “five A’s”. More precisely, the term stands for five different stages of a customer path, the first one being “aware”, continuing with “appeal”, “ask” and “act”, finally completed with “advocate”. (Kotler et al., 2016, p. 146).



**Picture 1.** Mapping Touchpoints and Channels across the Customer Path (Kotler et al., 2016, p. 146)

As visualized above in Picture 1, during the aware stage, touchpoints between the customer and brand include discovering and learning about a product while on the other hand, during the act stage, touchpoints are classified as concrete actions such as purchasing, using as well as servicing the good.

Despite the channel being an online or offline channel, utilized by the customer, it acts as a way of interaction between the customer and the brand. Moreover, there are two kinds of channels: communication channels, mainly forwarding information, such as social media and content websites, for example. Additionally, there are sales channels, described as transaction facilitators, examples including sales forces, e-commerce websites

and sales exhibitions. Finally, depending on the situation and more specifically the structure of the organization, it can sometimes be unclear defining the two different types of channels and therefore these can occasionally be used together in alignment as one. Also, sometimes a touchpoint might consist of more than one single channel. More in detail, at some stages of the customer journey, the person might learn about a product from various sources such as print advertisements, online banners as well as sales representatives all at once. On the other hand, a channel can serve multiple touchpoints, too. Despite the numerous positive sides of utilizing multiple channels and therefore generating a larger number of touchpoints, marketers should also be aware of the situation not only increasing market coverage but also adding complexity into designing a consistent omnichannel marketing strategy. Hence, they should emphasize the balance between market coverage and clarity in planning their strategy for implementing omnichannel marketing operations. (Kotler et al., 2016, pp. 145-147).

All the different end results, with all possible touchpoints considered that any customer might end up choosing throughout the customer journey, in a certain order, is described as a customer-path scenario. In detail, a concrete example could be a customer first exploring a content website, where they end up from clicking a banner ad on another website. Once landed on the actual content website, landing page, the customer decides to book a test drive after becoming convinced by the comprehensive information they learned about the car while exploring the content page. Finally, the customer seals the purchase decision by buying the car after a unified and smooth customer experience, thus far. On the other hand, another possible way the customer might end up purchasing the car, is finding their way to the content website by first seeing an advertisement on television, then searching the car from internet and finally, ending up on the same content page as in the first example case. Since there most likely is numerous touchpoints and as many different end results for a single customer journey, companies should be focusing their resources on the most effective and preferred channels as well as touchpoints amongst the customers to generate a seamless customer-friendly experience.

Once the most crucial touchpoints have been identified, the next and final step is to assess as well as enhance the main channels in the previously highlighted touchpoints. These intersections between the top touchpoints and channels are the factors that will indicate whether the omnichannel strategy will be successful or not. Therefore, companies should have the willingness to invest extra financial resources to these key factors. Moreover, to be able to launch a successful omnichannel strategy and implement it as a part of daily practices, companies should also form such organizational structure that it would enable implementing the strategy in practice the way it was first created on a theoretical level. More in detail, the implementation part also includes breaking barriers between different functions and channels to be able to work together seamlessly in the best way possible, delivering an optimal result in the form of benefiting the customer to the maximum, making them satisfied while also creating value as well as customer loyalty. Usually, the organizations that manage to successfully align their omnichannel strategy with concrete actions, are the ones where various channel teams do not really exist but have rather been blended and unified into either one or a few smaller units. The previous also enables an effortless allocation of certain crucial resources, such as budgets and shared goals, to be transferred seamlessly within the organization, across borders. By following the previously introduced steps along the way of building an omnichannel strategy and finally, putting it into practice, also the objective becomes unified which is to create the top tier customer experience along with reaching the maximum sales results from omnichannel marketing. (Kotler et al., 2016, pp. 147-149).

### **2.3 From Multichannel to Omnichannel – the Integration of Channels**

When it comes to integrating channels and moving from multichannel marketing strategy to omnichannel marketing strategy, Berman & Thelen (2018, p. 605) have identified several reasons that keep organizations away from switching to an omnichannel marketing strategy as follows: companies tend to lack a comprehensive view of customers across channels, lack of channel management and utilizing metrics and incentives that are not aligned, for example.

As next steps to overcome the previously introduced challenges, Berman & Thelen (2018, p. 606) suggest starting with identifying the current level of channel integration within the organization, enabling the marketing function to recognize the existing gaps separating the current stage and the preferred stage of channel integration. By doing the identification of these gaps, it further enables the organization to first develop required plans for filling these gaps and then perform the needed actions to close these gaps and enhance the level of channel integration.

The second step towards channel integration is to evaluate the omnichannel marketing capability of the company. More in detail, the evaluation can be done by following criteria such as the degree to which customers are placed in the focus of the experience and consistent pricing available for customers across channels. In addition, an important criterion is the ability of the company to engage technology as a part of collecting and further analyzing data from the channels to have a comprehensive overall view of the customers and their customer profiles including the needs and expectations they have for the company. (Berman & Thelen, 2018, p. 605).

After evaluating the omnichannel marketing capability follow channel integration activities, which can either be originated by the customer or led by the organization. An example of a customer originated activity includes searching and being able to find the identical price of a certain product on a website and a mobile application. Examples of organization led activities include customer, pricing as well as data integration throughout and across the channels. (Berman & Thelen, 2018, p. 605).

Another step in the process of adopting an omnichannel marketing strategy is to utilize a multistage model for channel integration. It is summarized as a process including four separate steps switching from multichannel to omnichannel. The model supports the idea of not aiming to move directly from the lowest level of channel integration to the highest but instead moving forward level by level. By making the change step by step, it enables the organization to focus and implement the most important activities at a time,

moving forward with other activities as the transition progresses towards a higher level of channel integration. (Berman & Thelen, 2018, p. 606).

Compton (2014, pp. 25-28) advises organizations to start small, when familiarizing and adapting to omnichannel marketing as it may feel complex and overwhelming at first. The priority to start with is to understand the way each individual responds to brand communication through the various channels in use. Also, redirecting the focus and effort from the most emphasized channel to other channels as well as allocating the marketing efforts somewhat equally between different marketing channels, helps the organization to reach the goal of omnichannel marketing: to align and unite all the active channels. It is recommended to start with channels the company has the most control over and continue progressively in reaching the ultimate omnichannel marketing entirety.

Once approaching omnichannel marketing, a strategy that provides an overview of the vision and clarifies next steps both in theory and in practice, is to utilize the five P's, consisting of purpose, position, personality, promise and finally, proof. Purpose connects the organization internally and aligns with its values, mission and vision. Additionally, positioning differentiates the company from its competitors, whereas promise sums up the story behind the brand. Moreover, personality in this concept stands for the creation of brand identity. Finally, proof in this concept includes all the concrete activities the company does to redeem expectations coming from purpose and promise, for example. (Medical Marketing and Media, 2023, p. 38).

According to Berman & Thelen (2018, p. 606), the organization transitioning from multi-channel to omnichannel marketing is suggested to identify and mitigate obstacles related to channel integration in advance. These include barriers such as siloed marketing organizations for each separate channel, moderate level of consistency across channels and touchpoints, unclarity understanding customers and their customer journeys across and throughout the channels as well as separate goals set for each channel instead of having unified goals.

Once the company closes the decision to integrate their marketing channels, the need to familiarize and motivate customers to utilize a variety of channels comes along with the channel integration decision. That is to concretize as well as enable the customers to benefit from channel integration. In practice, it means that the company encourages and motivates customers to move from channel to channel. Previous research has discussed the topic of whether one marketing channel having a positive impact on a customer can lead them to make a purchase decision on the next channel of customer journey. The described impact is called a marketing cross-effect, which on a practical level means online marketing having an impact on offline channels and vice versa. (Neslin, 2022, pp. 120-123).

Mansurali et al. (2024, pp. 633-634) also support and highlight the importance of channel integration as a part of successful omnichannel marketing. Activities and strategies such as regularly evaluating channel performance, removing underperforming channels, justifying certain marketing and channel decisions on appropriate indicators and data as well as unifying touchpoints occurring both online and offline, are all essential to organizations to succeed in omnichannel marketing integration. The role of implementing technological innovations as a part of overcoming omnichannel integration related challenges, for example QR codes, is continuously increasing. It is due to the essential possibilities on a practical level that they offer to businesses to be able to seamlessly integrate channels. This approach goes hand in hand with the modern digital environment we live in these days, as majority of consumers are familiar with using technology as a part of their daily life.

## **2.4 Advantages and Challenges of Integrating Channels**

The role of unified customer experience is emphasized as an advantage for companies having omnichannel marketing integrated into their daily business. By integrating omnichannel marketing strategies as a part of daily operations, organizations are more likely to have customers interacting with them seamlessly through multiple unified, both

internal and external, channels. In addition, another advantage is enhanced customer value. It can be created by successfully managing a mix of channels, and because of that, the company aligns with their customers' behavior as they search, purchase as well as consume their products and services. Therefore, this enables companies to achieve synergistic management of channels while still performing across and even over channels. Omnichannel marketing operations are also strongly related to increased sales results and customer engagement which is mainly due to the presence of multiple channels enabling customers to make the decision choosing channels individually throughout the customer journey at each touchpoint of it. (Cui et al., 2021, p. 104).

In addition to the advantages introduced in the previous chapter, enhanced customer experience is mentioned as an important factor. Furthermore, it enables organizations to achieve and provide a seamless and coherent experience to their customers across channels, increasing customer satisfaction and loyalty as long term benefits. Additionally, as a result of successful implementation of omnichannel marketing strategies, follow sales growth and reduction of costs. As mentioned previously, decisions based on collected data is mentioned as one of the main advantages, as omnichannel marketing provides companies a way of data collection as well as analysis of customer information simultaneously from multiple channels, therefore enabling them to make decisions based on data and through that, enhance marketing strategies. Organizations can also gain advantage from providing their customers flexibility and comfort through omnichannel marketing, as it allows customers to choose from both online and offline channels they individually prefer. Additionally, omnichannel marketing reduces the dependence of companies on their intermediaries, resulting lower costs and enhanced performance in terms of profitability. Finally, with the help of omnichannel marketing, organizations may even gain previously lost customers back, that being due to previous negative experiences and challenges or dissatisfaction with a single channel, for example. (Mansurali et al., 2024, p. 630).

The main challenges in integrating channels today and in the future, are data access and integration related questions. Companies need information and data in the bigger picture, including all their interactions with each customer, all the way throughout their unique customer journeys. Nevertheless, data is not always easily accessible and further usable, which may be caused by the company structure divided into smaller functions, creating silos and separating the different units even more from each other, causing informational challenges. Another challenge to be considered when integrating an omnichannel marketing strategy is marketing attribution. Moreover, companies should be on track of the impact different touchpoints have on customer behavior and evaluate the return on investment (ROI) of their financial efforts on marketing. On the other hand, omnichannel environment can make the evaluation complicated due to the freedom of customers making individual decisions between the channels, which most likely causes difference comparing customers in responding to marketing operations, thus the results of marketing operations cannot be interpreted as such. Finally, the effectiveness of omnichannel marketing is based on utilizing collected data from all interactions between the organization and its customers. When it comes to data privacy issues, it might concern customers that companies would collect such information about them that they are not willing to share. This is when organizations should clearly define the ethical and respectful way of handling sensitive customer data while benefiting from collecting it. (Cui et al., 2021, pp. 104-106).

Additionally, Compton (2014, pp. 25-28) states that even if companies manage to align their online and offline channels successfully, along comes usually obstacles such as challenges in organizational adaptation, issues related to implemented technology as well as lack of expertise and skills required for the chosen omnichannel strategy. Therefore, preparing the organization in advance and further overcoming these challenges in the best possible way is crucial, or otherwise the situation may give customers inconsistent signals causing lack of trust in the company and a decrease in customer loyalty.

Finally, there are also challenges related to omnichannel marketing such as integration complexity, as combining multiple channels and programs can be difficult. The process of avoiding and overcoming these challenges, successfully aligning different channels and systems requires both financial and human resources as well as technological knowledge and flexibility within the organization to adapt. Also, it may be challenging for companies of smaller scale to switch to omnichannel marketing due to limited financial resources, as well as lacking expertise and time to start utilizing omnichannel marketing. Another challenge found is customer motivation, as it may be challenging to motivate and encourage customers to familiarize themselves with channels, they have no previous experience of. In addition, a major challenge for companies to consider now and in the future is safety and security concerns as customers are more aware of the potential threats that lie in the processes of companies collecting and utilizing customer information, if not done properly. (Mansurali et al., 2024, pp. 630-632).

## **2.5 Summary of the Theoretical Framework**

To contribute to the main research question of how marketing specialists perceive the implementation of omnichannel marketing strategies as well as the first objective, defining omnichannel marketing and evaluating the challenges and advantages of different omnichannel marketing strategies, the theoretical framework for this study was formed. Therefore, the framework was developed utilizing the most relevant theoretical concepts and theories identified by completing a literature review consisting of articles and other publications, books as well as reports within relevant areas. The theoretical framework is summarized in visual form in figure 1 below.

The figure provides an overview of the concept of omnichannel marketing, while visualizing the relationship between the customer and the company. The different elements included in the figure are focusing on explaining the motivators and requirements for building an omnichannel strategy, the implementation process, advantages and challenges of integrating multiple marketing channels considering both perspectives, the customer and the company and finally, industry-specific ethical and regulatory

limitations found, leading to obstacles and challenges in terms of omnichannel utilization, lastly defining the available, allowed marketing channels to build omnichannel strategies around for prescription medicines in Finland.

The theoretical framework, as mentioned above, is built around the concept of omnichannel marketing. Omnichannel marketing, as a term, can be summarized as a way of integrating various marketing channels to deliver a seamless and unified customer experience. In order to be able to successfully implement omnichannel marketing as a part of daily operations, organizations should focus on the following key areas of the strategy: aligning goals and strategies throughout various channels, providing a seamless experience across both online and offline platforms and touchpoints as well as harmonizing efforts on all the different channels in use in order to enhance customer commitment (Kotler et al., 2016, p. 140).

Moreover, the theoretical framework of the study focuses on building an omnichannel strategy including the motivators and requirements, continuing to the implementation, followed by advantages and challenges for both the company and its customers, finally completed with industry-specific, more in detail ethical and regulatory limitations as well as challenges due to those limitations and the marketing channels allowed in promoting prescription medicines in Finland. The framework is presented in visual form in Figure 1 below, supported by key findings from the theoretical part of this study.

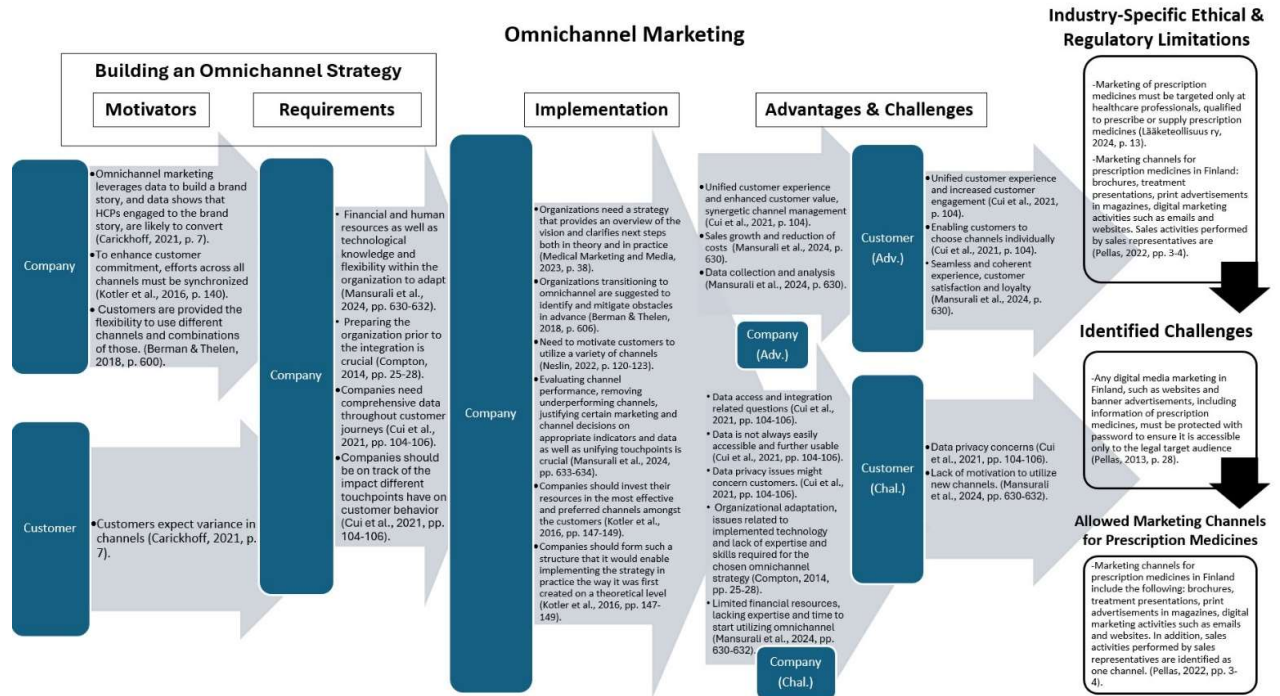


Figure 1. Illustration of the theoretical framework of the study.

### **3 Methodology**

This chapter focuses on the methodology of the study. More in detail, qualitative research method is introduced as this study was conducted by utilizing qualitative research strategy, aiming to provide context specific insights in terms of omnichannel marketing within pharmaceutical industry, specifically in Finland. Thus, the data for this master's thesis was collected by utilizing a qualitative research approach. Moreover, this chapter covers both the data collection, which consisted of four semi-structured interviews, as well as explaining the data analysis process included as a part of the study. Furthermore, the data gathered through the executed interviews was analyzed by utilizing thematic analysis.

#### **3.1 Research Method and Strategy**

As mentioned previously, this study was conducted through qualitative research. When it comes to choosing between qualitative and quantitative research methods, some clear differences between the two approaches can be stated and therefore, the choice of research method be justified.

Firstly, quantitative research depends on gathering numerical data and is based on the quantitative research paradigm overall. The previous includes testing hypotheses as well as theories linked to data, is objective and aims to validation through empirical confirmation by hypotheses together with adherence to universal scientific standards. Furthermore, observations in such studies are conducted under controlled conditions to isolate the causal effects of individual variables. Finally, the quantitative data collected is measured through structured and validated data collection tools. (Johnson, 2019, p. 33).

On the other hand, qualitative research is explanatory in nature as it involves the researcher actively generating and constructing subjective information. Also, it includes hypotheses and is based on grounded theory derived from data collected from the

concrete fieldwork such as completed interviews. In detail, the gathered data is situational, contextual as well as personal and therefore unpredictable. This kind of research explores the breadth and depth of the phenomena in question, to form a deeper understanding of them. When applying qualitative research method, the focus is on wider study groups or individuals in natural settings as through the method the aim is to understand participants' views, meanings as well as perspectives. The qualitative data collected comes in the form of in-depth interviews, participant observations, field notes as well as open-ended questions. Also, in the approach in question, the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection. (Johnson, 2019, p. 33).

Based on the previous definitions, qualitative research method was justified to be used in this study as the results derived are based on detailed explanations formed in words, moreover in the form of non-standardized data, which is further divided into categories (Saunders, 2007, p. 272).

The purpose of this study is to gain a deep understanding of omnichannel marketing from the perspective of marketing specialists in the pharmaceutical industry in Finland. Furthermore, the study originated information that is dependent on context and thus, can be utilized to understand the omnichannel activities as well as further develop them as a result. The research concentrated on the pharmaceutical industry in Finland and was carried out as a qualitative study, including data gathered through semi-structured interviews as well as secondary data consisting of industry-specific information. Furthermore, the sources of secondary data for the study are presented in the next sub-chapter.

### **3.2 Data Collection**

The interviews provided valuable information for the thesis, providing a deep understanding of the research topic on an empirical level. Furthermore, choosing the respondents was done through purposive sampling, also known as judgmental sampling, where the researcher identifies specific traits or characteristics of a target population and then seeks out individuals with those identified characteristics (Johnson, 2019, p. 254). In this

case, the common characteristic was that all respondents held marketing positions in the pharmaceutical sector in Finland.

The respondents were selected from three different companies across the Finnish pharmaceutical industry, broadly representing pharmaceutical companies operating in the country. More specifically, all the companies the respondents are employed at operate within the field of prescription medicines. Additionally, interview requests were sent to six individuals representing three companies, and finally, four people from three different companies agreed to be interviewed. More detailed information about the respondents of this study can be found in Table 1 below.

Furthermore, the respondents received the interview questions together with research notification and privacy notices after agreeing to participate. The previous was done to enable the respondents to familiarize themselves with the content in advance. More in detail, three out of four interviews were conducted on Teams and one face to face. Also, a briefing was held before each interview covering the research aims, the anonymization of responses as well as the request for permission to record and transcribe the interview.

In this study, semi-structured interviews were utilized. Moreover, in semi-structured interviews the researcher prepares a list of themes and questions to address, but these can differ between the interviews held. Furthermore, the previous provides flexibility for the interviewer to ask certain questions in specific interviews and on the other hand, opportunity to pass certain questions depending on the organizational context related to the research topic. Additionally, the order of questions can be adjusted based on the natural progression of the conversation. (Saunders, 2007, p. 312).

Respondent	Gender	Position	Company	Interview duration (minutes)
R1	Female	Digital Specialist	Company A	29:13
R2	Female	Marketing Trainee	Company A	39:36
R3	Male	Marketing Coordinator	Company B	46:10
R4	Female	Omnichannel Engagement Strategist	Company C	27:00
Total:	4		3	142 minutes

**Table 1.** Information table of respondents.

The themes were identified through an abductive approach which is considered beneficial in cases where the research goal is to uncover new insights. More in detail, the method allowed the analysis process to be tied in the theoretical framework while also being adapted along the way based on empirical findings and theoretical insights gathered throughout the study. (Dubois & Gadde, 2002, p. 559).

Moreover, the themes for the interview were set based on the identified research objectives as well as the theoretical framework collected. More specifically, the interviews consisted of questions that were designed to address the most crucial aspects of the research objectives. Also, additional questions were presented, if needed, to ensure the answers to be comprehensive enough. The interview questions have been stated in Appendix 1.

In addition to the semi-structured interviews, secondary data was utilized in this study, since the industry description is introduced as a part of the empirical section of the study.

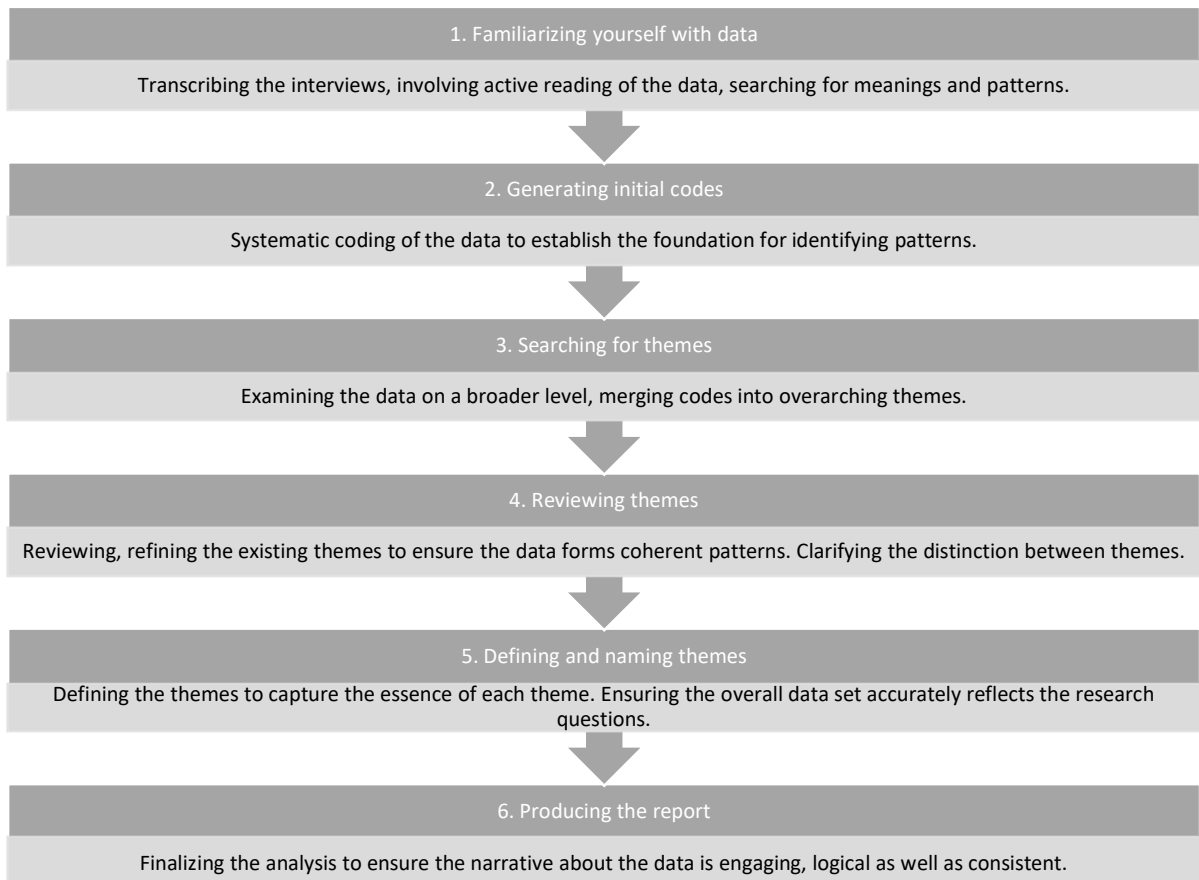
Furthermore, the secondary data consisted of documentary secondary data, which can include sources in various written forms such as notices, minutes of meetings or transcripts of speeches, books, organizations websites, journal as well as magazine articles and newspapers (Saunders, 2007, pp. 248-249). More precisely, the documentary secondary data in this study consisted of organizations websites, journal and magazine articles, as presented in Table 2 below.

Secondary data source	Purpose of use
Fernandez, R. (2022). How Data Shapes the Future of Omnichannel Marketing: More innovation in data collection will help boost omnichannel arsenal.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To introduce the current state and predict the future of omnichannel marketing within pharmaceutical industry.</li> </ul>
Fimea.fi. (2025a). Luokittelu.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To define the classification criteria of a medicinal product.</li> </ul>
Fimea.fi. (2025b). What is a medicine?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To specify the differences between various types of medicinal products.</li> </ul>
Finlex, Lääkelaki 395/1987.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To introduce the role of Finnish Medicines Act in maintaining the safety of medicinal products in terms of safe and proper use.</li> </ul>
Hartung, S., & Ramadas, S. (2023). Bridging the Divide Medical's Omnichannel Momentum: How pharma medical affairs and commercial teams are synchronizing their capabilities to boost omnichannel marketing strategies and better understand customer engagement needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To explain the roles and responsibilities of commercial and medical teams in creating materials and utilizing omnichannel marketing strategies within the pharmaceutical industry.</li> </ul>
Lääketeollisuus ry. (2024). Lääketeollisuuden eettiset ohjeet.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To introduce the role of Pharma Industry Code of Ethics in maintaining the ethical and legal standards within the pharmaceutical industry in Finland.</li> </ul>
Pellas, K. (2013). Fimea valvoo kaikkien lääkkeiden markkinointia.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To introduce the role of Fimea, Finnish Medicines Agency, in the supervision of pharmaceutical industry.</li> </ul>
Pellas, K. (2022). Superlatiivit eivät kuulu lääkemainokseen.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To specify the limitations set for pharmaceutical marketing in Finland.</li> </ul>

**Table 2.** Summary of industry-specific secondary data sources.

### 3.3 Data Analysis

The data gathered through the semi-structured interviews executed was analyzed using thematic analysis. Moreover, the analysis was completed by identifying, analyzing as well as finally reporting themes identified within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Furthermore, the process of analyzing data in this thematic setting consists of six stages: familiarizing oneself with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and finally, producing the report. A summary of the previous process is gathered into Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** Phases of a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87).

As introduced above, the first phase of the data analysis process is for familiarizing with the gathered data, in this context meaning the transcription of the interviews as the transcribing part was already done while recording the interviews, enabling moving forward to re-reading the transcriptions. In practice, regarding the study in question, the first phase focused on correcting some typos and forming the transcriptions of recorded interviews into logical order to build a rational as well as coherent whole around them. Furthermore, as Braun & Clarke (2006, p. 87) suggest, after the first phase was completed, the transcriptions were re-read several times to make sure these include all the relevant information in order to continue the analysis process appropriately. As a part of the first phase some preliminary coding regarding identified themes was already done and derived into notes.

According to Braun & Clarke (2006, p. 88), the data analysis process enters the second phase once the data has been read and one has familiarized themselves with it. In addition, an initial list of themes and characteristics identified within the data is suggested to be created which is also the starting point of coding the collected data. During the second phase, all the interviews were systematically coded one by one.

As Braun & Clarke (2006, p. 89) state, continuing in the process of analyzing the data during phase three, all the collected data has been separately coded forming a comprehensive list of various identified codes. More in detail, this phase is dedicated to re-focusing the analysis towards the bigger picture in terms of themes instead of focusing on some minor level details and codes identified. In practice this involved visualizing the themes identified on paper and linking codes to further form themes as well as sub-themes.

Based on findings by Braun & Clarke (2006, pp. 91-92), phase four in the analysis process begins once a set of candidate themes has been created after reviewing the preliminary themes identified during the previous phase. The authors specify that this phase also includes classifying themes into smaller units and on the other hand, also grouping some

of them into wider ones, meaning that in addition to the regrouping activities some themes that lack supportive evidence from the data should be deleted. After the previous was completed, followed re-reading of the data to confirm it including all the important and relevant data summarized in collected codes, representing the dataset thoroughly.

Continuing to the fifth phase, Braun & Clarke (2006, p. 92) emphasize further refining the themes included as a part of the analysis and justifying as well as clarifying the reasons why certain themes were kept since the beginning of the analysis. This is to structure a detailed analysis considering both the main themes as well as the sub-themes. Finally, the authors highlight the importance of the final data set covering the research questions of the study.

As the sixth and final step of the analysis process, Braun & Clarke (2006, p. 93) introduce the report production phase consisting of continuing from repeatedly defined themes to the final analysis and concrete writing of the report. The process is finished by providing a written thematic analysis forming an interesting and rational story of the data, challenged by arguments created and derived from the research questions.

### **3.4 Reliability and Validity of the Study**

This thesis, as a qualitative study, and further the trustworthiness of it is viewed through the following criteria, consisting of dependability, credibility, neutrality as well as transferability, from which can be derived credibility, including reliability, which indicates the consistency of the findings gathered as a part of the study (Saunders, 2007, p. 149). When it comes to qualitative studies, reliability indicates the possibility of other originators receiving identical results out of a study, when executing the exact same study themselves (Saunders, 2007, p. 318). On the other hand, it does not directly mean that in non-standardized studies replicability would be rational, as varying conditions may still affect the results (Saunders, 2007, p. 319).

According to Saunders (2007, p. 150), validity pertains to whether the findings genuinely reflect what they are intended to represent. Moreover, a way to enhance the credibility of the research is to utilize triangulation, which is a technique combining research data from at least two different sources of conducted data, such as applying secondary data to support primary data (Saunders, 2007, p. 139).

In this study, credibility was confirmed by applying triangulation technique, as the primary data of the study was conducted through semi-structured interviews and further supported by conducting secondary data, more specifically documentary secondary data, which can include sources in various written forms, such as books and organizations websites, for example (Saunders, 2007, pp. 248-249). In this study, the documentary secondary data consisted of organizations websites, journal and magazine articles.

## **4 Empirical Findings**

In this chapter the empirical part of the study is discussed. Also, the fourth chapter provides a comprehensive introduction of the pharmaceutical industry in Finland based on secondary data sources. To support the collected secondary data, findings and evidence from semi-structured interviews are presented based on the experiences and insights of the respondents within the Finnish pharmaceutical industry. Also, the findings are analyzed in relation to the research question and theoretical framework.

### **4.1 Medicine and a Medicinal Product**

According to section 3 of the Medicines Act, a medicinal product refers to any preparation or substance intended for either internal or external use to prevent, cure or alleviate diseases or the symptoms caused by them in humans or animals. Additionally, any substance or combination of those, used either internally or externally, to modify, correct or restore physiological functions either in animals or humans through metabolic, immunological or pharmacological actions, or to make a diagnosis of the cause of a health condition or disease, is also considered as a medicinal product. More specifically, the term medicinal product refers to a product that: 1) is manufactured or imported in compliance with this Act, 2) is intended for use as a medicine and 3) is sold or otherwise provided for consumption in a sales package. Moreover, according to section 5 of the Medicines Act, a medicinal substance is a substance that exerts an effect on the body, defined precisely through chemical or other scientific methods, and is utilized either in the production of a medicinal product or as a medicinal product itself. (Finlex, Lääkelaki 395/1987).

Besides the definitions, the Medicines Act categorizes medicinal products into two groups based on the marketing restrictions applicable to the product. Some medicines are self-medication products and can be purchased from pharmacies without a prescription. These medicines are intended for treating mild and short-term symptoms that do not necessitate a doctor's appointment. Prescription medicines can only be obtained with a doctor's prescription. They are used in situations where a doctor's diagnosis is

necessary or when the effectiveness of the medication needs to be monitored. The dosage is always tailored to the individual, as the same medicine can have varying effects on different people. Therefore, prescription medicines are always personal. (Fimea, 2025b).

According to the Medicines Act, Fimea is responsible for determining, when necessary, whether a substance or preparation qualifies as a medicinal product. This classification is made on a product-specific basis, considering its composition and intended use. The decision is informed by the applicant's provided information, marketing details, and scientific literature on the effects of the product's ingredients. Additionally, the case law of the Court of Justice of the European Union is considered. Fimea evaluates all aspects of the product, including its composition, medically proven and known pharmacological properties based on current scientific knowledge, methods of use, distribution extent, consumer awareness, and potential risks associated with its use. Determining the classification of a product is crucial because different products are governed by varying legislation, particularly regarding import, sales, marketing as well as distribution channels. (Fimea, 2025a).

## **4.2 Special Characteristics of Pharmaceutical Marketing**

According to section 7 of the Pharma Industry Code of Ethics, pharmaceutical marketing information is expected to be appropriate as well as indicate the different impacts of medicine use, considering the usage from multiple viewpoints aiming to guide and support recipients in correct and safe usage of medicinal products. Following the previous, all the pharmaceutical marketing information must be up to date and in line with the latest knowledge, supporting the requirements of pharmaceutical marketing to be as transparent and clear as possible, to be easily recognizable as pharmaceutical marketing for individuals. Furthermore, medicinal product marketing must be aligned with the latest summary of product characteristics and further, not to leave out material facts enabling any kind of mislead about the composition, origins, quality or significance of the medicine. In addition to the previously presented requirements for medicinal marketing there are more detailed guidelines as well, such as not stating the safety of a medicinal

product without justified reason, referring to a medicinal product not having adverse effects or that there would not be a risk of a person becoming addicted to a medicine. When it comes to presenting medicine as a new product, it is not allowed to state the previous after one year of its introduction to the market and the same applies to the following details including the price of a product, reimbursement status, package size, indication or similar product details, after one year from the implementation of changes in this information. Pharmaceutical marketing information must be reliable and free from misleading verbal or visual presentations as well as should be presented in a way that allows recipients to easily understand the advertisement. Despite the previous limitations set and supervised by the The Pharma Industry Finland Code of Ethics, it does not aim to prevent the exchange of medical or scientific information. (Lääketeollisuus ry, 2024, p. 6).

If product comparison is implemented as a part of marketing, based on the section 10 of Pharma Industry Finland Code of Ethics, the comparisons between different medicines, active substances, excipients as well as other characteristics must be appropriate and trustworthy. Both the visual and price comparisons must be clearly justified, with the objective of comparison clearly identified. When comparing prices, similar packages as well as dosages should be used, and the medicinal products and their trade names must be clearly indicated. Also, comparisons between different active pharmaceutical ingredients should be based on scientific studies. Finally, the date of the publication of the comparison included in marketing purposes, or study the comparison was based on, should be clearly stated. (Lääketeollisuus ry, 2024, p. 7).

Based on the section 25 of the Pharma Industry Finland Code of Ethics, the objective of giving information about medicinal products is to support and enhance the use of medicines by healthcare professionals as well as develop their professional skills and promote patient safety about the medicinal products in question (Lääketeollisuus ry, 2024, p. 13).

### **4.3 Supervision of Pharmaceutical Marketing by Independent Entities**

The two main parties responsible for the supervision of pharmaceutical marketing are Fimea, the Finnish Medicines Agency and PIF, Pharma Industry Finland, the second entity consisting of two audit committees. More specifically, the first one is responsible for auditing consumer marketing, whereas the second audit committee supervises marketing operations reaching healthcare professionals. More in detail, pharmaceutical marketing as well as compliance related actions and guidelines are advised and supervised by the Supervisory Board of Medicinal Marketing, which consists of members with various professional backgrounds and expertise in fields such as medicine, pharmacy, law as well as business, specifically in marketing. Additionally, the areas of responsibility are somewhat overlapping between the parties responsible of the supervision of pharmaceutical marketing, Fimea and Pharma Industry Finland. Nevertheless, the ways these parties operate differ from each other quite significantly, as Fimea oversees the industry based on the Medicines Act, whereas Pharma Industry Finland utilizes only generally accepted and agreed ways of working by its member companies, on the other hand making its jurisdiction in the industry limited compared to Fimea. Generally, the Supervisory Board of Medicinal Marketing together with the audit committees apply only ethical instructions in their supervision agreed within Pharma Industry Finland (PIF) by its member organizations, while Fimea focuses on utilizing the principles of the Medicines Act. (Lääketeollisuus ry, 2024, p. 25).

### **4.4 Limitations of Marketing Prescription Medicines**

On the other hand, according to the section 26 of the Pharma Industry Finland Code of Ethics, marketing of prescription medicines should be directed exclusively at healthcare professionals, such as those qualified to prescribe or supply these products (Lääketeollisuus ry, 2024, p. 13). Pharmaceutical companies are also allowed to target their marketing of prescription medicines to medical students, dentistry students as well as veterinary medicine students, if the students are performing in such professional roles where they are involved in prescribing or delivering the medicine whereas for

prescription medicines, other medical personnel should only receive proper and safe usage instructions and training (Pellas, 2022, p. 2).

All information about a prescription medicine must always include the following (Lääketeollisuus ry, 2024, p. 13):

- Details consistent with the latest adopted summary of product characteristics (SPC).
- The statutory dispensing conditions of the medicine.
- Reimbursement terms and average therapy costs, whenever possible.
- Retail prices of various package sizes, if available.

A pharmaceutical company must not send advertisements or other direct marketing materials to individuals who have expressed an interest not to receive them. Companies are allowed to send free samples of medicines, which are defined as the smallest package size sold on the market, only to individuals that are legitimate to either prescribe or dispense them, in which the aim is to allow them to become familiar with the specific medicinal products. More in detail, the distribution of free samples has been limited for pharmaceutical companies to be allowed to send one package of each medicinal product, specific strength and pharmaceutical form, timely limited to two years following the market introduction of the product or the adoption of its reimbursable price within the timeframe of a calendar year. Furthermore, as stated in the beginning of this chapter, not only marketing the actual medicines but also giving samples of prescription medicines is limited to be given only to individuals able to prescribe them as well as if to the medicine in question applies the dispensing restriction, such samples are only allowed to be distributed to physicians with prescription rights. Finally, other than free samples, dosage devices can be given to individuals other than physicians with prescription rights, whereas free starter packages should never be used as a form of marketing prescription medicines. (Lääketeollisuus ry, 2024, pp. 15-16).

To receive a medicine sample, a separate written request with a signature of the person requesting to receive it as the date of the request is required. Additionally, pharmaceutical companies are expected to include the corresponding summary of product characteristics in the delivery of a medicine sample. The first requirement is due to pharmaceutical companies being required to continuously track the distribution of medicine samples throughout calendar year and to archive these records until the end of the year following the current calendar year to which they pertain. Furthermore, the strict tracking of medicine samples is due to the supervision of the Supervisory Commission for the Marketing of Medicinal Products and the second Inspection Board, as they have the right to request to receive the records collected in terms of supervision. (Lääketeollisuus ry, 2024, p. 16).

It is common for pharmaceutical companies to include comparisons and claims in their marketing especially when it comes to prescription medicines, usually in the form of text or pictures and other graphics to visualize results of studies between their own product and its substitute from a competitor, for example. In such cases, it is crucial to choose the comparators as well as studies reasonably. Furthermore, the comparability of various studies and the statistical significance of the results should be linked directly and presented clearly together with relevant references. (Pellas, 2013, p. 27).

The most challenging aspect in marketing prescription medicines is providing an accurate and comprehensive picture of the medical significance, both as such and in comparison to other treatment options. Furthermore, comparisons that are not relevant in terms of treatment, should not be done. For instance, including superlatives or highlighting the superiority of a product is inappropriate in pharmaceutical marketing according to the industry specific standards in Finland. However, if comparisons or claims about the characteristics of the medicine are made, the source of the information must be clearly and accurately stated which therefore allows the consumer to return to the material to review it later on. (Pellas, 2022, pp. 2-3).

According to Fimea, pharmaceutical companies should not actively apply new research results into their marketing, especially if the results are related to unauthorized pharmaceutical products, new uses or recent information about the efficacy of a product. In addition, due to the previous reasons, it is important for the marketing authorization holder to keep the summary of product characteristics up to date while ensuring it includes all relevant information regarding the safety as well as efficacy of the product. Also, the scientific references cited in any marketing material must be aligned with the information provided in the approved summary of product characteristics. (Pellas, 2013, pp. 27-28).

Additionally, when marketing a prescription medicine, companies should provide as comprehensive and recent information as possible, aligned with the summary of product characteristics (SPC). All marketing material for prescription medicines are expected to include the following details: indication for use and key characteristics such as intended use, efficacy and safety information, conditions of prescription and delivery along with details on the price as well as reimbursement of the medicine, actual costs of drug treatment if comparing the price to another product, and finally, clear presentation of adverse effects, interactions, contraindications and other relevant safety information. All these materials should also include the date of preparation, which is due to the high importance of not having any expired materials in distribution, since maintaining effective marketing materials can be considered as a reflection of the quality of the marketing authorization holder's processes and therefore, reliability. (Pellas, 2022, p. 2).

Throughout this decade the marketing methods in the pharmaceutical industry have developed rapidly. Hence, companies have transitioned from visits occurring in person by pharmaceutical sales representatives to prioritizing digital marketing channels. Even though digital channels and their rapid development lately have enabled pharmaceutical companies to utilize new ways of working, the situation has also made it more challenging for regulatory authorities to monitor the marketing activities due to the constantly growing selection of different marketing methods and channels. More in detail, as most

of the marketing activities these days take place on the internet, any digital media marketing in Finland, such as websites and banner advertisements, including information of prescription medicines, must be protected with password to ensure it is accessible only to the legal target audience. (Pellas, 2013, p. 28).

From a company-specific perspective, the respondents were asked about the main limitations they face when marketing prescription medicines.

Respondent 1 stated that the main limitations are related to public channels as when marketing prescription medicines, these channels are not allowed due to the nature of the pharmaceutical industry. One perspective she brought up is also that consumers may not fully understand the information they would receive about prescription medicines in public channels. Therefore, this regulation ensures that marketing is only done in environments where educated physicians are present. On the other hand, ensuring that physicians, as the targets, are on these channels can be challenging.

*“We cannot be present on TikTok, for instance, due to the nature of the pharmaceutical industry. We are not able to do the marketing on public channels, because I do not think it is ethical for consumers to see advertisements on prescription medicines, because they do not understand everything. So, I think it is very important that it is regulated, and we are only able to be in certain environments where only educated doctors can be in.” (Respondent 1)*

Respondent 2 also supported the previously introduced observations by Respondent 1, as she stated that the pharmaceutical industry is highly regulated, especially for prescription medicines, which can only be marketed to healthcare professionals. For example, in Finland, only the proper use of prescription medicines can be discussed with nurses and further, legal, ethical and practical limitations guide the ways allowed to market these products, she stated. In addition, The Code of Ethics by Pharma Industry Finland, is a crucial guideline to follow. Moreover, Respondent 2 highlighted that there is

comparatively limited use of social media for marketing prescription medicines in Finland, which to consider already while developing content and the messages included, to ensure these to be transparent enough.

*“Well, obviously, the pharmaceutical industry is very regulated in terms of prescription medicines. So, we are only able to market them for healthcare professionals. And then if we want to target, for instance, nurses in Finland, we can only talk about the right way of using these medicines. So, there is legal and ethical and also practical limitation of how we are able to do marketing”. (Respondent 2)*

Additionally, similar observations were made by Respondent 3, regarding the limitations of marketing prescription medicines. Furthermore, he based his answer in the interview on the fact that direct marketing of prescription medicines to consumers is not allowed and therefore, the focus of pharmaceutical companies will be on healthcare professionals. Respondent 3 had identified some specific challenges caused by the limitations of the industry, such as challenges in personalizing content and understanding customer attitudes. Furthermore, he stated that websites for healthcare professionals must be protected with passwords, which may also complicate the process of creating a seamless user experience on its own.

*“So the focus is more on the HCP communication and how to crack the code, so to say, how to personalize the content to your customers and identify the pools of the existing attitudes.” (Respondent 3)*

As a continuation of the observations by Respondent 3, also Respondent 4 brought up similar identified limitations, such as all the communication of prescription medicines to be protected with passwords, especially in digital channels. More in detail, this requirement can negatively impact the user experience as accessing data always requires the user to log in first and thus, communicating securely while complying with regulations can be challenging. According to Respondent 4, taking into consideration the physician’s

perspective, data privacy concerns are also something for pharmaceutical companies to focus on in the future.

*“So basically because of all the limitations it might be challenging to do cohesive cross communication plans to the physicians because everything needs to be somewhat secured and password-protected and those kinds of things. So that is affecting the user experience and customer experience quite heavily.” (Respondent 4)*

#### **4.5 Marketing Channels of Prescription Medicines**

Nowadays, marketing should be considered being more than simply selling as it first and foremost is about fulfilling customers' needs. Therefore, once marketers have identified the needs and are willing to create products and services that are offered to customers for effective prices and finally, distributed and promoted by them in alignment, the goods are likely to sell themselves. Moreover, successful marketing tends to generate automatic demand for goods. As described in the beginning of this chapter, selling and marketing are only one part of a wider marketing mix, a sequence of using multiple tools to work seamlessly together to meet the goal of satisfying customer needs and through that, building valuable customer relationships that benefit both parties, customers and the company. In the bigger picture, marketing can be seen as a social and managerial process that individuals and organizations together create by exchanging value from and to one another. When it comes to the business environment, marketing includes generating and maintaining profitable, value-based relationships, in the first place benefiting the customers but also the company in question. Finally, marketing as a term, can be summarized as the process by which companies create value for customers in return. (Parment et al., 2016, p. 10).

When it comes to pharmaceutical marketing, especially from supervision point of view, it covers various activities and channels, such as promoting a medicinal product by its name through brochures with claims or product comparisons included in them, product as well as treatment presentations, print advertisements in journals, posters, marketing

and sales activities performed by sales representatives, radio and advertisements in television, trainings and educational events comparing different products, market research results as well as websites. In addition, whenever a marketing authorization holder or pharmacy prepares selected or edited information about a certain product while also mentioning its product name, it is in most cases considered as marketing. Due to the previous, there have been numerous cases in the past where Fimea has intervened cases, specifically including materials originally classified as press releases with still actually enhancing the sales of the product based on its content. (Pellas, 2022, pp. 3-4).

On the other hand, Fimea defines information given about pharmaceutical products that is not considered as marketing, to consist of neutral photos of the product, approved package leaflets, notices about changes in package sizes, safety information as well as price lists where sales enhancing claims are excluded. Nevertheless, unrequested, repeatedly sent information to many recipients about a pharmaceutical product, including the product name, may increase the risk of being considered as sales and marketing enhancing activity. (Pellas, 2022, p. 4).

From a company-specific perspective, the respondents were asked about their perception on the most effective marketing channels for prescription medicines, based on their preferences and experiences.

Respondent 1 highlighted the importance of sales calls and meetings, events as well as webinars and therefore, building a customer journey around these activities. She also pointed out the role of email engagement being crucial. Moreover, based on the experiences of Respondent 1, third-party websites could be utilized for email campaigns to target a wider pool of physicians, for example. Also, reaching physicians through web banners implemented on digital platforms hosted by third parties are found efficient. According to Respondent 1, in addition to the previous marketing operations, advertorials on websites, magazines, conferences as well as third-party events are preferred in the company she is currently working for. All in all, face to face interactions are

particularly impactful, especially when incentives are included, such as food or keynote speakers. When it comes to digital channels, Respondent 1 highlighted the incentives in utilizing those to be as clear as possible, to engage healthcare professionals. She also added that a customer-centric approach can enhance engagement, since through such approach, it is more likely for healthcare professionals to receive relevant materials and education from their perspective.

*“With the digital channels, my aim, to at least, is to kind of communicate them the main or the key messages in a short form and then provide them a place where you can find some more knowledge that could help you in your day to day work.” (Respondent 1)*

Similarities were also found in the answer of Respondent 2, highlighting the effectiveness of email marketing, along with one-to-one meetings between sales representatives and key customers. Based on the experiences of Respondent 2, third-party portals and print marketing are less effective due to the limitations in targeting customers, but still these are widely used as a part of marketing operations.

*“I would say our own channels are best. And from those, maybe email marketing is something we use as a team the most.” (Respondent 2)*

Supporting the responses introduced above, Respondent 3 also identified email marketing, sales representatives, webinars and conferences as effective ways to engage with physicians.

*“I would say also that conferences are a good way to engage with physicians as customers and provide them kind of the latest research about the therapy area and to get to know the customers.” (Respondent 3)*

Furthermore, Respondent 4 emphasized that the effectiveness of marketing channels depends on knowing your customer since different specialties may have different

communication preferences. Based on the experiences of Respondent 4, straightforward messages such as information regarding pricing or reimbursement, could be communicated in the form of banners or mass email campaigns. For more detailed information, peer to peer meetings or detailed discussions are suitable. Respondent 4 summarized that the type of message being delivered highly influences the choice of marketing channel.

*“I would say there are like different formats such as you could do banners, mass email campaigns, those kinds of things. However, when you have something like going deeper into some specific topics, I would not choose then banner or probably like a mass email. Then I do something like either peer to peer meetings or something where you have more time to actually like deep dive into the topic. So, it is highly depending on kind of the type of message that you are delivering.” (Respondent 4)*

#### **4.6 The Current State of Omnichannel Adoption in Pharmaceutical Industry**

Not only the commercial teams in pharmaceutical companies but also medical affairs teams are now utilizing omnichannel strategies to engage with healthcare providers (HCPs) as well as key opinion leaders (KOLs). Therefore, as a result of both sides, commercial and medical, integrating omnichannel activities into their daily operations, an alignment and integration of the parties is crucial. Despite the companies recognizing and understanding the importance of aligning the omnichannel activities of both commercial and medical functions, it is somewhat complex due to the nature of the industry and the regulations given by different independent entities monitoring pharmaceutical companies. Therefore, it is required from the organizations to clearly state whether a material is created for medical and educational purposes or commercial marketing material for allowed audience. Nevertheless, when commercial and medical functions manage to collaborate successfully within given limitations, it will result an effective and seamless customer experience. (Hartung & Ramadas, 2023, p. 28).

Firstly, omnichannel approach requires identifying synergies connecting different functions within the company, leading to the alignment of message mapping for unbranded materials, which both the medical and commercial teams are using, for example. Other examples of different materials for medical functions are resources such as informational disease awareness materials and guidelines for treatment. On the other hand, commercial teams mainly focus on creating marketing material for specific brands as well as product positioning related activities. Once the previous is done properly, companies can ensure a seamless and effective strategy reaching healthcare professionals such as physicians and nurses, patients as well as other collaborators. (Hartung & Ramadas, 2023, p. 28).

Moreover, pharmaceutical companies need to focus on identifying and then filling the gaps between commercial and medical teams to ensure a coherent customer experience as the customer should be in the center of marketing and further, omnichannel strategy. This customer centric approach requires a new way of thinking and working since due to the regulation of the industry, there still is the line separating and defining the requirements for differences between medical and commercial materials. Despite the previous, general information of chosen channels or preferred format of content is allowed to be shared to ensure aligned integration. When it comes to digital adaptation of healthcare professionals, based on a Veeva Pulse Trends report from 2023, 70% of professionally active healthcare professionals are digitally native as they have graduated as physicians after the digitalization took over the world. These healthcare professionals have also utilized digital technology already as a part of their studies and later at work. More in detail, 77% of physicians also prefer using digital channels for personal learning and development purposes, supports a study from 2022 by Indegene. (Hartung & Ramadas, 2023, pp. 28-29).

On the other hand, even if healthcare professionals are open to digital technologies, data integration brings its own challenges to pharmaceutical companies utilizing it to the fullest. More specifically, these obstacles include sharing sensitive information such as

patient data, for example. Pharmaceutical companies usually tackle these kinds of issues by creating standard operation procedures within the company, with the expertise and support of data and compliance units, creating a compliant way of operating for both medical and commercial teams while sharing individual level information as well as overview level data of healthcare professionals within limits given by monitoring independent entities. Finally, any content created by the medical team should clearly differ from materials by the commercial team. Thus, content creation for medical materials require high expertise as the content itself is expected to follow given guidelines of being appropriate in terms of technical and scientific aspects. What makes the situation complex, is the role of medical teams for balancing between first creating scientific content but on the other hand, further targeting the created material to certain customer segments, which in some contexts may be seen as a form of marketing activity. To overcome these obstacles, having proactive collaboration on a regular basis within companies including all teams involved ensures that the implementation of omnichannel strategies will be done properly while respecting the rules and regulations of the pharmaceutical industry. (Hartung & Ramadas, 2023, p. 29).

The ever expanding amount of data available is directing the future of omnichannel marketing within the pharmaceutical industry. Therefore, companies are continuously integrating new omnichannel strategies into their daily operations to reach healthcare professionals, especially physicians, more efficiently. Moreover, the large amount of data enables pharmaceutical companies to utilize different forms of databased marketing tools such as using location data for targeting specific marketing material to certain customers based on their location, emails as well as websites, for example. Once the chosen omnichannel activities have been executed, companies can then collect data about how these strategic decisions and activities are performing and further base their next strategic decisions on these numbers collected. In addition, tracking performance of different channels and marketing tools enable companies to individually personalize marketing content and even take into account channel preferences of each healthcare professional. (Fernandez, 2022, p. 7).

Finally, it is suggested for pharmaceutical companies to pay attention to the reliability and quality of the data collected. As the amount of available data is continuously growing, it is crucial for organizations to identify and further focus on the relevance as well as trustworthiness of the data, otherwise tracking and collecting it will turn pointless and bring no value to the company or healthcare professionals as customers in this setting. In order to create value for both parties, the company itself, but to ultimately benefit its customers, while collecting and utilizing data, it is required from companies to take into account privacy concerns and therefore, make the data collection properly in terms of respecting customers' privacy as well as the valid industry specific rules and regulations. (Fernandez, 2022, p. 7).

The respondents were asked about their perception of how the adoption of omnichannel marketing strategies has developed in the pharmaceutical industry. Respondent 1 stated that she has not been in the industry for that many years yet, so she has no experience of the early days before digital channels became crucial in the industry. Nevertheless, she has noticed significant development towards omnichannel in recent years, for example the company she is currently working for has created roles specifically for digital marketing as well as introduced various tools for data analytics and marketing segmentation to support the integration of omnichannel marketing strategies. She also specified that their global organization is continuously improving digital capabilities within the company.

*"I feel like compared to when I started, like almost three years ago, I think we have more and more different kinds of tools and applications available." (Respondent 1)*

Also, Respondent 2 highlighted that the adoption of omnichannel marketing strategies has certainly progressed significantly in the past years, as the shift towards digitalization has been driven by societal changes, such as the widespread use of smartphones and social media. On the other hand, she stated that specifically in Finland, omnichannel

marketing in the pharmaceutical industry has not reached its full potential yet, as when comparing the possibilities of utilizing omnichannel activities between colleagues working for the same company in Finland and abroad, the difference is significant.

*“Comparing the Finnish market to how our colleagues somewhere in central Europe are able to do podcasts and WhatsApp-marketing, I think we are still on taking baby steps in this process.” (Respondent 2)*

However, both Respondent 3 and Respondent 4 indicated that pharmaceutical companies in Finland are still primarily operating at a multichannel level rather than utilizing omnichannel marketing strategies.

*“I would say that it is still kind of in a multichannel stage, because omnichannel means that you have a priority of channels and the information between those channels flows seamlessly but in pharmaceutical industry we cannot do that, and we are not in that kind of state yet. I would argue that we could seamlessly flow information between channels.” (Respondent 3)*

More specifically, Respondent 4 emphasized the role of strict laws and guidelines valid in the pharmaceutical industry in Finland, hindering the progress of adopting omnichannel marketing activities.

*“I think when we are benchmarking ourselves to other industries, we are a bit behind due to the many laws and guidance that are binding us a lot, which is kind of then slowing us a bit down, which goes to kind of how advanced we are. I would say the majority of the pharmaceutical companies, at least in Finland, are somewhat comfortable with creating multichannel plans and strategies. Going forward, all the companies try to be more omnichannel, they are starting to build the capabilities to be more omnichannel, but I would say none of the companies are fully there yet.” (Respondent 4)*

Moving forward from the current state of omnichannel adoption within the pharmaceutical industry in Finland, to viewing the future of it, all the respondents shared similar kind of predictions.

*“I feel like we are going even more towards the customer-centric point of view, and then maybe utilize AI more in that process.” (Respondent 1)*

*“I would say that the future is very digitalized, there is a lot of opportunities for growth. I think the people who are in our global teams are doing a lot to improve our operational efficiencies and improving customer experience, making the content more engaging and using tech in better ways. So, I think something to maybe end this interview on is to follow how AI technologies will be affecting marketing efforts from now on.” (Respondent 2)*

*“I would like to see a kind of AI takeover. For example, I would like to see that the preferences of our customers are utilized by AI, a kind of more tailored communication that addresses the specific needs based on the data insights of particular customers. And that AI could make these kinds of decisions on behalf of us. And of course, human oversight is crucial but make these kinds of decisions based on the needs and the data that the customers provide to our CRM systems. AI is evolving so fast that, of course, the pharmaceutical industry needs and gets some enhancement in the next coming years, I would hope so.” (Respondent 3)*

*“I think it is exciting, I think there are huge leaps that we are taking constantly. AI comes of huge help and already has done a lot. We are talking about next best engagement where we are using AI to actually assess what could be with the specific customer and what could be the potential next best thing that we are doing. It is exciting, there is a lot of things happening constantly and I believe AI is the one that will be like a game changer and something that all the companies should be focusing on.” (Respondent 4)*

All in all, as a conclusion about the future of the adoption of omnichannel marketing strategies within the Finnish pharmaceutical industry can be derived, that AI will have an unforeseen role as a part of the adoption and utilization process. Also, the focus will be more on customers and their preferences rather than companies' channel as well as strategy preferences.

#### **4.7 Key Insights of the Concept of Omnichannel Marketing**

First, the respondents were asked questions that covered their current general understanding of omnichannel marketing as a term, its implementation process as well as the aim of implementing it and the key factors to create an effective omnichannel marketing strategy. The interview questions and responses are discussed below.

Further, the interviews were opened by asking the respondents to define the term omnichannel marketing, in their own words and at their current knowledge. Respondent 1 had a coherent understanding of the phenomenon and summarized the definition by highlighting the precision and timeliness of performing omnichannel activities, these being crucial factors in omnichannel marketing.

*"Omnichannel marketing involves communicating with customers by delivering the right message, at the right time, through the right channel." (Respondent 1)*

Thus, the previous response emphasizes omnichannel marketing not to be only about targeting customers but instead focusing on creating content and communication that resonates and engages with them, while also choosing the right moment for each activity.

As a continuation of the first response, Respondent 2 had a more detailed perspective on describing omnichannel marketing.

*"I would say omnichannel marketing means a customer-centric approach in which a company targets its customers, aiming to reach them at the right time in their preferred*

*channel, and it is often a mixture of marketing activities across different channels.” (Respondent 2)*

Based on the response, it can be derived that Respondent 2 views omnichannel marketing from a strongly customer-centric perspective. Furthermore, the response highlights the role of understanding and prioritizing the preferences and attitudes of target customers. Also, omnichannel marketing consisting of a mixture of channels ensures the customers to have the ability to choose between various channels and therefore, to receive the content in their preferred form.

Additionally, Respondent 3 summarized omnichannel marketing from the point of view of unifying channels, aiming for seamless and coherent customer experience, despite the channel preferences of them.

*“I would say omnichannel marketing is kind of a unified way of communication with the customers.” (Respondent 3)*

On the other hand, Respondent 4 approached the topic from a strategic perspective, highlighting the value of data-based decisions as a part of omnichannel marketing. By making decisions focusing on data as well as segmenting customers and further analyzing their identified attitudes and behavior, organizations can personalize the communication to align with customers’ recognized preferences.

*“Omnichannel marketing is the way we are targeting our customers based on the predefined segments. And then also looking into the data and seeing kind of how these specific segments that we are having, how they want to be communicated. So basically tailoring the message based on the customer group needs is kind of the foundation of how we want to look at omnichannel.” (Respondent 4)*

As a conclusion, it can be derived from the responses that the overall understanding of omnichannel marketing summarizes it to be an extensive strategy formed around communicating the right message at the optimal moment through the right channel. Furthermore, omnichannel marketing was identified to be strongly customer-centric, encouraging companies to understand as well as prioritize their preferences, while also putting effort in unifying communication through all the channels, further utilizing collected data to personalize content aligned with the identified preferences. Finally, once the previous is done appropriately, it results in a seamless customer experience to engage customers.

As the second question during the interviews, respondents were asked to describe the implementation of an omnichannel marketing strategy.

Respondent 1 based her answer strongly on personal experience of implementing omnichannel marketing strategies.

*“We rely heavily on our own digital channels, so email, basically. I do not necessarily think that we can call it like omnichannel marketing strategy if we are only like focusing on sales, the sales channels, events, sales calls and then just using our CRM system.” (Respondent 1)*

As stated above, the description of Respondent 1 about implementing omnichannel marketing strategies was focused on the identified limitations of a highly sales focused strategy, which relies unnecessarily much on a specific channel, thus including only a limited selection of activities available.

Moreover, Respondent 2 provided a detailed explanation describing the process of implementing an omnichannel marketing strategy.

*“Obviously, it depends on what kind of marketing strategy you are currently having in your company, but in a case when you already have knowledge about your target audience, you should first decide who you are targeting, then set clear and measurable goals. You might need to invest in right tools. Then, I would say you need to identify your customers’ preferred channels. Then you have to prioritize that what works in your local markets, because it can be different depending on the country. Then you have to optimize your presence across channels. When you have planned your strategy, and you are starting to implement it, you have to train your commercial and sales teams. And then it is very important, when you are implementing the omnichannel strategy, to make data-driven decisions.” (Respondent 2)*

The previous explanation underlines the significance of understanding customers, setting clear and measurable goals as well as investing efforts in necessary tools, building and supporting marketing activities. Respondent 2 also emphasized the alignment of strategies depending on the market the company is operating on, while optimizing their presence throughout the channels, which results in the strategy being adjustable.

Continuing to the definition of Respondent 3 about implementing an omnichannel marketing strategy, it relied strongly on the practical part of the implementation, while keeping customers in focus.

*“Well, first of all, we need a customer pool. We need to know who we are targeting, we need the audience and their attitudes towards our products. Then we kind of build this potential customer journey, and based on their preferences, then pool the customers into different smaller pools based on their attitudes and then build the actual customer journey and map out the customer journey. These can be based on some kind of event or data we want the customers to know more about. Then, of course, choosing the right channels is important and defining how do we want to implement the customer journey, including what kind of messages and how do we build the messages, usually it is digital*

*emails. We do not usually get traditional channels mixed up in the customer journeys.”*  
(Respondent 3)

From the previous response it can be derived that it is seen important to understand customers' attitudes and preferences and further utilize the information gathered to build purposeful customer journeys. More specifically, by dividing customers into smaller segments and mapping out detailed customer journeys, companies are more likely to have their content and messages delivered in alignment with the target customers' preferences, regarding channels and relevant information, to result in efficient omnichannel marketing.

Lastly, Respondent 4 found the role of data and customer understanding to be the two most crucial factors in the integration of an omnichannel marketing strategy.

*“Everything starts from the customer understanding, looking into the data and the preferences that we can see like for these different customer segments that we have. Then we need to start tailoring the message. So I would say in practice you then look at the different messages you have and then look at the different kind of a communication needs for each of these segments in practice. For instance, because you want to move these different segments along the adaptation ladder, you are looking into the different communication gaps that they have and tailor the message to kind of fill that gap. After that is done and you know the message, we then decide what is then the channel we want to use to actually deliver the message in an optimized way. So from understanding the preferences of customers, we then start building the journey from there.”* (Respondent 4)

The previous approach emphasized the value of tailoring messages to align with the specific needs and expectations of various customer segments in addition to utilizing data to identify and address gaps in communication between the company and its customers. By executing the previous activities, companies can ensure their communication to be

relevant to the targeted customers as well as messages and content to be efficiently delivered according to the identified channel preferences of customers.

To conclude the responses received to the second interview question regarding the implementation of an omnichannel marketing strategy, following overview was gathered. Furthermore, the process of implementing an omnichannel marketing strategy consists of multiple different phases and factors, such as a comprehensive understanding of customers, setting clear goals as well as first collecting and then utilizing data to base marketing related decisions on. By combining the previously presented crucial factors into one strategy, companies can build an effective omnichannel strategy including various channels leading to seamless and effective customer experiences, value as well as engagement. To achieve these results, companies are required to focus on careful planning, segmentation and optimization, thus making the omnichannel activities customer-centric and data-driven.

Next, the respondents were asked to refine the aim behind implementing an omnichannel marketing strategy.

Respondent 1 based the answer on emphasizing the role of timing, preferred channel and relevant message in reaching customers.

*“We kind of covered it already previously, but to communicate with customers, in like right time, on right channel with the right message and to reach the customers where they are.” (Respondent 1)*

As stated above, the role of precision in communicating is highly valued as a part of omnichannel marketing. First and foremost, it is about reaching the target customers in alignment with their identified preferences regarding the content they are provided as well as the channels they wish to receive it on.

Furthermore, Respondent 2 built her insight about the aim behind omnichannel marketing strategies around creating seamless and consistent customer experiences.

*“I would say that the aim of implementing an omnichannel marketing strategy is to create this kind of seamless and consistent customer experience. So that the way we are interacting with our customers is smooth, and that our brand message is consistent across channels, so it is easy for the customer to identify who is interacting with them.”*

*(Respondent 2)*

To specify, the previous insight emphasized the consistency in brand communication throughout all the channels in use. By providing seamless customer experience, it further creates brand and customer engagement, growing mutual trust and connection between the two parties, the company and customers.

Different than previous respondents, Respondent 3 provided new insight of the aim behind implementing an omnichannel marketing strategy, highlighting knowledge sharing.

*“The aim is to make customers more familiar with our products and I would also highlight the knowledge sharing.” (Respondent 3)*

The previous statement underscores the aim of omnichannel marketing to be educating customers in addition to the primary level aim, being brand and product promotion. Through valuable information sharing regarding products or services, companies aim to support customers as consumers, based on knowledge, which further results in enhanced customer engagement and satisfaction.

Finally, the insight gathered through the fourth response was strongly aligned with the previous insights.

*"I think that is quite clear. So the aim is to communicate relevant messaging to the relevant people. So just instead of bombarding them with a lot of, from the company point of view, important information, looking at it from the customer's eyes and what is the information that they want to receive, what are the things that they want to learn." (Respondent 4)*

Furthermore, this perspective also highlighted customers being in the center of omnichannel activities, specifically the importance of viewing communication from customers' perspective rather than the company's. Instead of spamming customers with an inappropriate amount of communication, it is recommended to focus the efforts on the recognized, specific channels customers prefer.

To conclude all the insights into one, the aim behind implementing omnichannel marketing strategies is to build coherent customer journeys, requiring comprehensive and detailed understanding of customers, clear goal setting as well as data to base the decisions about marketing activities on. Further, based on these previous insights the respondents provided can be derived that by following the activities suggested, companies can structure an efficient and adaptable strategy enabling them to achieve the goal, to build seamless customer journeys.

As the fourth interview question the respondents were asked to share insight on the key factors to create an effective omnichannel marketing strategy. During the interviews, a dominant theme was the role of data in creating effective omnichannel marketing strategies.

*"Definitely data, like we should have, and this is probably because we are in Finland, which is relatively like a small market, we do not have necessary data available compared to like some of the bigger markets, like Germany, Spain or France. But in Finland, we do not have too much data available, which means that although my company has got like digital tools available, but we do not have data." (Respondent 1)*

The previous insight shared by Respondent 1 highlights the importance of having access to appropriate and comprehensive data. It was also recognized that there are significant differences between continents and specific countries regarding the availability and amount of data for the companies to utilize. Therefore, when it comes to larger markets than the Finnish market for example, the bigger amount of data allows companies to specify targeting as well as personalization more efficiently, which on the opposite perspective means to cause challenges in smaller markets due to the limited data available.

In addition to the role of data access, another crucial factor identified was to set clear goals and invest efforts in the identification of the desired target audience to be able to build effective omnichannel marketing strategies.

*“I think across like different kind of strategies in business, you have to be clear of what your goal is and who is your target audience. In case you know your target audience, it is easier to design your omnichannel marketing strategy. So, understanding, who are the customers we want to be targeting, and what are their preferred ways of us communicating with them.” (Respondent 2)*

In the previous insight by Respondent 2, it was observed that it is required for companies to carefully define and specify the target audience, while also learning about their preferences of channels and content.

As a continuation of the previous insights presented, Respondent 3 found the role of providing variety in channels for customers highly important.

*“Maybe highlighting in general the terms of effectiveness of an omnichannel strategy. I would say we need to have data, that is the main thing. I would say that we need to know what the customers’ needs are, and to know how to target them. A key factor could be that you have a big variety of channels.” (Respondent 3)*

Further, by providing a variety of channels for the customers to choose from, the reach and efficiency of marketing activities are likely to improve.

In alignment with previous insights shared by the respondents, Respondent 4 also identified customer understanding to be the foundation of building effective omnichannel marketing strategies.

*“I think it all starts from understanding who your customers are. That is the key. And then of course, understanding their needs and future needs as well. So understanding what they need now and what they might need in the future so that you can kind of anticipate also how do you build that relationship going forward. So understanding your customer, understanding their needs as well as understanding their, kind of, well like habits, their preferences, those kinds of things, so that you can meet them where they are.” (Respondent 4)*

Moreover, gaining a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of customers enables organizations to also predict future customer demand in addition to the current expectations. By being able to respond to the demand now and in the future, it builds loyalty and further strengthens the relationship between the company and its customers.

All in all, the key factors required to build effective omnichannel marketing strategies include having comprehensive data to utilize, clearly defined and measurable goals, carefully identified target customer segments, extensive knowledge and understanding of customers, specifically their preferences as well as providing variety in channels for them to choose between.

#### **4.8 Summary of Findings**

Next, the respondents were asked questions related to their perception of implementing an omnichannel strategy, such as motivators behind it as well as requirements to

implement an omnichannel marketing strategy, and to describe the process from planning to executing an omnichannel marketing strategy. Furthermore, the interviews covered questions about the impact and effectiveness of omnichannel marketing strategies, specifically to gain insight about the advantages and on the other hand, challenges, from both the company's and customers' perspectives. Also, insights regarding the industry-specific perspective were covered through interview questions of the limitations of marketing prescription medicines as well as the most effective marketing channels for prescription medicines identified. The specific interview questions are presented in Appendix 1.

In Table 3 below, the relationship between the key findings from empirical data, by each sub-theme, and the relevant key findings in theory, has been presented. Also, some new empirical insights were discovered.

Key findings from empirical data	Key findings in theory	New empirical insight
<p><b>Motivators:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing digital presence of customers.</li> <li>• Changes in customer behavior towards using multiple channels and to have variance.</li> <li>• Customers expect personalization.</li> <li>• Competitive advantage.</li> <li>• Data-driven insights to improve return on investment and operational efficiency.</li> <li>• Broader reach of customers.</li> <li>• Enhancement in customer engagement.</li> <li>• Cost savings.</li> <li>• Efficiency and speed in communication.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customers expect variance in channels (Carickhoff, 2021, p. 7).</li> <li>• Omnichannel marketing leverages data to build a brand story, and data shows that HCPs engaged to the brand story, are likely to convert (Carickhoff, 2021, p. 7).</li> <li>• In omnichannel marketing customers are provided the flexibility to use different channels and combinations of those. (Berman &amp; Thelen, 2018, p. 600).</li> <li>• To enhance customer commitment, efforts across all channels must be synchronized (Kotler et al., 2016, p. 140).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data-driven insights to improve return on investment and operational efficiency are identified as an important motivator for companies.</li> <li>• In addition to providing variance in channels and personalization for customers, on the other hand omnichannel also enables targeting customers on broader reach.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Requirements:</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Successful alignment of different channels</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customer-centricity and customer-centric</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear and cohesive communication throughout the implementation.</li> <li>• A proper strategy.</li> <li>• Essential data.</li> <li>• Careful planning (time and effort).</li> <li>• Customer-centricity.</li> <li>• Functioning tools.</li> <li>• Automation tools and data analytics platforms.</li> <li>• Integration of systems.</li> <li>• Capability building.</li> <li>• Cross-functionality.</li> <li>• Organizational adaptation.</li> </ul>	<p>requires financial and human resources as well as technological knowledge and flexibility within the organization to adapt (Mansurali et al., 2024, pp. 630-632).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preparing the organization prior to the integration is crucial (Compton, 2014, pp. 25-28).</li> <li>• Companies need comprehensive data throughout customer journeys (Cui et al., 2021, pp. 104-106).</li> <li>• Companies should be on track of the impact different touchpoints have on customer behavior (Cui et al., 2021, pp. 104-106).</li> </ul>	<p>strategies are highlighted to be crucial requirements for companies to successfully implement an omnichannel strategy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The role of organizational readiness was emphasized including cross-functionality, capability building and organizational adaptation, prior to implementing an omnichannel strategy.</li> <li>• Adequate technical tools, such as automation tools and data analytics platforms as well as the integration of these, were identified crucial.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Implementation process:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Familiarizing with the customer base.</li> <li>• Defining the target and goals.</li> <li>• Setting clear timelines.</li> <li>• Preparing and planning materials.</li> <li>• Targeting and motivating customers.</li> <li>• Mapping touchpoints.</li> <li>• Analyzing and measuring journeys.</li> <li>• Identifying areas for improvement.</li> <li>• Reviewing the data after implementing the strategy.</li> <li>• Deleting ineffective channels.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When approaching omnichannel, organizations need a strategy that provides an overview of the vision and clarifies next steps both in theory and in practice (Medical Marketing and Media, 2023, p. 38).</li> <li>• Organizations transitioning to omnichannel are suggested to identify and mitigate obstacles in advance (Berman &amp; Thelen, 2018, p. 606).</li> <li>• Need to motivate customers to utilize a variety of channels (Neslin, 2022, p. 120-123).</li> <li>• Evaluating channel performance, removing underperforming channels, justifying certain marketing and channel decisions on appropriate indicators and data as well as unifying</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customer-centricity, getting to know them and to benefit them, was identified as the foundation for omnichannel implementation.</li> </ul>

	<p>touchpoints is crucial (Mansurali et al., 2024, pp. 633-634).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Companies should invest their resources in the most effective and preferred channels amongst the customers (Kotler et al., 2016, pp. 147-149).</li> <li>• To implement omnichannel strategy as a part of daily practices, companies should form such a structure that it would enable implementing the strategy in practice the way it was first created on a theoretical level (Kotler et al., 2016, pp. 147-149).</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Advantages (company):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To have an impact on customer behavior by strengthening messaging through various channels.</li> <li>• Improving customer experience.</li> <li>• Increasing customer satisfaction and loyalty.</li> <li>• Seamless interactions across channels.</li> <li>• Increasing sales and revenue.</li> <li>• Higher conversion rates.</li> <li>• Enhanced customer engagement through comprehensive data.</li> <li>• Increased operational efficiency and management of channels.</li> <li>• Cost savings.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unified customer experience is emphasized as an advantage for companies utilizing omnichannel marketing (Cui et al., 2021, p. 104).</li> <li>• Enhanced customer value. (Cui et al., 2021, p. 104).</li> <li>• Omnichannel marketing enables companies to achieve synergetic management of channels (Cui et al., 2021, p. 104).</li> <li>• Omnichannel marketing provides a way of data collection and analysis of customer information simultaneously from multiple channels (Mansurali et al., 2024, p. 630).</li> <li>• Omnichannel marketing is strongly related to increased sales results and customer engagement (Cui et al., 2021, p. 104).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concrete new advantages identified in the empirical data were higher conversion rates and having an impact on customer behavior by strong and effective messaging through various channels.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sales growth and reduction of costs follow successful implementation of omnichannel marketing strategies (Mansurali et al., 2024, p. 630).</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Challenges (company):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Risk of overcommunicating.</li> <li>• Complexity, specifically in data integration.</li> <li>• Cost of integration.</li> <li>• Ensuring data privacy.</li> <li>• Managing content across multiple channels and maintaining consistency.</li> <li>• Data access.</li> <li>• Technical challenges with platforms, no unified platform to manage compliance, customer data and omnichannel strategies.</li> <li>• Limited resources.</li> <li>• Organizational resistance to change.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The main challenges in integrating channels are data access and integration related questions (Cui et al., 2021, pp. 104-106).</li> <li>• Data is not always easily accessible and further usable (Cui et al., 2021, pp. 104-106).</li> <li>• Another challenge when integrating omnichannel strategies is marketing attribution (Cui et al., 2021, pp. 104-106).</li> <li>• Data privacy issues might concern customers. (Cui et al., 2021, pp. 104-106).</li> <li>• Challenges in organizational adaptation, issues related to implemented technology and lack of expertise and skills required for the chosen omnichannel strategy (Compton, 2014, pp. 25-28).</li> <li>• Challenges related to limited financial resources, lacking expertise and time to start utilizing omnichannel (Mansurali et al., 2024, pp. 630-632).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As a part of the empirical data, risk of overcommunicating and spamming customers was identified as a new empirical insight.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Advantages (customer):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexibility to choose between channels.</li> <li>• Easy access to information.</li> <li>• Receiving personalized and relevant content.</li> <li>• Customer satisfaction.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unified customer experience and increased customer engagement (Cui et al., 2021, p. 104).</li> <li>• Enabling customers to choose channels individually (Cui et al., 2021, p. 104).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As a part of the empirical data, easier access to information and receiving personalized, and therefore, relevant content was identified as a new empirical insight.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhanced and seamless customer experience.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seamless and coherent experience to customers across channels, increasing customer satisfaction and loyalty (Mansurali et al., 2024, p. 630).</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Challenges (customer):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Receiving overcommunication.</li> <li>Receiving irrelevant communication.</li> <li>Confusion about personal communication preferences.</li> <li>Not being digitally savvy.</li> <li>Unfamiliarity with new digital channels.</li> <li>Privacy concerns.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Data privacy concerns (Cui et al., 2021, pp. 104-106).</li> <li>Lack of motivation to utilize new channels. (Mansurali et al., 2024, pp. 630-632).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As a part of the empirical data, receiving overcommunication, and therefore somewhat irrelevant information was identified as a new empirical insight.</li> <li>As a part of the empirical data, confusion about personal preferences and consents given between various channels was identified as a new empirical insight.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Industry-Specific Ethical and Regulatory Limitations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inability to use public channels such as social media for marketing prescription medicines.</li> <li>Ethical concerns of consumers having access to advertisements of prescription medicines.</li> <li>Allowed marketing activities of prescription medicines are limited to channels where only healthcare professionals are present.</li> <li>Marketing activities for prescription medicines are targeted at healthcare professionals only, guiding in correct usage in the first place.</li> <li>Compliance with the Code of Ethics, guiding transparency in pharmaceutical marketing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Marketing of prescription medicines must be targeted only at healthcare professionals, qualified to prescribe or supply prescription medicines (Lääketeollisuus ry, 2024, p. 13).</li> <li>Other medical professionals than physicians should only receive guidance and instructions to correct and safe usage of prescription medicines (Lääketeollisuus ry, 2024, p. 13).</li> <li>Marketing channels for prescription medicines in Finland include for example the following: brochures, treatment presentations, print advertisements in magazines, digital marketing activities such as emails and websites. In addition, sales activities performed by sales representatives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ethical concerns of consumers having access to advertisements of prescription medicines was mentioned as one perspective of ethical and regulatory limitations in the interviews.</li> </ul>

	are identified as one channel. (Pellas, 2022, pp. 3-4).	
<p><b>Identified Challenges in Omnichannel Marketing Caused by Industry-Specific Rules and Regulations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequent requests to login to websites and challenges in accessibility negatively impact customer experiences.</li> <li>• Challenges in creating cohesive cross-communication plans for physicians due to the need for security and compliance with laws.</li> <li>• Challenges in providing seamless customer experiences to physicians, moving between websites and platforms requiring constant logins.</li> <li>• Regulatory requirements for password protected websites targeted to physicians.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Any digital media marketing in Finland, such as websites and banner advertisements, including information of prescription medicines, must be protected with password to ensure it is accessible only to the legal target audience (Pellas, 2013, p. 28).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Password-protection for websites and constant login requests due to it were identified as the main challenges in creating omnichannel marketing strategies.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Identified Allowed Marketing Channels for Prescription Medicines</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sales calls and face to face meetings.</li> <li>• Live events.</li> <li>• Webinars.</li> <li>• Email marketing.</li> <li>• Mass email campaigns.</li> <li>• Third-party websites, including banners.</li> <li>• Advertorials on third-party websites and magazines.</li> <li>• Conferences.</li> <li>• Print marketing is also used, not found as efficient as digital channels.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marketing channels for prescription medicines in Finland include for example the following: brochures, treatment presentations, print advertisements in magazines, digital marketing activities such as emails and websites. In addition, sales activities performed by sales representatives are identified as one channel. (Pellas, 2022, pp. 3-4).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Print marketing is still widely used for marketing prescription medicines to physicians, not found as efficient as digital channels.</li> <li>• The role of email marketing was highly emphasized in the interviews.</li> </ul>

**Table 3.** Summary table of key findings related to the main research question.

When it comes to the first section of the key findings in Table 3, related to the main research question of how marketing specialists perceive the implementation of omnichannel marketing strategies within the pharmaceutical industry in Finland, it was viewed through the motivators for the implementation of omnichannel marketing strategies. In the interviews, the respondents identified motivators such as increasing digital presence of customers as well as changes in customer behavior towards using multiple channels to have channel variance available to choose from. Furthermore, to support the previous, customers expecting variance in channels was also identified by Carickhoff (2021, p. 7). In addition, one of the motivators to implement omnichannel marketing activities the respondents made observations about was that customers expect personalization, which companies can respond by utilizing omnichannel marketing as according to Berman and Thelen (2018, p. 600), in omnichannel marketing customers are provided the flexibility to choose between channels and combinations of those. During the interviews, another motivator identified is gaining data-driven insights through omnichannel marketing, which can further improve return on investment as well as operational efficiency. Also, similar findings are made by Carickhoff (2021, p. 7) emphasizing that omnichannel marketing leverages data to build a brand story and furthermore, data indicates that healthcare professionals engaged to the brand are likely to convert. Finally, enhancement in customer engagement and efficiency in communication were mentioned as motivators during the interviews, also supported in theory by Kotler et al. (2016, p. 140) emphasizing that to enhance customer engagement, efforts across all channels shall be synchronized, which can be achieved through omnichannel marketing. Other motivators mentioned by the respondents for organizations to start utilizing omnichannel marketing strategies were competitive advantage achieved through omnichannel marketing as well as cost savings and broader reach of customers.

As requirements for organizations implementing omnichannel marketing strategies the respondents recognized factors such as careful planning, clear and cohesive communication within the organization throughout the implementation, a proper strategy, functioning tools, automation as well as data analytics platforms, and integration of these

systems. The previous identified requirements are also covered in theory by Mansurali et al. (2024, p. 630-632), as they state that successful alignment of different channels requires financial and human resources as well as technical knowledge and flexibility within the organization to adapt. Furthermore, the respondents highlighted essential data to be another requirement, which is supported by Cui et al. (2021, pp. 104-106) stating that companies need comprehensive data throughout customer journeys. Moreover, organizational adaptation and capability building were observed to be requirements as well being supported by Compton (2014, pp. 25-28), as he emphasizes that preparing the organization prior to the integration of channels is crucial. Lastly, the respondents found customer-centricity to be another requirement, which is also emphasized from theoretical perspective by Cui et al. (2021, pp. 104-106) stating that companies should be on track of the impact different touchpoints have on customer behavior.

When it comes to the implementation process, empirical data underscores a comprehensive approach to be a necessity. This includes getting to know the customer base, defining clear targets and goals, setting precise timelines, preparing and planning materials, targeting and motivating customers, mapping touchpoints, analyzing and measuring customer journeys, identifying areas for improvement as well as continuously reviewing data, aiming to remove ineffective marketing channels. These empirical findings are reinforced by theoretical perspectives, which suggest organizations develop a strategy that provides a clear vision and outlines the strategic steps both theoretically and practically (Medical Marketing and Media, 2023, p. 38). Additionally, it is crucial to identify and mitigate potential challenges in advance (Berman & Thelen, 2018, p. 606), motivate customers to engage with various channels (Neslin, 2022, p. 120-123), and evaluate channel performance regularly (Mansurali et al., 2024, pp. 633-634). New empirical insights highlight that the core of successful implementation processes is customer-centricity. This means understanding the customers and implementing omnichannel marketing strategies that genuinely benefit them.

When considering the advantages that companies can achieve through omnichannel marketing strategies, empirical data highlights several key benefits. These include the ability to influence customer behavior through strong messaging, improved customer experience, increase in customer satisfaction and loyalty, seamless interactions throughout channels, enhanced sales and revenue, higher conversion rates, enhanced customer engagement through comprehensive data, increased operational efficiency as well as cost savings. Also, theoretical findings support these advantages found, highlighting the importance of a unified customer experience (Cui et al., 2021, p. 104). Enhanced customer value, synergetic management of channels as well as the benefits of data collection and analysis from multiple channels are emphasized by Mansurali et al. (2024, p. 630), as well as increased sales and customer engagement (Cui et al., 2021, p. 104). Additionally, new empirical insights found are higher conversion rates and the significant impact of strong and effective messaging achieved utilizing various channels.

Conversely, empirical data reveals several challenges that companies face, including the risk of overcommunicating, complexity in data integration, high integration costs, ensuring data privacy, managing content across multiple channels, data access issues, technical challenges related to platforms, limited resources and organizational resistance to change. These empirical findings are supported by theoretical perspectives, which also highlight challenges such as data access and integration issues, marketing attribution and data privacy concerns (Cui et al., 2021, pp. 104-106). Moreover, Compton (2014, pp. 25-28) identifies challenges in organizational adaptation and a lack of expertise and skills within organizations. Mansurali et al. (2024, pp. 630-632) further emphasize that limited financial resources, expertise and time are significant obstacles to implementing omnichannel marketing strategies. New empirical insights also point to the risk of overcommunicating and spamming customers in an inappropriate way.

Regarding the advantages for customers, empirical data highlights several key benefits. These include the flexibility to choose between channels, easy access to information, receiving personalized and relevant content as well as overall customer satisfaction,

which leads to an enhanced and seamless customer experience. Theoretical findings further support these advantages identified through the interviews held. They emphasize the importance of a unified customer experience (Cui et al., 2021, p. 104), enabling customers to choose their channels individually and providing a seamless experience across all channels (Mansurali et al., 2024, p. 630). Additionally, new empirical insights highlight the value of easier access to information and receiving personalized, relevant content as significant advantages for customers.

Finally, empirical data has identified several challenges faced by customers. These include receiving irrelevant communication and overcommunication, confusion regarding personal communication preferences across different channels, a lack of digital savviness, unfamiliarity with new digital channels and privacy concerns. Theoretical perspectives echo these findings highlighting issues such as data privacy concerns (Cui et al., 2021, pp. 104-106) and a lack of motivation to utilize new channels (Mansurali et al., 2024, pp. 630-632). Additionally, new empirical insights have pointed out the significant challenges of overcommunication and confusion regarding personal preferences and consents agreed on across different channels.

As industry-specific, ethical and regulatory, limitations the respondents identified restrictions such as inability to utilize public channels including social media for marketing prescription medicines. Also, according to Pellas (2022, pp. 3-4), allowed marketing channels for prescription medicines in Finland are limited to brochures, treatment presentations, print advertisements in magazines, sales activities and digital marketing activities consisting of emails and websites. Another limitation found in the interviews was that marketing activities for prescription medicines are targeted at healthcare professionals only, first and foremost guiding in correct usage. The previous is due to the limitation of marketing prescription medicines being targeted only at healthcare professionals qualified to either prescribe or supply those medicines and other medical professionals than physicians should only receive guidance and instructions to correct and safe usage of prescription medicines (Lääketeollisuus ry, 2024, p. 13).

Furthermore, the respondents named the following issues as challenges in omnichannel marketing caused by industry-specific rules and regulations: frequent requests to login to websites and challenges in accessibility negatively impact customer experiences, challenges in creating cohesive cross-communication plans for physicians due to the need for security and compliance with laws, challenges in providing seamless customer experience to physicians as moving between websites and platforms require constant logins as well as identified regulatory requirements for password protected websites targeted to physicians. All the identified challenges come down to that any digital media marketing in Finland, such as websites and banner advertisements, including information of prescription medicines must be protected with password to ensure it is accessible only to the legal target audience (Pellas, 2013, p. 28). Also, password-protection for websites and constant login requests due to it were identified as the main challenges during the interviews in creating omnichannel marketing strategies for prescription medicines.

During the interviews, respondents identified the following marketing channels to be effective in marketing prescription medicines: sales calls and face to face meetings, live events, webinars, email marketing, mass email campaigns, third-party websites including banners, advertorials on third-party websites and magazines, conferences and lastly, print marketing but it was found less effective compared to digital channels. As another new empirical insight, the role of email marketing was highly emphasized in the interviews.

## 5 Conclusions

This chapter of the thesis covers the updated framework of the study, theoretical contributions and managerial implications that are intended to offer practical advice for marketing specialists regarding the implementation of omnichannel marketing strategies. Lastly, limitations of the study and suggestions for future research are discussed.

### 5.1 Updated Framework

The first part of the theoretical framework is focused on building an omnichannel strategy, including motivators and requirements for implementing an omnichannel marketing strategy. From the perspective of customers, it was identified as one motivator that customers expect to be provided with variance in channels (Carickhoff, 2021, p. 7). Reversely, motivators for companies were identified omnichannel marketing to be leveraging data to build a brand story, and data shows that healthcare professionals who engage to the brand story, are likely to convert (Carickhoff, 2021, p 7). Furthermore, another motivator for implementing an omnichannel marketing strategy, was found enhanced customer commitment achieved through marketing efforts across channels being synchronized (Kotler et al., 2016, p. 140). In addition, companies' ability to respond to the expectations of customers to have variance between channels, was identified as another motivator to provide them with the flexibility to use different channels and combinations of those (Berman & Thelen, 2018, p. 600).

As another factor in the phase of building an omnichannel strategy, were included different requirements for companies to consider prior to the implementation. These requirements were viewed through the theoretical findings by Mansurali et al. (2024, pp. 630-632) stating that it is required from companies to have financial and human resources as well as technological knowledge within the organization to adapt before starting the implementation. Also, Compton (2014, pp. 25-28) highlighted the importance of preparing the organization prior to the integration, whereas Cui et al. (2021, pp. 104-106) found that companies need comprehensive data throughout customer journeys,

also adding that companies should be on track of the impact different touchpoints may have on customer behavior.

Continuing to the implementation phase, it was suggested for companies to identify and mitigate possible obstacles and challenges in advance (Berman & Thelen, 2018, p. 606). It was also recognized that organizations need a strategy that provides an overview of the vision and one that clarifies the next steps both in theory as well as in practice (Medical Marketing and Media, 2023, p. 38). Another activity completing the implementation phase is for companies to motivate as well as encourage their customers to utilize a variety of channels (Neslin, 2022, p. 120-123). The implementation of omnichannel marketing strategies also involves evaluating channel performance, removing underperforming channels, making certain marketing and channel decisions based on appropriate indicators and data (Mansurali et al., 2024, pp. 633-634). When it comes to allocating resources between channels, Kotler et al. (2016, pp. 147-149) suggest companies invest their resources in the most effective and preferred channels by customers. They also emphasize companies form such organizational structure that it would further enable them to implement the chosen strategy in practice as it was originally recognized on a theoretical level (Kotler et al., 2016, pp. 147-149).

Moving forward to advantages companies can gain through utilizing omnichannel marketing strategies. Factors that are found include unified customer experience as well as enhanced customer value and synergetic management of channels (Cui et al., 2021, p. 104). Other advantages identified are sales growth and reduction of costs, as well as data collection and therefore, comprehensive data available (Mansurali et al., 2024, p. 630). Reversely, challenges companies may face when implementing omnichannel marketing strategies consist of data access and integration related questions (Cui et al., 2021, pp. 104-106). Another obstacle companies may have to consider is data privacy concerns coming from customers (Cui et al., 2021, pp. 104-106). Moreover, Compton (2014, pp. 25-28) recognized hindering factors such as challenges related to organizational

adaptation, issues related to implemented technology and lack of expertise as well as skills required for the chosen omnichannel strategy.

On the other hand, unified customer experience and increased customer engagement was found to be one of the advantages for customers through seamless movement between channels and touchpoints in addition to the freedom to choose channels themselves (Cui et al., 2021, p. 104), followed by advantages such as customer satisfaction and loyalty (Mansurali et al., 2024, p. 630). The same authors found data privacy concerns (Cui et al., 2021, pp. 104-106), and lack of motivation to start utilizing unfamiliar channels as challenges for customers (Mansurali et al., 2024, pp. 630-632).

Furthermore, as an addition to the new updated framework was identified industry-specific, ethical and regulatory limitations affecting the implementation of omnichannel marketing strategies. Firstly, marketing of prescription medicines is only allowed be targeted at physicians, qualified to prescribe these medicines (Lääketeollisuus ry, 2024, p. 13), which therefore restricts significantly the potential audience to be targeted with marketing efforts. Another new insight regarding the industry-specific limitations found is the limited selection of marketing channels available for pharmaceutical companies to promote prescription medicines in. The options to choose from include brochures, treatment presentations, print advertisements in magazines, digital marketing activities in the form of emails and websites, followed by sales activities performed by sales representatives (Pellas, 2022, pp. 3-4).

A significant challenge derived from specific channels allowed, is that any digital media in Finland, such as websites and banner advertisements on third-party platforms having information of prescription medicines, are to be protected with password to ensure only physicians being able to access the kind of content (Pellas, 2013, p. 28). The previous restriction further limits the capabilities of pharmaceutical companies in Finland to build and utilize omnichannel marketing strategies in terms of creating and providing seamless experience for customers.

## 5.2 Theoretical Contributions

This sub-chapter focuses on the comparison between the key findings from empirical data and theory. In addition, new empirical insights found are discussed.

Firstly, empirical data derived from the semi-structured interviews gave several insights regarding the motivators for implementing omnichannel marketing strategies. The main motivators identified include the increasing digital presence of customers, changes in customer behavior towards using multiple channels as well as customers' expectations to be provided with personalization. The previous motivators found are supported by several theoretical findings, as Carickhoff (2021, p. 7) emphasizes the importance of companies to provide variance in channels as well as leveraging data for building a brand story, which further engages healthcare professionals. Moreover, Berman and Thelen (2018, p. 600), advise companies to provide customers with the freedom to choose between different channels and combinations of those, by implementing omnichannel marketing strategies. Finally, Kotler et al. (2016, p. 140), highlight that synchronized efforts across all channels are likely to enhance customer commitment. When it comes to new empirical insights, a few were made, including the importance of data-driven insights to improve return on investment and operational efficiency. Additionally, it was found that omnichannel marketing strategies enable companies to target their activities to a broader reach of customers, it also enhances customer engagement and efficiency in communication as well as leads to cost savings.

When it comes to identifying requirements for implementing omnichannel marketing strategies successfully, several were recognized, including clear and cohesive communication, a proper strategy, essential data, careful planning, customer-centricity, functioning tools and specifically automation as well as analytics tools, integration of systems, capability building, cross-functionality, and finally, organizational adaptation. These recognized requirements are supported by theoretical findings, the first one emphasizing companies to focus on having enough financial and human resources, technological

knowledge and organizational flexibility within the company (Mansurali et al., 2024, pp. 630-632). Furthermore, preparing the organization prior to the integration process of channels is found to be crucial (Compton, 2014, pp. 25-28), as well as having comprehensive data throughout customer journeys while also understanding the impact of different touchpoints on customer behavior (Cui et al., 2021, pp. 104-106). Lastly, new empirical insights emphasize the important role of customer-centric strategies, organizational readiness consisting of cross-functionality, capability building as well as adaptation. Further, the role of adequate technical tools, especially automation tools and data analytics platforms and the integration of those, was highlighted.

Regarding the implementation process, empirical data shows the importance of having a detailed implementation process, including familiarizing with the customer base, defining targets and goals, setting clear timelines, preparing and planning materials, targeting and motivating customers, mapping touchpoints, analyzing and measuring journeys, identifying areas for improvement, reviewing data along the way and then deleting ineffective channels. The previous findings derived from the empirical data are supported by theory, as it is suggested for organizations to have a strategy which provides an overview of the vision and which clarifies the next strategical steps both in theory and in practice (Medical Marketing and Media, 2023, p. 38). Also, identifying and mitigating potential challenges in advance (Berman & Thelen, 2018, p. 606), motivating customers to utilize various channels (Neslin, 2022, p. 120-123), as well as evaluating channel performance are found to be crucial in the implementation process of omnichannel marketing strategies (Mansurali et al., 2024, pp. 633-634). Therefore, new empirical insights emphasize the foundation of successful implementation processes to be customer-centricity, first and foremost knowing the customers and further, benefiting them by implementing omnichannel marketing strategies.

When it comes to advantages companies can achieve through utilizing omnichannel marketing strategies, as a part of the empirical data, the following advantages were recognized: ability to impact customer behavior through strong messaging, improving

customer experience, increasing customer satisfaction and loyalty, seamless interactions across channels, increased sales and revenue, higher conversion rates, enhanced customer engagement through comprehensive data, increased operational efficiency as well as cost savings. Theoretical findings support previous advantages identified, emphasizing a unified customer experience (Cui et al. 2021, p. 104), enhanced customer value, synergetic management of channels as well as data collection and analysis gained from multiple channels (Mansurali et al., 2024, p. 630), and increased sales and customer engagement (Cui et al., 2021, p. 104). Additionally, new empirical insights include increased conversion rates and the impact of strong and effective messaging, which is enabled by various channels.

On the other hand, as a part of the empirical data, various challenges for companies were found, such as the risk of overcommunicating, complexity in data integration, cost of integration, ensuring data privacy, managing content across multiple channels, data access, technical challenges related to platforms in use, limited resources and organizational resistance to change. Supporting the empirical data, similarities are found in theory such as data access and integration challenges, marketing attribution and data privacy concerns (Cui et al., 2021, pp. 104-106). Also, Compton (2014, pp. 25-28), has identified challenges in organizational adaptation and lack of expertise and skills within organizations. Additionally, Mansurali et al. (2024, pp. 630-632), name limited financial resources, expertise and time to be significant challenges related to the implementation of omnichannel marketing strategies. New empirical insights cover the risk of overcommunicating and spamming customers as a significant challenge.

Regarding the advantages for customers, empirical data includes flexibility to choose between channels, easy access to information, receiving personalized and relevant content, customer satisfaction, followed by enhanced and seamless customer experience. As a continuation, theoretical findings support these advantages found through the interviews, emphasizing a unified customer experience and engagement (Cui et al., 2021, p. 104), enabling customers to choose channels individually and providing a seamless

customer experience across channels (Mansurali et al., 2024, p. 630). Derived from the previous advantages presented, new empirical insights highlight easier access to information and receiving personalized, relevant content as valuable advantages.

Finally, through the empirical data several challenges for customers were derived, such as receiving irrelevant communication as well as overcommunication, confusion regarding personal communication preferences to have agreed on different channels, not being digitally savvy, unfamiliarity with new digital channels and lastly, privacy concerns. From the theoretical perspective, similar findings are made, including data privacy concerns (Cui et al., 2021, pp. 104-106), and lack of motivation to utilize new channels (Mansurali et al., 2024, pp. 630-632). A couple of new empirical insights as challenges were generated: receiving overcommunication and confusion regarding personal preferences and consents given between various channels.

### **5.3 Managerial Implications**

The findings derived from this study provide several implications for marketing specialists and people in related roles in the pharmaceutical industry. As the trend is continuously growing towards the implementation of omnichannel marketing strategies despite the business field, generalizable findings can be applied in the pharmaceutical industry as well, still considering the rules and regulations valid in the industry, which have been introduced previously in the fourth chapter of this thesis.

Furthermore, this sub-chapter focuses on offering managerial implications for marketing specialists based on the empirical data gathered through semi-structured interviews and supporting theoretical findings. The insights are aimed to help marketing specialists to first identify and understand the motivators, requirements, implementation processes and finally, recognize possible advantages to gain as an organization by utilizing omnichannel marketing strategies in practice, while avoiding and preventing challenges that may come along, for both the company as well as its customers.

As the customers are continuously becoming more digital, it is both justified and suggested for the companies to grow their presence in these channels as well, to maximize their reach amongst customers. Furthermore, being omnichannel is no longer considered as a competitive advantage since majority of customers these days expect to be provided with channel variance and personalized content. For example, Carickhoff (2021, p. 7), emphasizes the importance of providing channel variance and leveraging data to build a brand story that engages customers. Thus, marketing specialists are suggested to focus on several crucial, concrete activities as follows.

To begin with, marketing specialists should familiarize themselves with their customer base. By doing so, grows the understanding of customer behavior, their preferences as well as expectations the companies should base their omnichannel activities later. More specifically, the previous includes collecting and further analyzing data to gather insights in order to be able to build appropriate customer journeys and touchpoints.

In the next phase, marketing specialists are suggested to define clear targets and goals for their omnichannel activities. Through setting specific as well as measurable goals they can ease the data tracking and the evaluation process of whether chosen channels and activities are successful and worth investing in or not. The evaluation can be done through key performance indicators set as a part of the strategy to be implemented.

Another crucial aspect to consider is setting clear timelines. By doing so, marketing specialists can ensure all tasks to be completed in a timely manner, which further eases cross-functional coordination of these activities such as planning and preparing marketing materials, consisting of content creation and other activities as well as resources in all the channels in use.

Next follows targeting and motivating customers, which involves the development of personalized content and messaging that resonate with various customer segments throughout channels, while aiming to encourage them to engage with the company and

further, the brand. More specifically, to understand customers and their interactions with the company on a detailed level, marketing specialists are suggested to map touchpoints along customer journeys, which enables them to recognize areas to improve as well as ensure seamless customer experience throughout channels.

When it comes to analyzing and measuring customer journeys, it is crucial to continuously evaluate the efficiency of the chosen omnichannel strategy, including specific activities such as data collection on customer touchpoints as well as further utilizing analytics tools to gather understanding of customer behavior and more in detail, their preferences. As mentioned previously, evaluating and identifying areas to be enhanced is a process to be repeated regularly, focusing specifically on data review to recognize gaps and underperforming channels to make needed decisions either to delete or replace them.

Lastly, marketing specialists are recommended to follow the suggested steps introduced above, as these activities performed together enable them to successfully implement omnichannel marketing strategies, resulting in improved customer engagement, increased sales and enhanced operational efficiency, for example.

#### **5.4 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

Despite the managerial implications and theoretical contributions derived from this study, several limitations are necessary to be considered. Due to the study being executed in Finland, it automatically sets limitations for further utilization of it in other settings as well as circumstances. More in detail, the aim of this study was to gain a comprehensive understanding of perceptions of marketing specialists on the implementation of omnichannel marketing strategies, specifically in the Finnish pharmaceutical industry, and therefore it is justified that the intention behind the study was not to derive general level information in the first place. On the other hand, if the results were intended to be universalized, a larger sample size for the study would have been required instead of the current sample of four respondents from three different organizations.

Another limitation in addition to the country-specificity and sample size of the study, is the study being time-bound, not considering previous or future phases of the evolution of omnichannel marketing within the pharmaceutical industry in Finland. Thus, to discover the phenomenon further, longitudinal studies should be conducted.

When it comes to suggestions for further studies, an interesting point of view would be discovering the topic of integration omnichannel marketing strategies in the Finnish pharmaceutical industry, but to focus on the decision-making side of the integration, which was not covered in this study as such. In addition to the previous suggestion, another one would be concentrating on the customer-centric perspective discovering the perceptions of customers, physicians in this setting, on the integration of omnichannel marketing strategies in the Finnish pharmaceutical industry.

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## Appendix 1. Interview Questions

### 1. Understanding the Context of Omnichannel Marketing:

- How do you define omnichannel marketing?
- How do you implement an omnichannel marketing strategy?
- What is the aim behind implementing an omnichannel marketing strategy?
- What do you believe are the key factors to create an effective omnichannel marketing strategy?

### 2. Perception of Implementing an Omnichannel Marketing Strategy:

- What do you think would be the main motivators to implement an omnichannel marketing strategy?
- What does the implementation of omnichannel marketing strategy require?
- What is the process like from planning to executing an omnichannel marketing strategy?

### 3. Impact and Effectiveness of Omnichannel Marketing Strategies:

- What kind of advantages does the implementation of omnichannel marketing strategies bring to the company?
- What kind of challenges are linked to the process of implementing omnichannel marketing strategies from the company's point of view?

### 4. Customer-Centric Perspective:

- What kind of advantages do the customer gain from the implementation of omnichannel marketing strategies?
- What kind of challenges are related to omnichannel marketing strategies from the customer's point of view?

### 5. Industry-Specific Perspective:

- What are the main limitations you face when marketing prescription medicines?
- What are the most effective marketing channels for prescription medicines?
- How has the adoption of omnichannel marketing strategies developed in the pharmaceutical industry?
- How do you see the future of omnichannel marketing within the pharmaceutical industry?