

# In search of digital marketing communications success: the case of oil and gas industry B2B SMEs.

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IN SEARCH OF DIGITAL MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS SUCCESS:  
THE CASE OF OIL AND GAS INDUSTRY B2B SMES

JUSTINA SETKUTE

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements of the  
Robert Gordon University  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

October 2018



## ABSTRACT

### IN SEARCH OF DIGITAL MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS SUCCESS: THE CASE OF OIL AND GAS INDUSTRY B2B SMES

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The focus of this study is the use and role of digital marketing communications (DMC) among B2B SMEs in the oil and gas industry. In order to understand the role of DMC, which is described as the use of DMC channels, such as website, social media, e-mail and mobile marketing, a comprehensive review is undertaken into SMEs and B2B marketing theory to identify the nature of their marketing practices. The conceptual framework of critical success factors (CSFs) for DMC is developed to assess the use and role among B2B SMEs. The digital marketing theory is still emerging and at the same time there are calls for more research into B2B and SMEs marketing and thus this study combines these calls and investigates B2B SMEs and their DMC practices.

The study is a qualitative case study research, which uses three phases of data collection, undertaken in light of realism research paradigm. The first phase includes a longitudinal systematic observation of oil and gas SMEs and their DMC practices. The second phase includes interviews with marketing agencies to provide a macro view on the oil and gas industry and its marketing practices. The final phase are interviews with the managers from oil and gas B2B SMEs aiming to gain the internal views and insights on DMC use and role.

This study contributes to the digital marketing theory, by investigating the five groups of factors: internal, external, marketing strategy, website and DMC channels, affecting DMC strategy for B2B SMEs. Empirical data suggests that the two main groups of factors influencing DMC strategy are internal and external factors, putting B2B SMEs in a complex situation as they are internally dealing with limited resources and operating in the industrial context externally. Study also shows that among B2B SMEs DMC play only a supportive role as the focus remains on traditional communication techniques such as personal face-to-face sales communications.

**Keywords:** Digital marketing, digital marketing communications, B2B marketing, SMEs marketing, oil and gas industry

*“I dedicate this work to my father Prof Dr Benediktas,  
whose footsteps I followed into academic career”*

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## **CONTENTS**

<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
1.0. CHAPTER OVERVIEW	1
1.1. STUDY FOCUS AND RATIONALE	1
1.2. RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES	5
1.3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	6
1.4. RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION	7
1.5. STRUCTURE	7
<b>2. LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	<b>9</b>
2.0. CHAPTER OVERVIEW	9
2.1. MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS	9
2.1.1. Definition of Marketing Communications	9
2.1.2. Marketing Communications Mix	10
2.1.3. Integrated Marketing Communications	11
2.1.4. Changes in Marketing Communications	12
2.2. DIGITAL MARKETING	15
2.2.1. Definition of Digital Marketing and Digital Marketing Communications	15
2.2.2. Features of Digital Marketing	20
2.2.3. Digital Marketing Communications Channels	23
2.2.3.1. Websites	25
2.2.3.2. Search Engine Marketing	27
2.2.3.3. Social Media Marketing	29
2.2.3.3.1. Definition of Social Media and Social Media Marketing	29
2.2.3.3.2. Features of Social Media Marketing	32
2.2.3.3.3. Social Media Channels	33
2.2.3.4. E-mail Marketing	34
2.2.3.5. Mobile Marketing	35
2.2.3.6. Content Marketing	36
2.2.4. Paid, Earned and Owned Media	37
2.2.5. Digital Marketing Communications Building Blocks	38
2.3. DIGITAL MARKETING FRAMEWORKS	39
2.4. DIGITAL MARKETING IN PRACTICE	42
2.4.1. A Marketing Theory and Practice Gap	42
2.4.2. Digital Marketing Practitioners	44
2.5. MARKETING AND DIGITAL MARKETING PRACTICES	45
2.5.1. Marketing Practices and SMEs	45

2.5.1.1. SMEs Marketing	45
2.5.1.2. SMEs Digital Marketing	46
2.5.2. Marketing Practices and B2B	49
2.5.2.1. B2B Marketing	49
2.5.2.2. B2B Digital Marketing	51
2.5.3. Marketing Practices and B2B SMEs	54
2.5.4. Marketing Practices and Oil and Gas Industry	55
2.5.4.1. The Oil and Gas Industry	55
2.5.4.2. Aberdeen Oil and Gas SMEs	57
2.6. DIGITAL MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS FRAMEWORK	58
2.6.1. Critical Success Factors Frameworks	58
2.6.2. Digital Marketing Communications Strategy Critical Success Factors	61
<b>3. RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES</b>	<b>64</b>
3.0. CHAPTER OVERVIEW	64
3.1. INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH QUESTION, AIM AND OBJECTIVES	64
3.2. RESEARCH QUESTION	64
3.3. RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES	66
3.4. RESEARCH CONTEXT	67
<b>4. METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>69</b>
4.0. CHAPTER OVERVIEW	69
4.1. INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	69
4.2. RESEARCH DESIGN	70
4.2.1. Research Philosophy	71
4.2.2. Research Design	76
4.2.3. Research Methods	80
4.2.4. Data Collection	85
4.2.4.1. Phase One – Longitudinal Observation	85
4.2.4.1.1. Research Instrument Development	85
4.2.4.1.2. Research Participants	87
4.2.4.1.3. Observation Execution	88
4.2.4.2. Phase Two – Semi-Structured Interviews with Marketing Agencies	88
4.2.4.2.1. Research Instrument Development	88
4.2.4.2.2. Research Participants	89
4.2.4.2.3. Undertaking Interviews	90
4.2.4.3. Phase Three – Semi-Structured Interviews with B2B SMEs	91
4.2.4.3.1. Research Instrument Development	91
4.2.4.3.2. Research Participants	91



4.2.4.3.3. Undertaking Interviews	93
4.2.5. Data Analysis	93
4.2.5.1. Phase One – Observation Data Analysis	94
4.2.5.2. Phase Two – Semi-Structured Interviews Data Analysis	94
4.2.5.3. Phase Three – Semi-Structured Interviews Data Analysis	95
4.3. VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY	95
4.4. LIMITATIONS	98
4.5. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	98
<b>5. FINDINGS</b>	<b>99</b>
5.0. CHAPTER OVERVIEW	99
5.1. INTERVIEWS WITH MARKETING AGENCIES	99
5.1.1. Introduction	99
5.1.2. Digital Marketing	101
5.1.2.1. Digital Marketing Strategy	101
5.1.2.1.1. Digital Marketing Definition	101
5.1.2.1.2. Digital Marketing Planning	104
5.1.2.1.3. Digital Marketing Implementation	105
5.1.2.1.4. Strategic Digital Marketing	106
5.1.2.2. Online and Offline Integration	107
5.1.2.3. Traditional and Digital Marketing Differences	108
5.1.2.4. B2B and B2C Marketing Differences	109
5.1.2.5. Internal Factors	109
5.1.2.6. External Factors	110
5.1.2. Digital Marketing Communications Channels	110
5.1.2.1. Website	111
5.1.2.2. Search Engine Optimisation	112
5.1.2.3. Social Media	113
5.1.2.4. Mobile-Optimised Websites	116
5.1.2.5. Mobile Applications	116
5.1.2.6. E-mail Marketing	116
5.1.3. Oil and Gas Industry Marketing	117
5.1.3.1. Oil and Gas Industry Features	117
5.1.3.2. Marketing Practices in Oil and Gas Industry	119
5.1.3.3. Digital Marketing before the Recession	121
5.1.3.4. Digital Marketing during the Recession	122
5.1.4. Marketing Agencies	126
5.1.4.1. Marketing Agency Role	126

5.1.4.2. Issues and Challenges	127
5.1.5. Summary of Interviews	128
5.2. OBSERVATION OF B2B SMES	128
5.2.1. Introduction	128
5.2.2. Website	129
5.2.2.1. Introduction	129
5.2.2.2. Website Observations	129
5.2.2.3. Summary of Observations	135
5.2.3. Facebook	137
5.2.3.1. Introduction	137
5.2.3.2. Facebook Observations	138
5.2.3.3. Summary of Observations	139
5.2.4. Twitter	142
5.2.4.1. Introduction	142
5.2.4.2. Twitter Observations	142
5.2.4.3. Summary of Observations	144
5.2.5. LinkedIn	147
5.2.5.1. Introduction	147
5.2.5.2. LinkedIn Observations	147
5.2.5.3. Summary of Observations	149
5.2.6. YouTube	151
5.2.7. Mobile Marketing	153
5.2.8. E-mail Marketing	154
5.3. INTERVIEWS WITH OIL AND GAS B2B SMES	154
5.3.1. Introduction	154
5.3.2. Marketing Communications Channels	156
5.3.2. Sales Focus	157
5.3.2.1. Networking and Relationships	157
5.3.2.2. Traditional Sales Techniques	159
5.3.3. Industry Features	161
5.3.3.1. Company Size	161
5.3.3.2. Resources	162
5.3.3.3. Commercially Sensitive Information	163
5.3.3.4. Oil and Gas Industry	164
5.3.3.5. Generation and Age	166
5.3.3.6. Industry News	167
5.3.4. Website	167

5.3.4.1. Good Website	169
5.3.4.2. Attract Stage	169
5.3.4.3. Engage and Retain Stage	171
5.3.4.4. Learn Stage	172
5.3.4.5. Relate Stage	173
5.3.5. Search Engine Marketing	173
5.3.5.1. Search Engines	173
5.3.5.2. Search Engine Optimisation	174
5.3.5.3. Google AdWords	174
5.3.6. Social Media	175
5.3.7. LinkedIn	177
5.3.8. E-mail Marketing	179
5.3.9. Mobile Applications	180
5.3.10. Marketing Agency Role	180
5.3.11. Summary of Interviews	180
<b>6. DISCUSSION</b>	<b>182</b>
6.0. CHAPTER OVERVIEW	182
6.1. INTERNAL FACTORS	183
6.1.1. Technological Infrastructure	183
6.1.2. Internal Culture	184
6.1.3. Relationship between Marketing and IT Departments	185
6.1.4. Role of Sales Force	186
6.1.5. Training Programmes	187
6.1.6. Access to Resources	187
6.2. MARKETING STRATEGY FACTORS	189
6.2.1. Setting the Strategic Goal	190
6.2.2. Having Top Management Support	191
6.2.3. Integrating Internet Marketing with Marketing Strategy	192
6.2.4. Deciding the Strategic Partners	193
6.2.5. Deciding the Potential Audience	194
6.3. WEBSITE	195
6.3.1. Website – Attract	197
6.3.2. Website – Engage and Retain	198
6.3.3. Website – Learn	200
6.3.4. Website – Relate	200
6.4. DIGITAL MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS CHANNELS AND PLATFORMS	201
6.4.1. Social Media	201

6.4.2. LinkedIn	204
6.4.3. Mobile Applications	205
6.4.4. E-mail Marketing	206
<b>6.5. EXTERNAL FACTORS</b>	<b>207</b>
6.5.1. Trust	208
6.5.2. Security and Privacy	208
6.5.3. Successful Relationships	209
6.5.4. Easy and Affordable Access to the Internet	210
6.5.5. Customer Acceptance	211
6.5.6. Industry Type	211
6.5.7. Competitors	214
6.5.8. Macroeconomic Factors – Recession	215
<b>6.6. DIGITAL MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY</b>	<b>215</b>
6.6.1. Issue 1 – Definition	216
6.6.2. Issue 2 – Planning and Implementation	217
6.6.3. Issue 3 – Integration	218
6.6.4. Issue 4 – Channels Use	219
6.6.5. Issue 5 – Objectives	219
6.6.6. Best Practice for Digital Marketing Communications Strategy Success	220
<b>6.7. REVISED CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS FRAMEWORK</b>	<b>223</b>
<b>7. CONCLUSIONS</b>	<b>227</b>
7.0. CHAPTER OVERVIEW	227
7.1. RO1: DIGITAL MARKETING AND DIGITAL MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS	227
7.2. RO2: MARKETING AND DIGITAL MARKETING FOR B2B SMES	229
7.3. RO3: DIGITAL MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS FOR OIL AND GAS SMES	230
7.4. RO4: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR OIL AND GAS SMES	231
7.5. RO5: CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS FOR B2B SMES	232
7.6. RO6: BEST PRACTICE FOR B2B SMES	234
7.7. CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE	235
7.8. LIMITATIONS	236
7.9. FURTHER RESEARCH	237
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>238</b>
<b>APPENDICES</b>	<b>259</b>

## TABLES

<b>Table 1.1:</b> Research aim and objectives	6
<b>Table 2.1:</b> Marketing communications tools and channels	10
<b>Table 2.2:</b> Comparison of online and traditional media advertising	14
<b>Table 2.3:</b> Definitions of digital marketing	15
<b>Table 2.4:</b> Digital marketing objectives and benefits	20
<b>Table 2.5:</b> Ten marketing tensions	22
<b>Table 2.6:</b> Digital marketing communications channels	23
<b>Table 2.7:</b> Communications tools and online executions	24
<b>Table 2.8:</b> Definitions of social media	30
<b>Table 2.9:</b> Social media channels	34
<b>Table 2.10:</b> Earned, owned and paid media	38
<b>Table 2.11:</b> Digital marketing framework and levers	40
<b>Table 2.12:</b> Stages of e-commerce service development	41
<b>Table 2.13:</b> Differences between B2B and B2C markets	50
<b>Table 2.14:</b> Critical success factors frameworks for B2B and/or SME companies	59
<b>Table 2.15:</b> Digital marketing communications strategy critical success factors	62
<b>Table 4.1:</b> Approaches to research design	70
<b>Table 4.2:</b> Characteristics of quantitative and qualitative paradigms	72
<b>Table 4.3:</b> Research paradigms	73
<b>Table 4.4:</b> Research philosophies in management research	73
<b>Table 4.5:</b> Research designs	76
<b>Table 4.6:</b> Relationship between research objectives and research phase	83
<b>Table 4.7:</b> Relationship between conceptual framework factors and research phase	83
<b>Table 4.8:</b> Test and techniques for validity and reliability in case-study research	96
<b>Table 4.9:</b> Case study tactics for four design tests	97
<b>Table 4.10:</b> Predominant criteria for evaluating design tests in the positivist paradigm	97
<b>Table 5.1:</b> Interviewees from marketing agencies	100
<b>Table 5.2:</b> Categories and sub-categories for interviews with marketing agencies analysis	100
<b>Table 5.3:</b> Digital marketing definitions	102
<b>Table 5.4:</b> Digital marketing strategy planning stages	104
<b>Table 5.5:</b> Questions required to answer as a part of the planning process	105
<b>Table 5.6:</b> 5Cs model	108
<b>Table 5.7:</b> Website development stages	111
<b>Table 5.8:</b> Quotations illustrating the perception of marketing being a supporting activity	119
<b>Table 5.9:</b> Quotations illustrating the focus on PR activities	121

<b>Table 5.10:</b> Quotations illustrating the changes in oil and gas industry	123
<b>Table 5.11:</b> Quotations illustrating the use of social media in oil and gas industry	124
<b>Table 5.12:</b> Quotations illustrating the barriers for LinkedIn use in oil and gas industry	125
<b>Table 5.13:</b> Quotations illustrating the role of marketing agencies	127
<b>Table 5.14:</b> Summary of Observations	129
<b>Table 5.15:</b> Interviewees from B2B SMEs	155
<b>Table 5.16:</b> Categories and sub-categories for B2B SMEs interview analysis	155
<b>Table 5.17:</b> Quotations illustrating the importance of business development	158
<b>Table 5.18:</b> Quotations illustrating the questionable results of trade shows	160
<b>Table 5.19:</b> Quotations illustrating the limited resources	162
<b>Table 5.20:</b> Quotations illustrating the applicability of marketing in oil and gas industry	165
<b>Table 6.1:</b> Digital marketing communications strategy critical success factors	182
<b>Table 7.1:</b> Research aim and objectives	227

## FIGURES

<b>Figure 2.1:</b> Relative interest in Google search terms from 2004 to 2018	19
<b>Figure 2.2:</b> Digital marketing communications building blocks	39
<b>Figure 2.3:</b> Digital marketing framework	40
<b>Figure 2.4:</b> RACE framework	41
<b>Figure 2.5:</b> B2B internet marketing critical success factors framework	61
<b>Figure 2.6:</b> Conceptual digital marketing communications critical success factors framework	62
<b>Figure 4.1:</b> Research study design and relationship with research objectives	82
<b>Figure 5.1:</b> Digital marketing elements	103
<b>Figure 5.2:</b> Oil and gas industry features	119
<b>Figure 5.3:</b> Marketing in the oil and gas industry	121
<b>Figure 5.4:</b> Digital marketing before recession	122
<b>Figure 5.5:</b> Digital marketing during recession	126
<b>Figure 5.6:</b> The total number of company profile likes	139
<b>Figure 5.7:</b> The number of company posts per observed month	140
<b>Figure 5.8:</b> The total number of customer likes per observed month	140
<b>Figure 5.9:</b> The total number of customer shares per observed month	141
<b>Figure 5.10:</b> The total number of customer comments per observed month	141
<b>Figure 5.11:</b> The total number of company profile followers	144
<b>Figure 5.12:</b> The total number of company following	145
<b>Figure 5.13:</b> The total number of company tweets	145
<b>Figure 5.14:</b> The total number of company tweets per observed month	146
<b>Figure 5.15:</b> The total number of customer retweets per observed month	146
<b>Figure 5.16:</b> The total number of customer shares per observed month	147
<b>Figure 5.17:</b> The total number of company profile followers	149
<b>Figure 5.18:</b> The total number of company employees' profiles	149
<b>Figure 5.19:</b> The total number of company posts per observed month	150
<b>Figure 5.20:</b> The total number of customer likes per observed month	150
<b>Figure 5.21:</b> The total number of customer comments per observed month	151
<b>Figure 5.22:</b> The total number of subscribers	152
<b>Figure 5.23:</b> The total number of videos	153
<b>Figure 6.1:</b> Conceptual digital marketing communications critical success factors framework	182
<b>Figure 6.2:</b> Revised digital marketing communications critical success factors framework	226

## **APPENDICES**

<b>Appendix 1: Digital Marketing Checklist</b>	259
<b>Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet for Interviews</b>	264
<b>Appendix 3: Informed Consent Form for Interviews</b>	265
<b>Appendix 4: Interview Protocol for Interviews with Marketing Agencies</b>	266
<b>Appendix 5: Interview Protocol for Interviews with B2B SMEs</b>	268
<b>Appendix 6: Paid and Organic Listings</b>	270
<b>Appendix 7: Nodes for Interviews with Marketing Agencies Analysis</b>	271
<b>Appendix 8: Nodes for Interviews with B2B SMEs Analysis</b>	272
<b>Appendix 9: Website Observation</b>	273
<b>Appendix 10: Search Engine Optimisation Observation</b>	281
<b>Appendix 11: Facebook Observation</b>	288
<b>Appendix 12: Twitter Observation</b>	292
<b>Appendix 13: LinkedIn Observation</b>	296
<b>Appendix 14: YouTube Observation</b>	301



## **ABBREVIATIONS**

AMA – American Marketing Association

B2B – business-to-business

B2C – business-to-consumer

CIM – Chartered Institute of Marketing

CIPR – Chartered Institute of Public Relations

CMI – Content Marketing Institute

CRM – customer relationship management

CSFs – critical success factors

DA – domain authority

DMC – digital marketing communications

EU – European Union

FAQs – frequently asked questions

MMA – Mobile Marketing Association

MSI – Marketing Science Institute

PA – page authority

PDF – portable document format

PPC – pay-per-click

PR – public relations

QHSE – quality, health, safety and the environment

ROI – return on investment

SEA – search engine advertising

SEM – search engine marketing

SEO – search engine optimisation

SERPs – search engine result pages

SME – small and medium enterprise

T&Cs – Terms and Conditions

USA – United States of America

## **GLOSSARY**

Brand search – when searchers use search engines by adding product name, brand or site name as a qualifying word for the keyword.

Breadcrumbs – a row of internal links at the top or bottom of the page that allows visitors to quickly navigate back to a previous section or the root page.

Domain name – an easy-to-remember name that is associated with a physical IP address on the Internet, also referred to as the website address or URL.

Issuu magazine – an online platform for digital magazines.

Responsive website design – an approach to website design that serves the same HTML code on the same URL regardless of the users' device (desktop, tablet, mobile, non-visual browser), but can render the display differently based on the screen size.

Root page – a general website page that introduces the hierarchy of a large topic, guiding to pages containing more specific content.

Search engine – a specialised website that uses automatic tools to index pages, users can search this index by typing in specific keywords and pages containing these keywords will be listed.

Sitemap – a graphical or text depiction of the relationship between different groups of content on a website.

URL – uniform (universal) resource locator, a web address used to locate a web page on a web server.



# **1. INTRODUCTION**

## **1.0. CHAPTER OVERVIEW**

This chapter starts by outlining the focus of the thesis and the justification for undertaking this study. The research aim and objectives are then presented, followed by a summary of the methodology. The chapter concludes with a review of the research contribution and an outline of the thesis structure.

## **1.1. STUDY FOCUS AND RATIONALE**

This thesis is about the use and role of digital marketing communications (DMC) among business-to-business (B2B) small and medium enterprises (SMEs) operating in the oil and gas industry. The thesis brings together three streams and disciplines of literature. It reviews marketing communications and digital marketing literature to understand how marketing and digital marketing are related. In addition, the literature on SME marketing and B2B marketing practices is reviewed to understand DMC applicability within the context of B2B SMEs.

The study first examines the existing theory on digital marketing and marketing communications. Scholars agree that the marketing communications environment is changing (Rowley, 2001; Rowley, 2004; Sharma and Sheth, 2004; Keller, 2009; Winer, 2009; Truong and Simmons, 2010; Berthon *et al.*, 2012; Chaffey and Smith, 2013; Clark and Melancon, 2013; O'Hern and Kahle, 2013) and traditional communication strategies no longer apply to the contemporary marketplace. There are new two-way interactive personalised communications instead of one message broadcasting to a mass audience (Rowley, 2004; Mangold and Faulds, 2009; Truong and Simmons, 2010; Kietzmann *et al.*, 2011; Smith and Zook, 2001). The power has shifted from companies to individuals and communities (Sharma and Sheth, 2004; Winer, 2009; Berthon *et al.*, 2012) and communications now happen with or without influence from firms (Kietzmann *et al.*, 2011). With the help of technology, passive consumers have become active and creative participants of companies' communications strategies (Berthon *et al.*, 2012), with customers now being at the centre of every communication (Smith and Zook, 2011). The boundaries between the roles of consumers and firms are blurring and users are now more involved in tasks that previously were managed solely by companies. O'Hern and Kahle (2013) argue that customers are now empowered, with the new business models and technologies transferring power over marketing communications and new product development to them.

Initially, DMC were mainly restricted to corporate websites. However, a larger number of DMC options now exist. Jensen (2006) initially identified 17 different online communication tools, but in his later study reduced this to 13, while Eid and El-Gohary (2011) suggest that all communication tools can be grouped into eight groups. Truong and Simmons (2010) divide the existing platforms into two main groups. On the other hand, Chaffey and Smith (2013) suggest viewing the new online communications as the online executions of traditional promotional mix elements, which extend the traditional communication channels. It is thus clear that there are various DMC channels options for marketers to

choose from to create successful dialogues with their current and potential customers. While scholars present different viewpoints on these interactive tools, they agree that the main digital communications options are: websites, search engine marketing, social media marketing, e-mail marketing and mobile marketing activities. Researchers further identify various benefits for companies that implement digital marketing strategies (Rowley, 2001; Smith and Taylor, 2004; Keller, 2009; Shimp, 2010; Järvinen *et al.*, 2012; Harrigan and Hulbert, 2011; Tiago and Verissimo, 2014). These usually include the traditional marketing objectives such as to grow sales, enhance the brand or serve customers better.

This thesis further analyses the existing theory of SMEs marketing to understand how small companies operate. SMEs have been neglected in academic research since they tended to be considered the same as large organisations, though now it is acknowledged that marketing practices in SMEs differ a great deal from marketing in large organisations (Coviello, Brodie and Munro, 2000; Gilmore, Carson and Grant, 2001; Hill, 2001a; Hill, 2001b; Gilmore, Gallagher and Henry, 2007). These organisations have specific attributes: the owner-managers have more power, they have fewer financial and marketing knowledge resources, and they might also concentrate on short-term goals (Hill, 2001a; O’Dwyer, Gilmore and Carson, 2009b; Centeno and Hart, 2012). Thus, “SME marketing is likely to be haphazard, informal, loose, unstructured, spontaneous, reactive, built upon and conforming to industry norms” (Gilmore, Carson and Grant, 2001, p.6). Similarly, Ramsey *et al.* (2003) note SMEs lack of strategic planning and preparation.

There is no universally accepted definition of SMEs and some variations are proposed (Bolton Committee, 1971; HM Government, 1985; European Commission, 2015), however, this thesis adopts EU definition of SME. According to European Commission (2015, p.3), “the category of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) is made up of enterprises which employ fewer than 250 persons and which have an annual turnover not exceeding EUR 50 million, and/or an annual balance sheet total not exceeding EUR 43 million”. It is also acknowledged and suggested that SMEs can be of many sizes and forms and that they may have complex relationships with other enterprises, it is sometimes “difficult to precisely draw the line between an SME and a larger enterprise” (European Commission, 2015, p.3). While SMEs consists of micro enterprises, small enterprises and medium-sized enterprises (European Commission, 2015), this thesis does not seek to differentiate between these types. Instead, the proposed SME definition is primarily used as a practical tool.

SMEs are also major contributors to economies – the European Commission (2018) notes that 99% of all companies in Europe are SMEs. There has been a growing number of academic studies focused on SME marketing (Coviello, Brodie and Munro, 2000; Gilmore, Carson and Grant, 2001; Hill, 2001a; Hill, 2001b; Gilmore, Gallagher and Henry, 2007; O’Dwyer, Gilmore and Carson, 2009b; Centeno and Hart, 2012; Gabrielli and Balboni, 2010; Reijonen and Komppula, 2010; Einwiller and Boenigk, 2012); however, only a few studies have investigated SMEs and digital marketing (Gilmore, Gallagher and

Henry, 2007, Karjaluoto and Huhtamäki, 2010; Eid and El-Gohary, 2013; Taiminen and Karjaluoto, 2015), or SMEs and social media (Durkin, McGowan and McKeown, 2013; McCann and Barlow, 2015). The internet presents many opportunities for SMEs as it enables them to communicate globally (Gilmore, Gallagher and Henry, 2007). In addition, Eid and El-Gohary (2013) suggest that the use of digital marketing tools has a positive impact on SMEs pre-sales, after-sales and marketing activities as well as performance and effectiveness. However, Durkin, McGowan and McKeown (2013) emphasise that SMEs use more operational and tactics-based approach rather than a strategic approach to social media, key DMC tool. Since it is argued that SMEs marketing differs from large corporation marketing and they are major economy contributors, there is a need for further investigation regarding SMEs and their digital marketing activities.

The thesis also reviews the literature on B2B marketing practices. This is sometimes also termed industrial marketing, although Lilien (2016) argues that the definition evolved from industrial marketing, which initially focused on the transactions of raw materials and equipment that companies used in their operations, to the broader term of B2B marketing, which includes a broad range of relationships such as between businesses, government agencies and not-for-profit organisations and the individuals who represent these organisations. It is acknowledged that B2B marketing is different to marketing consumer goods (Gilliland and Johnston, 1997; Coviello and Brodie, 2001; Rowley, 2001; LaPlaca and Katrichis, 2009; Kärkkäinen, Jussila and Väisänen, 2010; Jerman and Završnik, 2011). Gilliland and Johnston (1997, p.15) highlight how “inherent differences between business-to-business marketing and consumer marketing results in important differences in how marketing communication tools are processed and acted on by their targets”. Some of the major differences include: market characteristics, buyer decision processes and buyer-seller relationships (Coviello and Brodie, 2001), market structure and demand, the buying unit and the decision-making process (Reed, Story and Saker, 2004), product complexity and type of customers (Kärkkäinen, Jussila and Väisänen, 2010; Jerman and Završnik, 2011). Thus, industrial sectors require different marketing practices due to complex products, multiple people involved in the sales processes, long purchase cycles and significant financial value. The focus is, therefore, on personal face-to-face interaction and relationship building. Consequently, the same marketing strategies cannot be used for consumer and industrial markets as tactics suitable for individual consumers might not be relevant to B2B professionals.

While it is believed that digital marketing and social media is important to B2B companies, only a few studies have been identified that focus on DMC strategies for B2B organisations (Jensen, 2006; Kärkkäinen, Jussila and Väisänen, 2010; Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011; Brennan and Croft, 2012; Järvinen *et al.*, 2012; Jussila, Kärkkäinen and Aramo-Immonen, 2014; Karjaluoto Mustonen and Ulkuniemi, 2015), however, the focus is on social media rather than various DMC channels. Some researchers (Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011; Brennan and Croft,

2012) even describe the situation as anecdotal, since experts claim that digital marketing and social media is very important to B2B organisations, but there is little academic research in this field.

Therefore, B2B SMEs face even more challenges due to their complex nature of being small companies and operating in industrial sector. The literature suggests that digital marketing is necessary for all organisations, including SMEs and B2B, as it can bring many benefits. However, there is only limited research on the use of DMC by B2B SMEs, and the emphasis tends to be on social media (Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011; Brink, 2017). Digital channels can bring various benefits to SMEs and B2Bs, including creating awareness, enhancing brand image, increasing sales from new customers, improving customer service, enhancing customer loyalty, improving customer satisfaction, increasing sales from existing customers and decreasing costs (Järvinen *et al.*, 2012). However, previous research suggests that SMEs do not use DMC channels and tools to their full potential (Gilmore, Gallagher and Henry, 2007; Taiminen and Karjaluo 2015; Karjaluo, Mustonen and Ulkuniemi, 2015; Brink 2017). In addition, scholars note that there is limited research in industrial marketing and call for more research into industrial marketing (LaPlaca and Katrichis, 2009; Jerman and Završnik, 2011; Jussila, Kärkkäinen and Aramo-Immonen, 2014; LaPlaca, Lindgreen and Vanhamme, 2018). Specifically, Karjaluo and Ulkuniemi (2015) call for more research in how DMC channels are used in an industrial context since most of the research in this area focuses on consumer marketing.

This thesis therefore addresses the existing gap and contributes knowledge to B2B SMEs marketing theory. The literature states that B2B and SMEs are adopting DMC channels, as it is important to remain competitive. However, there is a lack of research into how organisations are actually using these digital channels and whether they use a strategic approach for these channels. In addition, this specific context choice is aligned with *Research Priorities 2016-2018* proposed by the Marketing Science Institute (MSI, 2016). Research priority 3 “making sense of changing decision process(es)” calls for more research into decision-making changes specific to B2B contexts.

From a theoretical perspective, this study builds on Eid, Elbeltagi and Zairi’s (2006) internet marketing CSFs framework to create a conceptual framework. It adapts their holistic approach that suggests various factors influence DMC strategy and identifies the five groups of variables affecting the use of DMC for B2B SMEs: external factors, internal factors, marketing strategy factors, website and DMC channels. The thesis also uses Kierzkowski *et al.*’s (1996) successful marketing to a digital consumer framework. Kierzkowski *et al.* (1996) argue that, to gain the advantages of digital marketing, companies need to use specific strategies and techniques at each stage of the framework. Thus, each stage of the digital customer journey requires different approaches and different mixtures of channels to create successful communications. This conceptual framework is then examined using empirical data and a new revised framework is suggested. The new framework suggests that internal and external factors play a major role in influencing marketing strategy factors, which then lead to the choices on website and other DMC

channels. All these factors then lead to the successful DMC strategy, in terms of acquiring and retaining new or existing customers.

The context for this study is B2B SMEs from the oil and gas industry, based in Aberdeen. Aberdeen has a large number of SMEs due its specialisation in the oil and gas industry (Centre for Cities, 2014). These SMEs operate in the knowledge-intensive and high-technology sectors connected to oil and gas. The two key industry clusters are in London and Aberdeen. Research into the Aberdeen oil and gas industry reveals that it is a very different industry with specific characteristics (Crabtree, Bower and Keogh, 1997; Green and Keogh, 2000; Cumbers, 2000; Green and Keogh, 2000; Cumbers and Martin, 2001; Chapman, MacKinnon, and Cumbers, 2004; MacKinnon, Chapman and Cumbers, 2004). The whole industry consists of three different types of organisations (Crabtree, Bower and Keogh, 1997; Green and Keogh, 2000): several operators and major contractors, serviced by the large number of SMEs providing highly specific products and services. The Aberdeen oil and gas industry is described as an “industrial village” (Crabtree, Bower and Keogh, 1997; MacKinnon, Chapman and Cumbers, 2004).

This study also aligns with Scottish Government key digital priorities. “Scotland’s Digital Future a Strategy for Scotland” (The Scottish Government, 2011) detailed the Government’s strategy to achieve a digital economy in Scotland by 2020. In 2013 the Government published the update “Scotland’s Digital Future Supporting the Transition to a World-leading Digital Economy: Emerging Findings: April 2013” (The Scottish Government, 2013). Within this Scottish Government digital strategy, SMEs become a vital part of the digital economy. “Digital Disruption and Small Business in Scotland” (Hamill, 2015) was published to highlight the issues faced by SMEs. Hamill (2015) highlights that 98% of companies in Scotland are SMEs, and thus their use of digital technologies is critical for Scotland’s competitiveness. However, it is acknowledged that there is a significant gap between Scottish SMEs use of technology and the pace of change. The choice of this context for the study is therefore both topical and appropriate.

## **1.2. RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES**

The thesis aims to understand what role DMC plays in the context of oil and gas B2B SMEs and how these companies use DMC channels. In order to achieve the aim, six research objectives have been devised, as shown in Table 1.1. The development of the aim and objectives is further detailed in the Research Aim and Objectives Chapter (p.64).



**Table 1.1:** Research aim and objectives

<b>Aim: To critically evaluate the role and usage of digital marketing communications in oil and gas industry B2B SMEs.</b>					
<b>RO1:</b> Define digital marketing and explore key concepts of digital marketing communications channels.	<b>RO2:</b> Identify and evaluate the characteristics of marketing and digital marketing in the context of SMEs and B2B enterprises.	<b>RO3:</b> Analyse the effectiveness of digital marketing communications in achieving strategic marketing objectives in oil and gas SMEs.	<b>RO4:</b> Investigate the challenges and opportunities of utilising digital marketing within the industrial context of oil and gas SMEs.	<b>RO5:</b> Critically evaluate the success factors of digital marketing communications use in B2B SMEs.	<b>RO6:</b> Produce best practice recommendations for digital marketing communications applicable to B2B SMEs based on primary and secondary research findings.

### 1.3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This thesis follows realism research paradigm, which enables the researcher to capture real-world complexity (Perry, Riege and Brown, 1999; Healy and Perry, 2000; Riege, 2003). The realism philosophy is the most suitable for the investigating role and usage of DMC channels since there is limited knowledge about the phenomenon and thus it is important firstly to describe and understand it.

The literature review revealed there is a significant gap in the academic literature on DMC and that research into B2B SMEs marketing practices is also scarce. Thus, there is a need for a qualitative research approach, which is most suitable when there is little research about the phenomenon that needs to be understood and explored, when the variables are not known because the topic is new, and the subject has not been researched within the certain sample and existing theories do not apply (Bonoma, 1985; Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008; Davis *et al.*, 2013; Creswell, 2014). While there are many research strategies associated with qualitative research design (Creswell, 2014), case-study approach is chosen. The aim of the study is to thoroughly understand a specific phenomenon, DMC within the oil and gas industry B2B SMEs, located in Aberdeen.

The research included three phases of data collection: observation of DMC and how it is used in a real-life context over a period of time; semi-structured interviews with marketing agencies' managers to gain external perspective; and semi-structured interviews with company managers to gather companies' internal perspectives on DMC. These three phases were required to achieve a complete view of DMC role within oil and gas industry B2B SMEs given the complexity and relatively unexplored nature of the topic. In-depth justification on the methodological choices is further detailed in the Methodology Chapter (p.69).

#### **1.4. RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION**

The study provides a contribution on three levels: theoretical, empirical and practical. With a very limited number of published academic studies on DMC for B2B SMEs, the entire thesis itself is a theoretical contribution to knowledge about B2B SMEs marketing theory and practice. It also contributes to DMC theory as it shows how B2B SMEs use DMC and what role it plays in their marketing activities. The study also expands the existing theory of DMC channels, as it looks into each channel separately. Most of the existing studies investigate DMC channels as a whole or focus on social media channels only. While other studies analyse DMC adoption, this study aims to understand the use and role of DMC as a part of wider marketing practices among B2B SMEs. Specifically, this thesis adds to the body of knowledge by providing a DMC critical success factors framework. A conceptual framework, based on Eid, Elbeltagi and Zairi (2006), is created at the end of the literature review and a new framework, grounded on empirical data, is provided for B2B SMEs DMC strategy (p.226). The framework suggests that DMC strategy success is influenced by five groups of variables: internal, external, marketing strategy, website and other DMC channels.

The thesis contributes to the B2B knowledge gap and is a response to the strong call for more research in B2B marketing (LaPlaca and Katrichis, 2009; Lilien, 2015; MSI, 2016; LaPlaca, Lindgreen and Vanhamme, 2018). The context of the study is the oil and gas industry, which is a significant contributor to the UK economy with Aberdeen as the industry hub. However, while the industry has been a major contributor to the UK budget, no studies have been identified dealing with marketing in it. Therefore, the empirical contribution is specific to the oil and gas industry and SMEs operating in this industry. In addition, a methodological contribution includes the use of a longitudinal observation as part of the case-study design. The longitudinal observation allowed the identification of changes in how companies used DMC channels as part of a three-year observation.

The study also contributes to practice. It combines both primary and secondary research to offer best-practice recommendations for B2B SMEs regarding DMC strategy. Research shows that SMEs have limited resources and thus they face challenges as they focus on their operational day-to-day activities. At the same time, the oil and gas industry has its own traditional ways of doing business. Therefore, specific recommendations are made for these SMEs operating in the oil and gas industry on how to use DMC successfully.

#### **1.5. STRUCTURE**

The thesis consists of eight chapters and the structure reflects the evolving nature of the research.

*Chapter 1* provides the introduction and justifies the study. The research aim and objectives together with research methodology are briefly presented. The contribution of the study is discussed, and the chapter concludes with an outline of the thesis structure.

*Chapter 2* presents an in-depth review of the literature. The review is completed on digital marketing and the different types of digital channels are also presented. Afterwards, the theory of SMEs marketing and B2B marketing is reviewed. The chapter ends with the conceptual framework of factors influencing DMC use among B2B SMEs.

*Chapter 3* explains the development of the research aim and objectives. It details how the aim and objectives evolved over the course of research. Further context and rationale for choosing Aberdeen oil and gas industry is also given.

*Chapter 4* presents the research methodology. It reviews the existing research paradigms. The choice of case-study design is detailed, and issues associated with case studies are presented to address validity and reliability issues. The decision to undertake a three-phase study is then discussed. The chapter ends with details of fieldwork and data-analysis techniques.

*Chapter 5* presents the findings. The findings from the three data-collection phases are detailed. The chapter starts with the findings from the interviews with marketing agencies. This is followed by the findings from the longitudinal observation. The chapter ends with the data from interviews with representatives from B2B SMEs.

*Chapter 6* presents the discussion of the findings based on the conceptual framework. It draws the findings from the three phases of data collection and discusses them together, simultaneously comparing and contrasting with the existing literature. The discussion is structured under conceptual framework themes to identify which factors play a role in influencing DMC strategy among B2B SMEs.

*Chapter 7* ends with overall study conclusions and recommendations for future research. The findings from the three research phases are evaluated in relation to existing literature and the achievement of each research objectives. The limitations of the study are discussed together and emerging areas for future research are proposed.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.0. CHAPTER OVERVIEW**

This chapter reviews the secondary literature on key subjects to underpin the existing research study. A broad range of research areas, including marketing communications, digital marketing and marketing practices for B2B and SME organisations, are discussed. The chapter starts with a brief introduction to marketing communications, and then presents the definitions and features of digital marketing. This is followed by the discussion of digital marketing channels. After a review of digital marketing, the characteristics of B2B and SMEs marketing are detailed, and the existing limited research into digital marketing for B2B and SME companies is reviewed. The chapter ends with the development of a CSFs framework for DMC.

### **2.1. MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS**

#### **2.1.1. Definition of Marketing Communications**

Marketing communications, which can also be defined as promotion (Fill, 2011), is one of the fundamental marketing concepts, which together with product, price and place, form the 4Ps marketing mix. While in the 4Ps marketing mix framework communications are labelled as promotion, Shimp (2010) and Fill (2009) suggest that the term marketing communications is more appropriate to use, and thus this is the term used in this thesis.

Kotler and Keller (2012, p.496) define marketing communications as “the means by which firms attempt to inform, persuade and remind consumers – directly or indirectly – about the product and brands they sell”. Similarly, Fill (2009, p.16) defines marketing communications as the “management process through which an organisation engages with its various audiences”. Shimp (2010, p.8) proposes a slightly different definition for communications with the emphasis on different types of communications, defining it as “the collection of advertising, sales promotions, public relations, event marketing, and other communication devices”. On the other hand, Rowley (1998) uses the term promotion and suggests that promotion is a type of communications between company and their customers regarding company product offering and ensures customers are aware of all available organisation product and service offerings. While Shimp (2010) highlights that marketing communications is critical to company’s success, Keller (2009, p.141) concludes “marketing communications can tell or show consumers how and why a product is used, by what kind of person and where and when”.

Rowley (1998) lists the marketing objectives which can be achieved by marketing communications, including an increase in sales, maintaining or improving market share, the creation or improvement of brand recognition, the creation of a favourable climate for future sales, informing and educating the market, the creation of competitive advantage, and improvement of promotional efficiency. In addition,

marketing communications characterise the company and its brand, and enables relationship building with consumers (Keller, 2001). “Marketing communications represent the voice of the company and its brands; they are means by which the firm can establish a dialogue and build relationships with consumers” (Kotler and Keller, 2012, p.496). Keller (2009) concludes that communications allow the creation of experiences and building of online and offline communities. Fill (2011, p.5) further suggests “marketing communications is an audience centred activity which attempts to encourage engagement between participants and provoke conversations”. He highlights that there are two major components of the definition: audience-centred, rather than product-related, as companies communicate with a variety of stakeholders, who are related and have various type of relationships with the company, and engagement, which is audience captivation.

Fill (2011) suggests that organisations communicate with their stakeholders in order to achieve their marketing and business objectives. It is thus apparent that marketing communications play an important role within organisations; they are the means of dialogue creation between companies and their customers. Hence, every company engages in various communications with their current and potential customers.

### 2.1.2. Marketing Communications Mix

Marketing communications consists of a large number of channels and tools, which can be employed “to inform, persuade, incite, and remind consumers – directly or indirectly – about the brands they sell” (Keller, 2001, p.819). There are different stances regarding channels and tools categories, and thus the table below provides an overview of categories proposed by various scholars. Keller (2001, p.820) uses the term communication option instead of communication tool to portray the diversity of existing channels and defines these options as “any marketer-initiated form of communication that is related directly or indirectly to the brand”. The newly emerged digital communication channels resulted in confusion among scholars whether they should be a part of existing categories or a completely new group of communications methods.

**Table 2.1:** Marketing communications tools and channels (author)

Author (Year)	Channels
Gilliland and Johnston (1997)	Media specific (Broadcast, Print); Non-media specific (Selling materials, Publicity).
Rowley (1998)	Advertising; Direct marketing; Sales promotion; Public relations and publicity; Personal selling; Sponsorship.
Smith and Taylor (2004)	Selling; Advertising; Sales promotion; Direct marketing; Publicity and public relations; Sponsorship; Exhibitions; Packaging; Point-of-sale merchandising; Word-of-mouth; E-marketing; Corporate identity.
Fill (2009)	Advertising; Sales promotion; Public relations; Direct marketing; Personal selling.
Winer (2009)	Advertising; Sales promotion; Direct marketing; Publicity and public relations; Personal selling.

Keller (2009)	Media advertising; Direct response and interactive advertising; Place advertising; Point-of-purchase advertising; Trade promotions; Consumer promotions; Event marketing and sponsorship; Publicity and public relations; Personal selling.
Kotler and Keller (2012)	Advertising; Sales promotion; Events and experiences; Public relations and publicity; Direct marketing; Interactive marketing; Word-of-mouth marketing; Personal selling.
Chaffey and Smith (2013)	Advertising; Selling; Sales promotion; Public relations; Sponsorship; Direct mail; Exhibitions; Merchandizing; Packaging; Word-of-mouth.

Table 2.1. above depicts the variety of communications tools available to marketers. Some researchers, for example, Gilliland and Johnston (1997) and Rowley (1998), present smaller numbers of existing tools, while later researchers suggest more comprehensive categories. Keller (2009) presents an in-depth categorisation of nine groups of communication tools, which is also adopted by Shimp (2010). Kotler and Keller (2012) then suggests the categorisation of all communication tools into eight main categories. The boundaries between these categories are not clear-cut, and thus some of the channels can be applied to several categories.

Different approaches in relation to digital channels are proposed. While Smith and Taylor (2004) suggest adding e-marketing as a separate category, Kotler and Keller (2012) include website and other digital marketing channels under the interactive marketing tools category. However, Fill (2011) argues that there are only five main communication tools or methods, and five types of media, where these tools could be used, including broadcast, print, outdoor, in-store and digital. Fill (2011) further explains that the marketing communications mix consists of three main components: tools, media and messages, and thus new digital media channels should not be separated. Instead, the traditional five communication tools can be used and applied in digital media.

The development of digital communication channels resulted in confusion among scholars about whether they should be placed within existing categories or seen as a completely new group of communication methods. It is clear, however, that companies can choose from a large and diverse variety of communication tools to communicate with their current and potential customers.

### **2.1.3. Integrated Marketing Communications**

There is a large number of marketing communication channels and, therefore, every company will use and engage with more than one communication option. Thus, the concept of integrated marketing communications becomes important (Phelps, Harris and Johnson, 1996; Cornelissen, 2003; Massie and Anderson, 2003; Holm, 2006; Ewing, 2009).

Integrated marketing communications can be defined as “a planning process designed to assure that all brand contacts received by a customer or prospect for a product, service, or organisation are relevant to that person and consistent over time” (Kotler and Keller, 2012, p.517). Shimp (2010) suggests a slightly different definition: “a communications process that entails the planning, creation, integration, and

implementation of diverse forms of marcom<sup>1</sup> (advertisements, sales promotions, publicity releases, events, etc.) that are delivered over time to a brand's targeted customers and prospects". Therefore, the main integrated marketing communications goal is "to affect the perception of value and behaviour through directed communication" (Holm, 2006, p.31). Integrated marketing communications has emerged as a way of integrating different communication channels in order to make sure that the same message is delivered across various company and customer touch points to achieve synergy effect.

It is also important for communications to be strategically integrated within a marketing strategy. The focal rationale for integrating various communication tools is the synergy effect, which can be produced by combining multiple methods (Shimp, 2010). Integrated marketing communications contains all customer and company touch points, which require integration to deliver a consistent message. Rakić and Rakić (2014), who investigate integrated marketing communications in the digital environment, suggest five aspects of integration, which include integrated media, integrated ways of communications, integrated approaches to the opportunities of communications, integrated actors and integrated content.

#### **2.1.4. Changes in Marketing Communications**

The communications landscape has changed dramatically since the inception of the internet, which resulted in new concepts, such as user-generated content, social media, and has revolutionised the way companies communicate with their customers. Sharma and Sheth (2004) and Mulhern (2009) even compare the emergence of the internet to the Industrial Revolution. Correspondingly, Honeycutt, Flaherty and Benassi (1998) and Singh, Gordon and Purchase (2007) argue that internet created a paradigm shift in the business environment. Other scholars (Harrigan and Hulbert, 2011, p.253) even propose that "newer 21st-century technologies have been far more disruptive to the marketing landscape and transformed not only the way marketing is done but also the very role of marketing in the organization". The appearance of the internet created new opportunities and challenges for existing marketing practices, with the new digital environment affecting the overall marketing mix and communications mix. Therefore, "marketers must embrace continual change and the online opportunities and challenges that constantly come with it" (Smith and Taylor, 2004, p.621).

Scholars agree that the marketing communications environment is changing (Rowley, 2001; Rowley, 2004; Sharma and Sheth, 2004; Keller, 2009; Winer, 2009; Hanna, Rohm and Crittenden, 2011; Truong and Simmons, 2010; Berthon *et al.*, 2012; Chaffey and Smith, 2013; Clark and Melancon, 2013; O'Hern and Kahle, 2013) and traditional communication strategies do not apply to the current marketplace. Keller (2011, p.819) states that "no area of marketing has seen more dramatic changes over the years than marketing communications" since the number of available communication options have increased significantly. The power has shifted from companies to individuals and communities (Sharma and Sheth,

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<sup>1</sup> marketing communications

2004; Winer, 2009; Berthon *et al.*, 2012). These communications now happen with or without influence from firms (Kietzmann *et al.*, 2011). With the help of technology, passive consumers are now active and creative participants of company strategies (Berthon *et al.*, 2012) with customers now at the centre of every communication (Smith and Zook, 2011). The boundaries between the roles of consumers and firms are blurring and users are now more involved in tasks that previously were managed solely by companies. O'Hern and Kahle (2013) present the concept of the empowered customer, as new business models and technologies transfer the power over marketing communications and new product development to the consumers, which is a radical change resulting in a power shift between consumers and marketing departments (Harrigan and Hulbert, 2011).

Therefore, the recent years have witnessed the decline of traditional mass-marketing communications (Clark and Melancon, 2013); resulting in a remarkable change in the way customers communicate with companies. The new environment has resulted in a constant two-way flow of communications between companies and their customers (Chaffey and Smith, 2013). Winer (2009) argues that the media landscape has been considerably influenced by the new digital media and proposes four main factors that influenced these major changes: new technologies, marketers now need to create experiences for their customers as a part of product/service offering, highly fragmented markets and increasing attention to behavioural targeting; meaning the power has shifted from buyers to consumers.

Rowley (2004) emphasises that marketing communications in a digital world are more than just simple communications; the communications now are about creating presence, relationships and mutual value. While creating presence is about building awareness, which is the first stage of marketing communications, creating relationships is about interaction between customers and companies, and creating value is about customers and companies working together to create benefits for both parties. Other researchers (Winer, 2009; Smith and Zook, 2011; Dateling and Bick, 2013) also add that marketing communications are no longer only communications: they are now extended into customer experiences as “promotion is morphing with product as communications seek to engage customers with experiences” (Smith and Zook, 2011, p.5).

Parsons, Zeisser and Waitman (1998) identify the fundamental differences between traditional and interactive media as one-way communication within a mass-market environment in comparison to dialogue with an individual consumer. With traditional media, the marketing communications focus is on promotion and messages broadcasting with a push, linear, one-to-many communication approach, while online media allows non-linear, free-flow, two-way communication between the business and its audience on a one-to-one or many-to-many basis (Rowley, 2001; Rowley, 2004). Table 2.2. summarises the main differences between traditional and online media.



**Table 2.2:** Comparison of online and traditional media advertising (Rowley, 2004, p.26)

Element	Traditional Media	Online Media
Space	Expensive commodity	Cheap, unlimited
Time	Expensive commodity for marketers	Expensive commodity for users
Image creation	Image is everything	Information is everything
Communication	Push, one-way	Pull, interactive
Call to action	Incentives	Information incentives
Audience	Mass	Targeted
Links to further information	Indirect	Direct/embedded
Investment in design	High	Low, allows changes
Interactivity	Low	Range from low to two-way dialogue

The main differences between traditional and digital communications are that the latter allows conversations between different parties, facilitates relationship building, and is easier to measure, while traditional communications are more mass-orientated, like message broadcasting rather than dialogues (Wymbs, 2011). It is suggested that the main difference is the technology itself, as marketing in the twenty-first century is mainly enabled through internet-based technologies, such as web communications, websites, databases and various analytical tools, while previously the technologies were only the enabling tools for traditional marketing principles and strategies (Harrigan and Hulbert, 2011). In traditional communications, companies are in control of communications content, frequency, timing and medium, while with digital and social media the control is lost as the power shifts to consumers (Mulhern, 2009; Winer, 2009; Mangold and Faulds, 2009). Marketing communications used to be about creating messages for a passive audience, but now this audience is empowered by new technology (Smith and Zook, 2011). Companies realise the need to incorporate the internet as a part of their marketing strategies, since this medium has changed customer behaviour. Thus, an increasing number of companies are using DMC channels to communicate with end users, suppliers and B2B customers (El-Gohary, 2010; Eid and El-Gohary, 2013).

In order to reach its full potential, digital communications need to be fully integrated and coordinated with overall marketing communications (Lagrosen, 2005). The new type of marketing communications should be integrated into overall business operations and focus on customer relationship building and maintenance (Rowley, 2001). Finne and Grönroos (2009) even propose that marketing communications should now be defined and viewed as relationship communications which highlights the focus on the consumer, who performs the integration.

It is evident that scholars agree that marketing, and especially marketing communications, has experienced dramatic changes since the emergence of the internet and new digital media. The power has shifted from companies to consumers (Sharma and Sheth, 2004; Winer, 2009; Kietzmann *et al.*, 2011; Berthon *et al.*, 2012) and there are new two-way interactive personalised communications instead of one-message broadcasting to a mass audience (Rowley, 2004; Mangold and Faulds, 2009; Truong and

Simmons, 2010; Kietzmann *et al.*, 2011; Smith and Zook, 2011). These changes in the communications landscape have resulted in the emergence of digital marketing.

## 2.2. DIGITAL MARKETING

### 2.2.1. Definition of Digital Marketing and Digital Marketing Communications

The new communications environment requires organisations to change their existing marketing communications strategies and adopt new communication channels. However, digital marketing presents a challenge for both researchers and practitioners as the concept is still evolving as there is not even an agreed definition. In addition, some researchers use the term digital marketing (Wymbs, 2011; Järvinen *et al.*, 2012; Durkin, 2013), others internet marketing (Sharma and Sheth, 2004), online marketing (Jensen, 2006, 2008), or e-marketing (El-Gohary, 2010; Eid and El-Gohary, 2013; Strauss and Frost, 2012; Chaffey and Smith, 2013).

While the popular media suggests tips and best practices on how to be successful online, academic research on the subject is still relatively scarce and fragmented. For example, while a special issue of *Industrial Marketing Management* (2013) focuses on the topic of buyer-supplier relationships in the digital era, the emphasis is on open innovation in new product development, disruptive technologies, partner relationship management systems and customer value creation (Obal and Lancioni, 2013), and no research studies on digital marketing or marketing communications are included.

This lack of research on digital marketing could be partly explained by the existing confusion regarding the definition. For this reason, the table below presents definitions currently found in the literature. Table 2.3. includes all terms used in the literature, including internet marketing, digital marketing and e-marketing.

**Table 2.3:** Definitions of digital marketing (author)

Author (Year)	Definition	Core elements
Parsons, Zeisser and Waitman (1998, p.32)	“By <b>digital marketing</b> we mean two activities: first, leveraging the unique capabilities of new interactive media (e.g., World Wide Web, on-line services, proprietary dial-up services) to create new forms of interactions and transactions between consumers and marketers; and second, integrating interactive media with other elements of the marketing mix.”	Interactions, integrating
Smith and Taylor (2004, p.620)	“ <b>E-marketing</b> is simply marketing online: identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer needs online. This implies keeping close to customers, forming relationships with them and keeping them happy online.”	Marketing online
DMI as cited by Smith (2007)	“ <b>Digital marketing</b> is an evolving concept; [...] the use of digital technologies to create an integrated, targeted and measurable communication which helps to acquire and retain customers while building deeper relationships with them.”	Digital technologies, communication, relationships
Gilmore, Gallagher and Henry (2007, p.236)	“ <b>E-marketing</b> includes using the internet and its related technologies and features such as the world wide web, web presence, e-mails, real-time communication, and delayed and	Internet and related technologies,

	mixed time communication to help achieve marketing objectives in conjunction with other marketing communication tools.”	marketing objectives, communication
Smith (2011, p.489)	“ <b>Digital marketing</b> is the practice of promoting products and services using digital distribution channels.”	Promotion, digital channels
Järvinen <i>et al.</i> (2012, p.104)	“ <b>Digital marketing</b> refers to the use of all kinds of digital and social media tools that allow companies to foster interactions with customers.”	Digital and social media tools, interactions
Strauss and Frost (2012, p.28)	“ <b>E-marketing</b> is the use of information technology for the marketing activity, and the processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large.”	Information technology, marketing activity
Chaffey and Smith (2013, p.15)	“ <b>E-marketing, internet marketing or digital marketing</b> is at the heart of e-business – getting closer to customers and understanding them better, adding value to products, widening distribution channels and boosting sales through running e-marketing campaigns using digital media channels such as search marketing, online advertising and affiliate marketing.”	Customers, digital media channels, dialogue
Järvinen and Karjaluo (2015, p.117)	“ <b>Digital marketing</b> refers to marketing that uses electronic devices and channels to support marketing objectives. [...] Digital marketing includes marketing via websites, search engines, online advertisements, e-mail and social media channels.”	Electronic devices and channels, marketing objectives
Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2016, p.11)	<b>Digital marketing</b> “achieving marketing objectives through applying digital technologies and media.”	Technology and marketing objectives
AMA (2017)	“ <b>Direct digital marketing</b> is defined as a digital marketing method that provides relevant marketing communications that are addressable to a specific individual with an email address, a mobile phone number or a Web browser cookie.”	Marketing communications, specific individual
Kannan and Li (2017, p.23)	“ <b>Digital marketing</b> may be seen as activities, institutions, and processes facilitated by digital technologies for creating, communicating and delivering value for customers and other stake-holders.”	Digital technologies, value

While researchers propose different definitions, some similarities can be identified as it is all about the core marketing idea, the relationships between companies and their clients utilising new technologies (Gilmore, Gallagher and Henry, 2007; Järvinen *et al.*, 2012; Strauss and Frost, 2012; Chaffey and Smith, 2013). One of the first definitions of digital marketing was proposed by Parsons, Zeisser and Waitman (1998), which is still applicable to the twenty-first century. The definition includes two components of digital marketing: new forms of interactions between companies and their customers and new media integration within the traditional marketing mix.

Analysing the proposed definitions further, two strands of the definitions emerge. Some researchers define digital marketing as communications in a digital environment (Smith, 2011; Järvinen and Karjaluo, 2015), while other definitions see digital marketing more broadly as marketing in general, including other aspects of the marketing mix, such as products, price and place, not only the promotion aspect (Smith and Taylor, 2004; Strauss and Frost, 2012; Chaffey and Smith, 2013; Kannan and Li, 2017). While the American Marketing Association (AMA) has a separate definition for direct digital

marketing with a focus on the communications aspect only, it does not provide a distinct definition for digital marketing. However, Kannan and Li (2017) propose a digital marketing definition, based on the AMA marketing definition, but applied to the digital environment.

Examining existing definitions further, it is evident that some researchers (Smith and Zook, 2011; Dateling and Bick, 2013; Rocha *et al.*, 2013) expand the digital and social marketing channels usage to other company departments as well. For example, Rocha *et al.* (2013) note that various company departments, including marketing, public relations, sales, IT, customer services and human resources, can gain benefits from social media. Similarly, Busscher (2013) states that social media can bring benefits to all Porter's value chain activities, including primary and support activities within an organisation. Dateling and Bick (2013) further argue that social media can be beneficial for product promotion, customer care, online reputation management and the distribution of content, together with internal communications and as a means of engaging with existing and potential customers.

Therefore, some authors contend that digital marketing should be viewed as a part of the overall marketing mix, not only the communications mix (Smith and Zook, 2011), as it can enhance the product, distribution methods and offer better pricing system and price comparison options. On the other hand, Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2016, p.178) use the term digital marketing, but explain "digital marketing strategy is primarily a channel marketing strategy which defines how a company should set channel-specific objectives and develop a differential channel proposition and channel-specific communications consistent with the characteristics of the channel and end user requirements". However, they later note that digital marketing is not only digital marketing communications strategy and suggest that the remaining parts of the marketing mix, product, price and place, should also be included. Rowley (2004, p.33) further explains: "it becomes difficult to differentiate between marketing communications and business operations, and marketing communications becomes embedded in business processes". Because marketing in the digital environment encompasses presence, relationships and mutual value creation, it extends beyond traditional marketing communications and marketing departments.

While digital marketing and digital marketing communications are interlinked, with some scholars using these terms interchangeably, this thesis advocates that it is important to distinguish between these terms. This thesis proposes to make a clear distinction between the definitions of digital marketing and digital marketing communications, based on the existing complexity. It adopts the definition of digital marketing proposed by Kannan and Li (2017, p.23), which is based on the AMA marketing definition:

*"Digital marketing may be seen as activities, institutions, and processes facilitated by digital technologies for creating, communicating and delivering value for customers and other stake-holders"*.

While previous studies have illustrated how digital marketing and social media can be applied to various organisation departments, this thesis focuses solely on digital channels as a part of the marketing communications mix and other applications of digital marketing are beyond the scope of this study. It adopts the view that DMC is broader than only communications as it is becoming more difficult to distinguish between marketing communications and other business operations (Rowley, 2004), though it also acknowledges that most researchers still focus on the communications aspect (promotion) rather than product, price and place. Based on the in-depth literature review, for the purpose of this research, the definition of digital marketing communications is proposed:

*Digital marketing communications is the use of digital communication channels, such as website, search engine marketing, digital advertising, social media, e-mails and mobile, to create an integrated, targeted and measurable communication which helps to acquire and retain customers while building deeper relationships with them.*

This is adapted from the Digital Marketing Institute (DMI) definition. While the original source of the DMI definition could not be traced, it is used in Mulhern (2009), Wymbs (2011), Royle and Laing (2014), and Karjaluo, Mustonen and Ulkuniemi (2015). Some researchers quote the definition from Smith's (2007) blog post on *What is Digital Marketing?* While the actual origin of this definition is not fully traceable<sup>2</sup>, it has gained wide use among academics. The proposed definition captures the focus on communications aspect and the use of digital channels in achieving major marketing objectives of acquiring and retaining customers.

In addition, it is also evident that different researchers use various terms to describe the new phenomenon – digital, online, internet or e- marketing. Initially, the most popular definitions were e-marketing and internet marketing. Gilmore, Gallagher and Henry (2007) suggest that e-marketing is a much broader and wider definition than the internet and suggest that e-marketing is a natural extension of traditional marketing practices. However, they conclude that internet and e-marketing definitions can be used synonymously. Similarly, El-Gohary (2010) suggests that e-marketing is the broadest term, which encompasses internet marketing with e-mails, intranets, extranets and mobile marketing, while Rowley (2008) concludes that there is a strong relationship and overlap between digital content marketing, e-marketing, internet marketing and web marketing, which are all related disciplines.

On the other hand, Charlesworth (2014) uses the term digital marketing and, in the preface of his textbook, raises the question of the most appropriate term to use: internet marketing, e-marketing, online marketing, digital marketing or new media marketing. He acknowledges that there is no straightforward answer since various researchers and academics use a variety of terms for the same discipline but suggests that digital marketing is the most appropriate term. Durkin (2013) tries to explain the variability

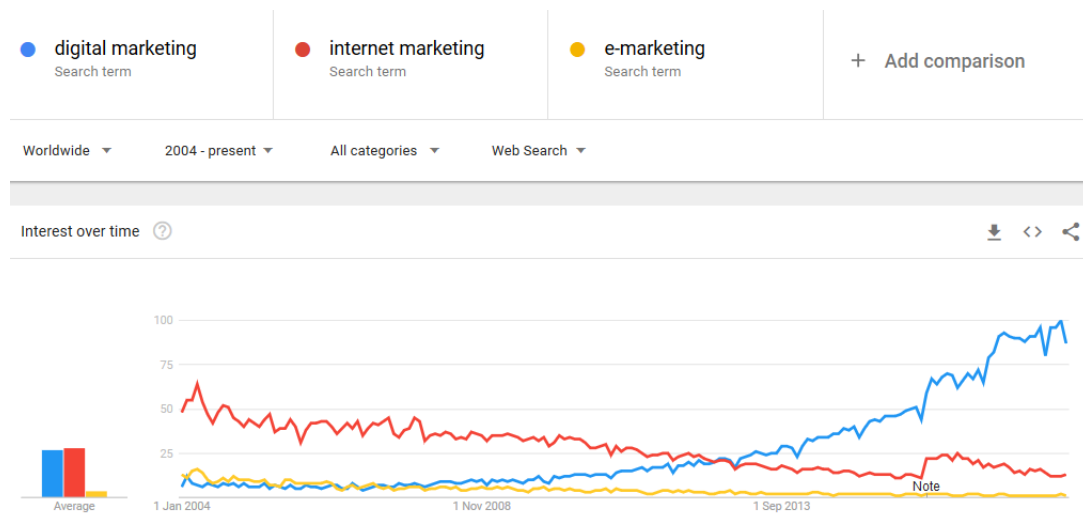
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<sup>2</sup> Researcher contacted DMI directly to identify the original source, however no response was received.

in terminology, demonstrating that the definition has evolved over time from internet marketing to electronic marketing and finally to the most recent and up-to-date term, digital marketing.

Similarly, Wymbs (2011) argues that digital marketing should be used instead of internet marketing, because it is broader, as the internet is not the only medium used for marketing, since digital marketing is about using digital technologies to support marketing activities with customer acquisition and retention. Correspondingly, Järvinen *et al.* (2012) suggest using the term digital marketing, which is the broadest umbrella term, and includes a variety of digital marketing channels, such as internet, mobile, wireless and digital television communications. The latest edition of Chaffey and Smith's (2017) textbook on digital marketing also changed its title from e-marketing to digital marketing, suggesting there is some consensus now that this is the most appropriate term.

This increased clarity and agreement on the term digital marketing is not only supported by the literature, but also by data from Google searches. *Google Trends*<sup>3</sup>, a tool that collects and compares real search terms used by users over a period of time, clearly shows that after an initial dominance and widespread use of internet marketing, from around August 2012 the term digital marketing became the one most adopted by users and therefore associate with marketing on the internet. Figure 2.1. demonstrates that terms evolved over the time and shows that from August 2012 the term digital marketing became the most used term.



**Figure 2.1:** Relative interest in Google search terms from 2004 to 2018 (April 2018)

This thesis proposes the clear distinction between digital marketing and digital marketing communications, which is only one aspect of digital marketing mix. Other digital marketing mix components, price, product and place, are outside the scope of this thesis. In addition, the use of the term

<sup>3</sup> <https://trends.google.com>

digital instead of internet or e- marketing is also justified based on the evidenced consensus that digital marketing is the most appropriate term to use.

### 2.2.2. Features of Digital Marketing

Digital marketing has greatly changed the marketing communications environment. It is therefore important to understand the main digital marketing features and attributes with the accompanying advantages and disadvantages of implementing digital marketing strategies across a company. Digital marketing is no different to the rest of the marketing; it is marketing in the digital environment and should always align with the main marketing principles.

Parsons, Zeisser and Waitman (1998, p.32) predicted accurately the potential of digital marketing: “digital marketing is likely to become an integrated part of the marketing mix for consumer marketers [...], as it enables entirely new forms of interactions between consumers and marketers [...] leading to deeper relationships and greater personalization of goods and services”. Later researchers (Rowley, 2001; Smith and Taylor, 2004; Keller, 2009; Shimp, 2010; Järvinen *et al.*, 2012; Harrigan and Hulbert, 2011; Tiago and Verissimo, 2014) identify many benefits for companies implementing digital marketing strategies. A key feature of digital marketing, according to the literature, pertains to the increased benefits it can bring to organisations; these are shown in Table 2.4. in the context of business objectives.

**Table 2.4:** Digital marketing objectives and benefits (author)

Author (Year)	Objectives and Benefits
Rowley (2001)	<p><i>E-business objectives</i> (improving corporate image, increasing visibility, improving customer service, achieving increased or maintaining market share, performing transactions, forming alliances in the supply chain, maintaining or improving profitability, establishing a position in a new market place, reducing costs through increased efficiency);</p> <p><i>Marketing communications objectives</i> (to increase sales, to maintain or improve market share, to create or improve brand recognition, to create favourable climate for future sales, to inform and educate the markets, to create a competitive advantage relative to competitor’s products or market position, to improve promotional efficiency);</p> <p><i>Advantages of web presence</i> (creating brand, product and corporate awareness and image; providing product and other information; generating qualified leads; handling customer complaints, queries and suggestions; allowing customers access to the extranet).</p>
Smith and Taylor (2004) and Chaffey and Smith (2008)	To increase sales ( <i>sell</i> ); to listen, understand and be closer to the customers ( <i>speak</i> ); to add extra value and services ( <i>serve</i> ); to save costs ( <i>save</i> ); to strengthen the brand itself ( <i>sizzle</i> ).
Keller (2009)	Greater interaction and individualisation; improved brand awareness; ability reaching customers while they are searching for information; better

	performance and imagery communications; influence on attitude formation and decision making; interactions between brand and the customers.
Shimp (2010)	Mechanism for building demand; conducting transactions; filling orders; providing customer service; serving as an advertising medium.
Järvinen et al. (2012)	Creating awareness; enhancing brand image; increasing sales from new customers; improving customer service; enhancing customer loyalty; improving customer satisfaction; increasing sales from existing customers and decreasing costs.
Harrigan and Hulbert (2011)	Stronger online connections with customers; product information dissemination; transaction facilitation; customer service improvement; stakeholder relationship management; existing markets development; entry into new and international markets facilitation; new products and service creation.
Charlesworth (2014)	Brand development; revenue generation; customer service/support.
Tiago and Verissimo (2014)	Improves information gathering and feedback; user-friendly tool; increases knowledge; promotes internal and external relationships; supports decision-making process; increases productivity; better outcome measurement.

The table shows there are various objectives companies can set for DMC within organisations. Rowley (2001) divides the objectives into strategic and tactical objectives, and suggest e-business objectives, marketing communications objectives and web presence advantages. Järvinen *et al.* (2012) present objectives for digital marketing as being the same as overall marketing objectives. Tiago and Verissimo (2014, p.705) highlight that the main component of digital marketing is communications: “digital marketing is not limited to the content of the message; it extends to links with customers and represents a powerful tool for building, consolidating, and maintaining brand awareness”. Keller (2009) also identifies greater interaction and individualisation as the main features of DMC; it means that companies can now send tailored messages engaging different segments. Smith and Taylor (2004) and Chaffey and Smith (2008) suggest using the 5Ss framework (sell, speak, serve, sizzle and save), which is a useful model for categorising digital marketing objectives.

While the digital marketing features, objectives and benefits, may be varied and include tactical or operational aspects, this thesis argues that the underlying and overarching objective for DMC, as with marketing more broadly, is to acquire and retain customers, as proposed in the definition of DMC in 2.2.1 (p.18). This is supported by Wymbbs (2011, p.95) who argues “that the main driver of digital marketing is the business returns from gaining new customers and maintaining relationships with existing customers”. Similarly, Chaffey and Smith (2017) contend that digital marketing should support the objectives of acquiring new customers and retaining existing customers while helping develop more long-term relationships with them. Customer acquisition and retention as the main marketing communications objectives are also advocated by Fill (2013) and Egan (2015). Finally, customer



acquisition and retention are also highlighted as the key objectives in literature on content marketing, a discipline closely associated with digital marketing (Pulizzi, 2012; CMI, 2013).

While the beneficial features that the internet brings to companies have been explored by numerous researchers, less focus has been on its risks. Leeflang *et al.* (2014) identify four major challenges companies face in going digital: explosion of customer data, social media, new digital metrics and an increasing talent gap in analytical capabilities. As a result, three potential difficulties for digital marketers are the ability to generate and leverage customer insights, brand health and reputation management in the online environment and evaluating digital marketing effectiveness. Thus, researchers identify what they call ten major digital tensions, which are presented in the Table 2.5. below grouped into three categories.

**Table 2.5:** Ten marketing tensions (Leeflang *et al.*, 2014, p.4)

Category	Digital tension	Description
Business strategy and customer insights	1. Digital revolution	The increasing prevalence of digital tools and technologies is threatening existing business models.
	2. Customer insights	Generating and leveraging rich and actionable customer insights is becoming a necessity to compete.
	3. Breakthrough	An overreliance on data and 'hard facts' can stifle creativity and breakthrough innovation.
Go-to-market operations and execution	4. Social media	Managing brand health and reputation is more challenging in a marketing environment where social media plays an important role.
	5. Online opportunity	Too often digital marketing targets only young customer segments, missing the promising older age groups.
	6. Price transparency	Online price comparison tools are impeding companies' ability to set optimal prices.
	7. Automated interactions	Service automation and efforts to migrate customer interactions online can create customer dissatisfaction and destroying value.
	8. Metrics	Assessing the effectiveness of digital marketing is difficult, since online and traditional metrics are not readily comparable.
Organisation and capabilities	9. Talent gap	Marketing and related departments are facing a significant talent gap in analytical capabilities.
	10. Organisation	The pervasiveness of marketing activities within companies is causing organisational challenges.

Given the challenges and tensions associated with a company going digital, Edelman (2010) suggests, there are four prerequisites for successful digital marketing, focusing on four core value sources. First, activities engaging the customer through the digital journey need to be well coordinated. Second, interest in brands is created by creating and combining consumer-empowering content, which allows the creation of consumer identity online. Third, companies need to act like publishing companies and produce high-quality content. Fourth, digital data should be gathered and used strategically. These

changes are required since the market is “moving from a one-way, company driven sales mentality to a two-way relationship with consumers” (Edelman, 2010, p.2). In conclusion, the literature shows that features of digital marketing bring many benefits and advantages to companies and meet marketing objectives. However, it indicates that in order to reach its full potential, digital marketing requires full integration into an overall marketing strategy to counterbalance the accompanying challenges, including loss of control. Edelman (2010, p.1) highlights that only “companies that make a deep strategic, organizational shift required to become effective digital marketers can become more agile, more productive, and accelerate revenue growth”.

### 2.2.3. Digital Marketing Communications Channels

The new digital channels can be of various forms, formats and structures, such as social networking sites, online advertising, search engine marketing, content marketing, mobile marketing, online sponsorships, e-mail communications and sponsorships. However, there is no unified agreement about how many DMC channels exist and how they might be categorised. As a result, various scholars provide different outlooks on the number and types of existing tools and channels.

While social media and social media marketing has already received much attention in the academic research field (Mangold and Faulds, 2009; Kärkkäinen, Jussila and Väisänen, 2010; Hanna, Rohm and Crittenden, 2011; Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011; Brennan and Croft, 2012; Castronovo and Huang, 2012; Järvinen *et al.*, 2012; Clark and Melancon, 2013; Dateling and Bick, 2013) it should be emphasised that social media is only one category of the new interactive digital communications tools that could be used as part of a DMC strategy. Table 2.6. gives an overview of existing DMC options identified across the academic literature.

**Table 2.6:** Digital marketing communications channels (author)

Author (Year)	Channels
Rowley (2001)	Paid advertising; Publicity and word-of-mouth; Portals and search engines; Site and search design.
Jensen (2006)	Display advertising; Search engine marketing; Public relations; Sponsorships; Viral marketing; Events; Sales promotion; Affiliate programmes; E-learning; E-mail marketing; Microsites; Mobile location-based services; Games; Communities; SMS; Mobile phone homepages.
Jensen (2008)	Online advertising (display advertising, search engine optimization, affiliate programmes); Online relationship communication (e-mail marketing, location-based services, e-learning); Online interactive communication (online competitions, microsites, online games); Online PR (media relations and viral marketing); Mobile communication (mobile marketing via SMS and MMS, mobile websites WAP/3G).
Keller (2009)	Websites; Microsites; Search ads, Display ads; Interstitials; Internet-specific ads and videos; Sponsorships; Alliances; On-line communities; E-mail; Mobile marketing.
Winer (2009)	Intrusive (internet advertising (i.e. buttons, banners, pop-ups), product placement in video games, m-commerce (mobile advertising)); Non-intrusive (internet advertising (i.e. streaming video/audio, sponsored search,), social networking sites,

	podcasting, viral marketing); User-generated (blogs, video sites, ratings/recommendations).
Shimp (2010)	Websites; Display/banner ads; Rich media formats; Blogs, podcasts and social networks; E-mail; Search engine advertising; Advertising via behavioural targeting.
Truong and Simmons (2010)	Online/internet platforms (display advertising, search engine marketing, affiliate marketing programmes, email marketing and paid for customer lists); Mobile platforms.
Eid and El-Gohary (2013)	Internet marketing; E-mail marketing; Intranet marketing; Extranet marketing; Mobile marketing; Telemarketing; Electronic data interchange; Customer relationship management.
Leeflang <i>et al.</i> (2014)	Company website; E-mail communication; Social media sites; Natural search; Paid search words; Paid banner ads; Mobile/SMS communication; Own online store; Mobile applications; Interactive voice recording; Third party online store.

At first, DMC were mainly restricted to corporate websites (Jensen, 2006; Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2016). However, a larger number of DMC options now exist. While, primarily, DMC focused on websites and how to attract customers to them, Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2016) explain that desktop, mobile-responsive and mobile sites and their constant enhancement is still a central part of digital marketing strategy. Whereas Table 2.6. depicts existing DMC channels, Keller (2009) defines them as interactive marketing communication options and Shimp (2010) uses the term internet advertising formats. On the other hand, Chaffey and Smith (2013) suggest viewing new online communications as the online executions of traditional promotional mix elements, which extend the traditional communication channels as in Table 2.7.

**Table 2.7:** Communications tools and online executions (Chaffey and Smith, 2013, p.81)

Promotional Mix	Online Executions
Advertising	Interactive display ads, PPC search advertising;
Selling	Virtual sales staff and chat, affiliate marketing;
Sales promotion	Incentives, rewards, online loyalty schemes;
PR	E-news releases, e-newsletters, social networks, links and virals;
Sponsorship	Sponsoring online event, site or service;
Direct mail	Opt-in email, e-alerts, e-newsletters and web response;
Exhibitions	Virtual exhibitions and white paper distribution;
Merchandizing	Web site design, promotional ad serving on retail sites, personalised recommendations;
Packaging	Photographs of real packaging displayed online;
Word-of-mouth	Social media, viral, affiliate marketing, e-mail friend, reviews.

There is a number of DMC channels for marketers to choose from to create successful dialogues with their current and potential customers, and scholars present different views on these channels. The divergence in DMC options could also be seen as an evolution of these options with the emergence and growth of digital marketing. At the same time, similar types appear in these viewpoints, with the main digital communications options being websites, search engine marketing, social media marketing, e-mail marketing and mobile marketing activities. It should be noted that these are aggregate categories that include other, more specific, elements.

### 2.2.3.1. Websites

While there is a growing number of DMC channel types and formats, the more traditional digital element, corporate websites, still plays a major role in company communications. Company websites should be considered as the centrepiece of all digital and online activities, as they are fundamental elements in integrating all online efforts (Shimp, 2010). While Chaffey and Smith (2008) suggest that websites should be considered as a separate communication tool from the rest of the online communication mix, they also agree that websites should be viewed as a tool that integrates all other elements together. Similarly, Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2016) argue that the website remains the key channel in digital communications.

Charlesworth (2014) goes even further and states that a website as a part of web presence is a strategic marketing communications mix resource. Thus, corporate websites should not only be used for communications, they should also be integrated with all online and offline company communications to deliver a consistent message about the brand (Chaffey and Smith, 2008, 2013). While websites remain the key channel for DMC, only a few of scholars researched websites from a DMC channel perspective, (Perry and Bodkin, 2000; Bodkin and Perry, 2004), though these researchers analyse websites through the lens of PR or direct marketing. Other studies focus on websites from the point of view of computing or information science fields (Kim, Shaw and Shneider, 2003; Tarafdar and Zhang, 2005).

While a website does not represent the whole web presence, as there are other digital assets, for many organisations, websites are still the only or most important web presence element, around which strategic and operational digital marketing is constructed (Charlesworth, 2014). A website can serve various purposes for companies, including helping customers in the purchase process, providing information, saving customers' money and time, allowing customers to communicate with the organisation, and providing a better experience to customers (Chaffey and Smith, 2013). One of the early studies on internet marketing by Honeycutt, Flaherty and Benassi (1998) suggests that a major advantage of the internet is that websites can attract new and existing customers and can also be applied and used for all four marketing mix elements: products, price, place and promotion. Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2016) are more specific and suggest that there are five main types of websites, with all of them having different objectives: transactional e-commerce, services-orientated relationship-building, brand-building, portal or media, and social network or community sites. Therefore, the website not only represents the web presence of the company but can also assist in achieving major marketing objectives.

There are two main elements for websites as a DMC channel: user-centred and marketing-led design (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2016). While user-centred design is based on user characteristics and their needs to optimise the user experience, marketing-led design means that site is designed to achieve marketing objectives, such as customer acquisition, retention and communication. According to Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2016), corporate websites typically have similar information and answer the

following questions about the company: who are you? what do you do? where do you do it? what makes you different? Therefore, a typical corporate website is expected to have “about us”, “products and services”, “location or contact us” and “online value proposition” sections. As a part of navigation, it is important to have clear and consistent labelling, thus, there are other standard elements, such as home page, search, FAQs and help functions (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2016). An important part of an effective website is information architecture, closely linked with the actual information, and this is defined as “the combination of organisation, labelling and navigation schemes constituting an information system” (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2016, p.381).

Website quality is a central aspect for successful websites and therefore ensuring a website meets usability requirements is an important activity. Usability is defined as “an approach to website design intended to enable the completion of user tasks” (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2016, p.375) and is a key criterion for website quality. There are several factors important to website quality and related to usability. Kim, Shaw and Schneider (2003) identify six website evaluation criteria: business function, corporation credibility, contents reliability, website attractiveness, systematic structure and navigation. They highlight that website appearance, structure and maintenance factors influence consumer perceptions about the company and its brand. Tarafdar and Zhang (2005) also identify six elements: information content, ease of content, usability, download speed, customisation and security. Chaffey and Smith (2008) name usability and accessibility as the two most important elements, though later Chaffey and Smith (2013) propose that the main four successful website components are high-quality content, ease of use, quick to download and updated frequently.

In addition, Charlesworth (2014) provides a summary of website design quality criteria suggested by other scholars, which include ease of use, aesthetic design, processing speed, security, business function, corporate credibility, content readability, attractiveness, structure, navigation; accessibility, communication credibility, understanding, appearance, availability; usability, usefulness, adequacy of information, accessibility, interaction; usability, information quality, service interaction; core service, supporting services, user interface; quality of information, service, security, playfulness, and design. Localisation is also suggested as an important element for successful websites as a website might need to be tailored to individual countries by different products, language or cultural needs (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2016). Thus, there are a number of website usability and quality criteria, which need to be addressed in order to design customer-centred websites.

Due to the importance of mobile devices and large number of users accessing websites from portable devices, website optimisation for mobile devices is another highly important factor. In 2016, the use of mobile devices while accessing the internet surpassed the use of desktop devices (The Guardian, 2016). As Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2016, p.392) explain: “Today’s multiple-device-using consumers need content in the right format in real time, which presents challenges as the form factor and operating

system varies across most of their devices”. Therefore, the concept of responsive web design gains significant importance. Here the “layout and formatting of website content is modified at the point of rendering to suit different screen resolutions and capabilities to produce a better experience to users of a range of desktop, tablet and smartphone devices using web development methods” (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2016, p.392). Thus, websites and the user experience while using mobile devices forms a large part of effective digital marketing. Additionally, websites should be integrated with the rest of online and offline marketing communications (Chaffey and Smith, 2008). The company branding should be consistent across all communications channels, with the same messages being communicated offline as well as online. It is important for businesses to have websites with high-quality content, that are easy to use, quick to download and updated frequently (Chaffey and Smith, 2013).

#### 2.2.3.2. Search Engine Marketing

Another digital marketing tactic that is closely related to the corporate website is search engine marketing (SEM). This channel is an extremely important component of communication strategy, as highlighted by Chaffey and Smith (2008, p.282): “search engine marketing is arguably the most important digital marketing channel for customer acquisition”. If a company has the greatest website but cannot be found on the web by current and potential customers, the business will not succeed.

SEM has been analysed by some academics, however, as with websites, it seems to be analysed more by scholars in the fields of computing and information science or tourism, rather than from a marketing perspective. Some researchers study search engine optimisation (SEO) and search engine advertising (SEA) strategies (Kritzing and Weideman, 2013), others website usability and SEO (Visser and Weideman, 2011; Visser and Weideman, 2014) with one study analysing brand positioning using SEM (Dou *et al.*, 2010). SEM appears to be more researched within the tourism discipline and described as online destination marketing (Xiang *et al.*, 2010; Paraskevas *et al.*, 2011; Pan *et al.*, 2011; Xiang and Law, 2013, Xiang and Pan, 2011). Lamberton and Stephen (2016) explain that there is a major academic-practitioner gap in relation to specific digital marketing disciplines, with one of them being SEM. They argue that, while SEM is very important to marketing practice, little is found in academic research and suggest that reasons for this divide include the fact that SEM as a research subject lacks theory development as it focuses on highly technical aspects and the technology changes very quickly, thus, knowledge becomes dated.

Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2016, p.484) define SEM as “promoting an organisation through search engines to meet its objectives by delivering relevant content in search listings for searches and encouraging them to click through to a destination site”. Thus, it is a significant technique for attracting customers to the website. An important aspect of SEM is visibility on search engine result pages (SERPs) (Kritzing and Weideman, 2013). SEM is an umbrella term used to define two different activities: SEO and SEA (Kritzing and Weideman, 2013; Charlesworth, 2014; Chaffey and Ellis-

Chadwick, 2016), with the main common element of these activities being search engines, keywords, and the fact that search results appear on SERPs. Other terms used to refer to SEA include paid search, pay-per-click (PPC) advertising or Google AdWords. While SEO results are organic or natural listings, SEA is generally associated with Google AdWords and results in paid listings, though both activities involve keywords and search results on SERPs. However, Charlesworth (2014) suggests that SEA should be viewed as an online advertising activity, because there is a payment involved with the keywords, while SEO is a natural organic search, which is free of charge.

SEO is defined as “achieving the highest position or ranking practical in the natural or organic listings on the search engine results pages after a specific combination of keywords (or key phrase) has been typed in” (Chaffey and Smith, 2008, p.283). Correspondingly, Charlesworth (2014, p.191) suggests viewing SEO as “the practice of making a website attractive to a search engine by presenting its code and content in such a way that the search engine will assume that it will address a specific enquiry from a (human) searcher”. SEA is very similar to classical advertising; “here a relevant text ad with a link to a company page is displayed when the user of a search engine types in a specific phrase” (Chaffey and Smith, 2009, p.296). These ads appear on the top of SERPs together with organic search results. Kritzinger and Weideman (2013) outline the advantages and disadvantages for both activities. SEA advantages include the fact that websites can be listed immediately with high rankings; however, paid search implementation can be pricey. Thus, SEO can cost less, but it requires more time. In addition, the algorithms for searches are kept confidential and are also constantly updated, and therefore, the highest positions on search engines can never be guaranteed. Hence, to have a successful SEO strategy requires specific skills set and knowledge. Since SEA is more similar to advertising, the focus here is on SEO as a DMC channel of driving traffic to the websites.

Using SEO, companies aim to achieve higher rankings on SERPs using various techniques (Kritzinger and Weideman, 2013). While the actual factors of search algorithms are not known as they are confidential, there are more than 200 factors and signals that the Google search engine uses, which have stimulated a great deal of discussion among practitioners (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2016). According to Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2016) the two most important factors include the match between keywords search and website copy and the links into that page, which are grouped into two major groups of SEO elements: on-page and off-page optimisation. On-page optimisation is concerned with website elements and parameters. Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2016) identify the main on-page optimisation factors: number of times the keywords or keywords phrase is repeated in the website page text, alternative image text and document meta data, including document title tag and description meta tag. Off-page optimisation is related to factors outside the actual website associated with external link building since “the number of links into a page and their quality was a great way of determining the relevance of page to searchers” (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2016, p.494). Therefore, the more high-quality links a page has, the higher it appears on SERPs. However, these are very simplified search

algorithm factors, a more in-depth review can be found in MOZ (2015) search ranking factors. Lambertson and Stephen (2016) again explain that academic research into SEO is scarce and does not match the interest in practice, because it is a tactical and operational activity with little opportunity for theory development.

### 2.2.3.3. Social Media Marketing

#### 2.2.3.3.1. Definition of Social Media and Social Media Marketing

While DMC is gaining popularity amongst practitioners, academic research into this area is still quite limited (Jensen, 2006; Wymbs, 2011; García, Díaz and Durán, 2012; Durkin, 2013). However, the topics of social media and social media marketing have received more attention from academic researchers (Mangold and Faulds, 2009; Kärkkäinen, Jussila and Väisänen, 2010; Hanna, Rohm and Crittenden, 2011; Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011; Brennan and Croft, 2012; Castronovo and Huang, 2012; Järvinen *et al.*, 2012; Clark and Melancon, 2013; Dateling and Bick, 2013). Most researchers agree on the definition and main characteristics of this phenomenon, and on the notion that social media has fundamentally changed the way companies communicate with their customers. Though, most of these studies focus solely on social media, and do not take a more strategic approach to social media as a part of wider DMC.

Researchers have studied social media from various aspects: as a hybrid promotion mix element (Mangold and Faulds, 2009), as a part of B2B companies' innovation (Kärkkäinen, Jussila and Väisänen, 2010), the power of the social media ecosystem (Hanna, Rohm and Crittenden, 2011), in B2B SMEs context (Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011), in B2B marketing and branding (Brennan and Croft, 2012), as an alternative marketing communication context (Castronovo and Huang, 2012), the popularity of brand posts and its effects (De Vries, Gensler and Leeflang, 2012), influence on relational outcomes (Clark and Melancon, 2013), the impact on marketing strategy (Dateling and Bick, 2013) and in building customer relationships (Rocha *et al.*, 2013). Some studies focus on only one type of social media, for example, Waters *et al.* (2009) analyse how non-profit organisations use Facebook; Lovejoy, Waters and Saxton (2012) conduct a similar study on Twitter; He, Zha and Li (2013) study Facebook and Twitter usage employing text-mining techniques; and Swami, Brown and Milne (2014) analyse Twitter communications for B2B and B2C organisations. The use of social media in specific industries has also been studied, for example, in the tourism industry (Chan and Guillet, 2011; Hudson and Thal, 2013; Leung *et al.*, 2013), within research bodies (Carim and Warwick, 2013), non-profit organisations (Waters *et al.*, 2009; Lovejoy, Waters and Saxton, 2012, Eagleman, 2013) and retail (Lorenzo-Romero, Constantinides and Alarcón-del-Amo, 2013).

While there are many studies on social media highlighting its importance in marketing; differing definitions are still identified in the literature. The definitions of social media found in the literature and their core elements are presented in Table 2.8.



**Table 2.8:** Definitions of social media (author)

Author (Year)	Definition	Core elements
Blackshaw and Nazzaro (2004) as cited by Mangold and Faulds (2009, p.357)	“ <b>Social media</b> , also referred as <b>consumer-generated media</b> , [...] describes a variety of new sources of online information that are created, initiated, circulated and used by consumers intent on educating each other about products, brands, services, personalities, and issues.”	New sources, online information, initiated by consumers
Kärkkäinen, Jussila and Väisänen (2010, p.229)	“ <b>Social media</b> is referred to applications, which are based either fully to user-created content, or user-created content and user activities have a significant role in increasing the value of the application or service.”	Applications, user-created content
Hennig-Thurau <i>et al.</i> (2010) as cited by Castronovo and Huang (2012, p.122)	“ <b>Social media</b> is about fostering communication with consumers rather than a one-sided push of a brand message.”	Fostering, communications, consumers
Kietzmann <i>et al.</i> (2011, p.241)	“ <b>Social media</b> employ mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms via which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content.”	Technologies, interactive platforms, communities, user-generated content
Chan and Guillet (2011, p.347)	“ <b>Social media</b> can be defined as a group of Internet-based applications that exist on the Web 2.0 platform and enable the Internet users from all over the world to interact, communicate, and share ideas, content, thoughts, experiences, perspectives, information and relationships.”	Applications, interact, communicate, share
Järvinen <i>et al.</i> (2012, p.104)	“ <b>Social media</b> as integrated elements, platforms, and tools of digital marketing that facilitate social interaction between businesses and customer networks.”	Digital marketing tools and platforms, social interaction, customer networks
Strauss and Frost (2012, p.328)	“ <b>Social media</b> is a term used to describe the type of media that is based on conversation and interaction between people online.”	Social networking, consumer generated media, conversation and interaction
CIPR (2013, p.3)	“ <b>Social media</b> is the term commonly given to Internet and mobile-based channels and tools that allow users to interact with each other and share opinions and content. As the name implies, social media involves the building of communities or networks and encouraging participation and engagement.”	Internet channels and tools, user interaction, content, communities, engagement
Dateling and Bick (2013, p.54)	“ <b>Social media</b> is about connecting with people and there is huge emphasis on the personal and authentic aspect of this interaction.”	Connecting, people, interaction
Zhou and Wang (2014, p.28)	“ <b>Social media</b> is an interactive community built on internet and mobile platform technology (referred to as Web 2.0). It is a technological platform that allows people to write, share, evaluate and discuss content that creates User Generated Content (UGC).”	Interactive community, technological platform

Table 2.8. shows the existing definitions of social media. While authors use various ways of defining the concept, some similarities can be identified. Nearly all definitions include an interactions and engagement aspect (Kietzmann *et al.*, 2011; Chan and Guillet, 2011; Berthon *et al.*, 2012; Järvinen *et al.*, 2012; Strauss and Frost, 2012; CIPR, 2013; Dateling and Bick, 2013). Another important element of the definition is technology and applications (Kärkkäinen, Jussila and Väisänen, 2010; Kietzmann *et al.*, 2011; Chan and Guillet, 2011; Berthon *et al.*, 2012; Järvinen *et al.*, 2012; CIPR, 2013). In addition, people, users, consumers or communities are included (Blackshaw and Nazzaro, 2004; Kärkkäinen, Jussila and Väisänen, 2010; Kietzmann *et al.*, 2011; Chan and Guillet, 2011; Järvinen *et al.*, 2012; Strauss and Frost, 2012; CIPR, 2013; Dateling and Bick, 2013). Therefore, social media should be seen as the interaction between different users and communities using various technological applications to facilitate that interaction. In other words, Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR, 2013) highlights that social media is about communities and their participation and engagement.

In marketing terms, Chaffey and Smith (2017, p.225) highlight “the most important feature of these social media channels is that we encourage our prospects and customers to interact and create user-generated content”. Therefore, social media should encourage audience participation, interaction and sharing. While much attention has been given to social media research, there has been less focus on social media marketing in the academic literature. Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2016, p.33) define social media marketing as “monitoring and facilitating customer-to-customer interaction and participation throughout web to encourage positive engagement with a company and its brands”. It is highlighted that, in order to use social media for marketing purposes, it needs to assist in achieving marketing objectives (Chaffey and Smith, 2017). Keinänen and Kuivalainen (2015, p.712) explain “social media marketing is a term which describes the actual acts of using social networks for marketing purposes”. While companies can use social media as a broadcasting channel, however, to gain advantages it is important to engage in a dialogue and conversations with customers (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2016). However, only a few studies deal with social media marketing in a more strategic approach rather than a pure focus on tactical execution.

It is suggested that the majority of companies use social media in an experimental and *ad hoc* manner rather than strategically planned and integrated with clear objectives and measurement practices (Macnamara and Zerfass, 2012). Barger and Labrecque (2013) note that there is little consensus on how social media metrics can inform marketing strategy. It is suggested that social media metrics should be aligned with marketing communications metrics (Barger and Labrecque, 2013; Töllinen and Karjaluoto, 2011). In order to gain benefits from social media marketing, it is important that it is integrated with an overall business strategy, meaning that short- and long-term social media marketing objectives are fully integrated with a company’s marketing strategy and overall strategy objectives (Töllinen and Karjaluoto, 2011). As a result, the strategic social media marketing concept is proposed. It is argued that research

into social media marketing is fragmented, with a focus on isolated issues and tactics rather than a strategic approach (Felix, Rauschnabel and Hinsch, 2017). Therefore, Felix, Rauschnabel and Hinsch (2017 p.123) propose a new definition for social media marketing: “social media marketing is an interdisciplinary and cross-functional concept that uses social media (often in combination with other communication channels) to achieve organizational goals by creating value for stakeholders”, adding that strategic social media marketing includes decisions about the scope, culture, structure and governance of social media.

Though, some researchers use social media to describe digital marketing, for example, Dahnil *et al.* (2014, p.120) state “the terms social media marketing and Internet marketing will be used interchangeably and will be taken to include the activities of e-marketing”. Social media should be viewed as “integrated elements, platforms, and tools of digital marketing that facilitate social interaction between businesses and customer networks” and digital marketing should be viewed as marketing, which use both social media and other digital media tools in creating and enhancing relationships (Järvinen *et al.*, 2012, p.104). While some researchers still use terms such as digital marketing and social media marketing interchangeably, this thesis follows Järvinen *et al.* (2012) and argues that the broadest term is digital marketing, which encompasses social media marketing as a part of marketing strategy to achieve overall business objectives.

#### 2.2.3.3.2. Features of Social Media Marketing

The popularity of social media has grown rapidly, resulting in rapid social media adoption among companies for various marketing strategies. This intensive growth emerged because “social media outlets constitute excellent vehicles for fostering relationships with customers” (De Vries, Gensler and Leeflang, p.83). Social media has completely changed communications between companies and their customers (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). Before social media, marketing communications were one-way message broadcasting to masses, now it is a two-way constant dialogue between different parties. Social media has empowered customers, it facilitates the necessity for increased interaction between companies, organisations and people, because it is participative, interactive, open and transparent (Zhou and Wang, 2014). Therefore, increasing number of organisations are utilising social media in their marketing.

Social media can be employed for various business objectives, including the improvement of customer service, the creation of communities, to gather customer feedback, build relationships, advertise, engage with customers, and increase loyalty (Castronovo and Huang, 2012), which could be grouped into three main groups of marketing objectives: awareness building, loyalty building and increasing sales. Similarly, Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides (2011) suggest that companies are using social media in their marketing to attract new customers, build and enhance relationships, increase brand awareness and communicate the corporate brand online, as well as communication with suppliers. It is

suggested that social media allows not only communications with customers, but also facilitates a relationship-building process (Castronovo and Huang, 2012) as “social media followers perceive higher levels of relationship investment, report higher perceptions of relationship quality, and have higher levels of customer satisfaction, loyalty and positive word of mouth intentions with the organization than do non-followers” (Clark and Melancon, 2013, p.132). Thus, researchers strongly encourage companies to use social media for building and enhancing their relationships with customers. Social media can also be used for market intelligence (Ang, 2011; He, Zha and Li, 2013; Leeflang *et al.*, 2014). Leeflang *et al.* (2014, p.2) explain that social media provides invaluable customer insights data: “blogs, product reviews, discussion groups, product ratings, etc. are new important sources of information describing how customers collect information, use that information, and how that information is used in their decision-making, shopping behavior, and post-purchase behaviour”.

While social media is about online communities and ongoing communication flow between different parties, it can also be successfully employed to achieve overall marketing objectives, including customer acquisition, customer loyalty and retention, sales growth, customer satisfaction, and traffic increase (Ang, 2011; Castronovo and Huang, 2012; He, Zha and Li, 2013). However, recently a more critical approach towards social media marketing has emerged “it is still ‘hyped’ about its [social media] benefits for marketing, we would expect to see its impact evaluated and criticised” (Chaffey and Smith, 2017, p.227). Researchers argue that individuals use social media to socialise with other individuals or brands, but not for sales, which is what companies strive to achieve.

#### 2.2.3.3.3. Social Media Channels

There are many definitions of social media, though fewer of social media marketing. The focus of this study is on social media as a marketing communications channel, which sees it as a vehicle for company and consumer communications. Sometimes social media channels for communications are considered very narrowly as social networking sites only (Facebook, Twitter, Google+ and LinkedIn), but there is a large variety of different platforms (blogs, forums, chat rooms, rating and feedback sites, picture and video sharing sites).

Chaffey and Smith (2017, p.224) suggest “social media means different things to different people”, thus Table 2.9. illustrates the most common social media forms identified across academic research. Different researchers suggest different numbers of media forms and different definitions; however, they all suggest similar types and widen the channels options to include more than social networking sites.

**Table 2.9:** Social media channels (author)

Author (Year)	Social Media Channels
Mangold and Faulds (2009)	Online forums; Blogs; Company sponsored discussion boards; Chat rooms; Consumer-to-consumer e-mail; Consumer product ratings websites and forums; Moblogs.
Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides (2011)	Social networking sites; Blogs; Chat-rooms; Rating websites; Video and photo sharing websites; Podcasts.
Chan and Guillet (2011)	Blogs and micro-blogs; Social networking sites; Virtual worlds; Collaborative projects; Content community sites; Feedback sites.
Berthon <i>et al.</i> (2012)	Blogs; Micro-blogs; Picture-sharing websites; Video-sharing websites; Networks.
Castronovo and Huang (2012)	Chat rooms; Blogs; Social networking sites.
Chaffey and Smith (2013)	Social networks; Social publishing and news; Social commenting in blogs; Social niche communities; Social customer service; Social knowledge; Social bookmarking; Social streaming; Social search; Social commerce.
Charlesworth (2014)	Consumer generated content and ratings; Social networks and online communities; Blogging; Viral marketing; Online public relations and reputation management.
Jussila, Kärkkäinen and Aramo-Immonen (2014)	Wikis; Blogs; Microblogs; Social networking sites; Social content communities; Intermediaries; Virtual social worlds.

Some researchers provide more aggregate social media types (Berthon *et al.*, 2012; Castronovo and Huang, 2012), and others present more extensive lists (Mangold and Faulds, 2009; Chaffey and Smith, 2013). While Charlesworth (2014) suggests six broad categories of social media, he also suggests viewing social media strategically as a whole subject, because the lines between different groups are blurred. It is therefore evident that there is a large number of social media channels available. Therefore, companies face a challenge of choosing the most suitable channels from the existing variety.

#### 2.2.3.4. E-mail Marketing

Another DMC tool and channel is e-mail marketing. E-mail marketing is defined as “outbound communication from a company to prospects or customers to encourage purchase or branding goals (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2016, p.659). However, academic research on e-mail as a DMC channel is limited and even textbooks dealing with digital marketing include only a few paragraphs and short sections about e-mail, while social media typically receives much more attention (Charlesworth, 2014; Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick; Chaffey and Smith, 2017). Similarly, Ellis-Chadwick and Doherty (2012) analyse e-mail executional tactics, such as length, frequency and timing of e-mail, illustrations, subject line, headline, and message content, instead of strategically analysing it as a DMC.

E-mails can be either part of a one-off campaign or part of automated campaigns. However, it is important to distinguish between one-to-one e-mails as a part of customer-client communication and e-mails used to achieve marketing objectives. E-mail marketing is also considered as a part of direct marketing (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2016), as Charlesworth (2014, p.273) explains “the use of e-mails as direct marketing tool continues to be one of the most effective elements of digital marketing”.

E-mail can be used successfully for both customer acquisition and customer retention goals (Chaffey and Smith, 2008; Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2016). Ellis-Chadwick and Doherty (2012) emphasise that e-mail marketing is an important marketing communications channel for building and maintaining relationships with customers. In addition, e-mail communications are also valuable in company branding activities and inform and remind customers about the company (Chaffey and Smith, 2008). However, it is suggested that e-mail marketing should be part of a CRM dialogue rather than a separate channel on its own (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2016; Chaffey and Smith, 2017).

It is a legal requirement that, for e-mail marketing use, permission is required (Ellis-Chadwick and Doherty, 2012; Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2016). The permission marketing idea was developed by Godin (1999). “Permission marketing is about seeking customer’s permission before engaging them in a relationship and providing something in exchange” (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2016, p.44). As a part of permission marketing, opt-in and opt-out elements are required. Opt-in is when the customer agrees to receive information from the company and opt-out is when they decline to receive company information (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2016). Permission-based e-mail communications has grown in importance as unsolicited e-mails are defined as spam, meaning that the e-mail recipient needs to provide the consent for e-mail communications from companies. The main incentive for customers to provide their consent is to receive relevant information (Ellis-Chadwick and Doherty, 2012). Current marketing practice advocates only opt-in e-mail, when customers agree to be contacted and receive communications from the company, otherwise it will be illegal due to *General Data Protection Regulation* (GDPR)<sup>4</sup>. However, the little attention that e-mail marketing has received in the academic literature suggests that it is perhaps seen in more operational terms, such as its role in CRM, rather than DMC channel.

#### 2.2.3.5. Mobile Marketing

Similarly, to e-mail marketing, there is limited research into mobile marketing as a communication channel. Only a few articles could be identified dealing with mobile marketing (Barnes and Scornavacca, 2004; Bauer *et al.*, 2005; Shankar and Balasubramanian, 2009; Shankar *et al.*, 2010; Persaud and Azhar, 2012; Watson, McCarthy and Rowley, 2013; Ström, Vendel and Bredican, 2014). Lamberton and Stephen (2016) suggest that mobile marketing is one of the major emerging future research topics for academics as currently there is limited theory regarding mobile marketing.

Mobile marketing is understood as “marketing to encourage consumer engagement when using mobile phones (particularly smartphones) or tablet devices” (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2016, p.13). Mobile Marketing Association (MMA, 2009) defines mobile marketing as “a set of practices that enable

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<sup>4</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/law-topic/data-protection/data-protection-eu\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/law-topic/data-protection/data-protection-eu_en)

organizations to communicate and engage with their audience in an interactive and relevant manner through any mobile device or network”. However, the mobile marketing definition evolved as the first studies on mobile marketing (Barnes and Scornavacca, 2004; Bauer *et al.*, 2005) emerged before the introduction of smartphones when the focus was more on mobile marketing through the use of text messaging. One of the first studies on mobile marketing was by Barnes and Scornavacca (2004), followed by Shankar and Balasubramanian (2009). Though, today’s smartphones offer many more opportunities and thus previous studies, based on classic mobile phones with limited capabilities, are of little relevance to current mobile marketing practices (Persaud and Azhar, 2012).

Chaffey and Smith (2017) suggest there are eight mobile marketing options available for companies: SMS, QR codes, Bluetooth, mobile applications, mobile (mobile-optimised) websites, advertising on mobile websites and mobile applications, location-based advertising, and social network-based advertising, acknowledging that mobile-optimised websites are the key channel. Another important addition to mobile channels is mobile applications, which are “designed to run on smartphones and tablet computers, apps provide users with rich mobile content by deploying the handset’s multiple native capabilities” (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2016, p.665). They also add that “mobile apps are a highly significant development in mobile communications, indeed all digital communications” (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2016, p.136). In this thesis, mobile marketing is understood to mean the use of mobile applications and mobile-optimised websites, the key mobile channels, for communications purposes between a company and its current and potential customers.

Even the earliest studies argued that mobile marketing is different to other channels due to time and location, information and personalisation features (Barnes and Scornavacca, 2004; Bauer *et al.*, 2005, Shankar *et al.*, 2010). Similarly, Lamberton and Stephen (2016) argue that mobile marketing is important as users of mobile devices exhibit different behaviours than users of desktop or laptop devices. It is suggested that due to differences between laptops, computers and mobile devices, mobile marketing strategies should also be different (Watson, McCarthy and Rowley, 2013; Ström, Vendel and Bredican, 2014).

#### 2.2.3.6. Content Marketing

While there are various DMC tools and channels identified across the academic literature, there are other digital platforms discussed in practitioners’ literature. One of these concepts is content marketing. Content marketing is gaining increasing attention among practitioners, but only a few academic studies can be identified on this subject (Rowley, 2008; Pulizzi, 2012; Holliman and Rowley, 2014). Interestingly, while content marketing seems to lack research in general, three studies are identified that research content marketing for B2B companies (Holliman and Rowley, 2014; Järvinen and Taiminen, 2015; Wang *et al.*, 2017). According to Charlesworth (2014), two factors influence the growing

importance of content marketing practice: search engine algorithms and social media, where the emphasis is on high-quality content.

Pulizzi (2012, p.116) suggests that “content marketing is the idea that all brands, in order to attract and retain customers, need to think and act like media companies”, and explains that content marketing comes in various forms, including corporate magazines, newsletters, blogs, videos, webinars, podcasts, case studies, white papers, e-books etc. According to Content Marketing Institute (CMI, 2017), content marketing is “a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience – and, ultimately, to drive profitable customer action”. Pulizzi (2012) argues that storytelling should be at the centre of every company strategy, because no SEO, lead generation, or social media leverage initiatives will be successful without compelling content, suggesting that marketing departments are transforming into publishing departments. Thus, the biggest challenge in the company becomes the creation of engaging content. Content marketing is an important digital marketing discipline, which provides a more structured approach towards the large variety of digital marketing tools, platforms and channels. In addition, web traffic, direct sales, customer retention, brand awareness, customer acquisition and lead generation are the objectives of content marketing, which can be achieved by companies using the practice (Charlesworth, 2014).

Although, initially Rowley (2008, p.522) analyses digital content marketing, which is defined as “the management process responsible for identifying, anticipating, and satisfying customer requirements profitably in the context of digital content, or bit-based objects distributed through electronic channels”, in this case digital content marketing is used to define marketing of digital content, which is the actual product. Later, Holliman and Rowley (2014) focus on content marketing in line with Pulizzi (2012) and search for holistic theory of digital content marketing and propose a new definition of digital content marketing. Adapting the AMA’s marketing definition, “digital content marketing is the activity associated with creating, communicating, distributing, and exchanging digital content that has value for customers, clients, partners and the firm and its brands” (Holliman and Rowley, 2014, p.287). Content marketing should be used strategically as the key is to engage customers and prospects by integrating different types of the content to meet business objectives (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2016).

#### **2.2.4. Paid, Earned and Owned Media**

The review has revealed that there is a significant number of DMC tools and platforms available. One approach to categorise these different channels is using the paid, earned and owned media concept, which is frequently used in marketing communications. The concept was popularised by Forrester in 2009 and has received a lot of attention from practitioners and academics. Its importance has grown with the rise of digital communications and variety of DMC channels (Corcoran, 2009; Chaffey and Smith, 2013). The Table 2.10. details the different types of paid, earned and owned media.



**Table 2.10:** Earned, owned and paid media (Corcoran, 2009)

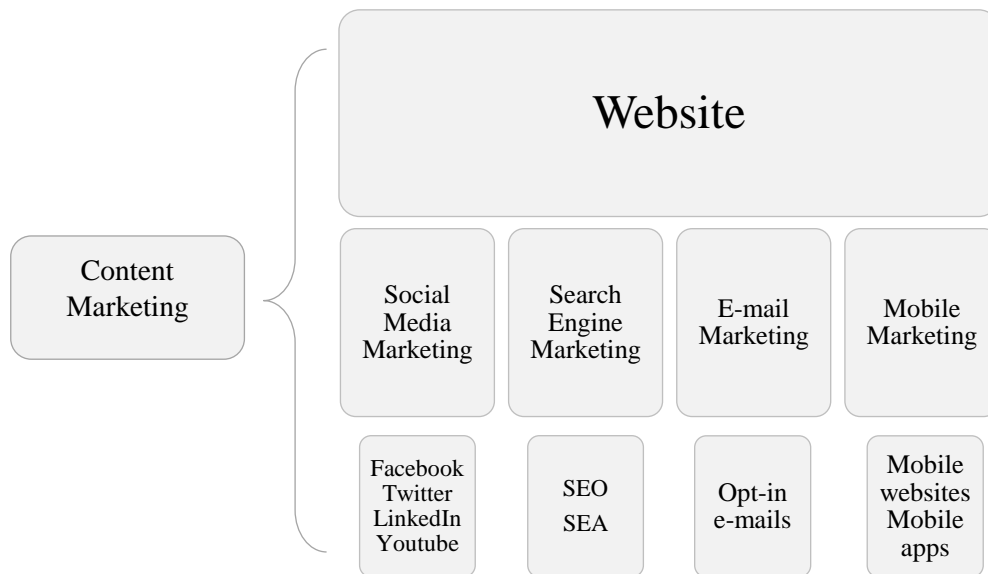
Media Type	Definition	Examples	The role	Benefits	Challenges
<b>Owned media</b>	Channel brand controls	Website, Mobile site, Blog, Twitter account	Build for long-term relationships with existing and potential customers and earn media	Control, Cost efficiency, Longevity, Versatility, Niche audiences	No guarantees, Company communication not trusted, Takes time to scale
<b>Paid media</b>	Brand pays to leverage a channel	Display ads, Paid search, Sponsorships	Shift from foundation to catalyst that feeds owned and creates earned media	In demand, Immediacy, Scale, Control	Clutter, Declining response rates, Poor credibility
<b>Earned media</b>	When customers become the channel	WOM, Buzz, Viral	Listen and respond – earned media is often the result of well-executed and well-coordinated owned and paid media	Most credible, Key role in most sales, Transparent and lives on	No control, Can be negative, Scale, Hard to measure

Owned media is a media owned by brand, for example, websites, blogs, mobile apps and social presence. Paid media is defined as media which involves payment, and earned media is the result of paid and owned media which creates word of mouth and viral effects (Chaffey and Smith, 2013). These categories are useful when analysing DMC channels, since different types of media require different approaches and different amounts of resources. Owned media channels are the most important as they are under the control of the company, paid channels require more expenditure as there is a direct payment involved and earned media is the hardest to achieve as this is the result of companies owned and paid media use.

### 2.2.5. Digital Marketing Communications Building Blocks

While the previous sections presented the existing variety of DMC channels, and discussed their main features, acknowledging that success lies in these communications channels' integration and coordination, this section summarises DMC channels, which are the focus of this thesis. DMC channels, the building blocks of a digital strategy, are presented in Figure 2.2. below.

The company website is identified as the most important DMC element, with all other digital channels aimed at increasing traffic to the website and supporting it. The thesis identifies the key supporting DMC channels as: social media marketing, search engine marketing, e-mail marketing and mobile marketing. In addition, the focus is on owned media, which is owned by the company and could potentially result in earned media. In line with CMI (2017), content marketing should integrate different DMC channels ensuring they are optimised and integrated together to deliver the same message.

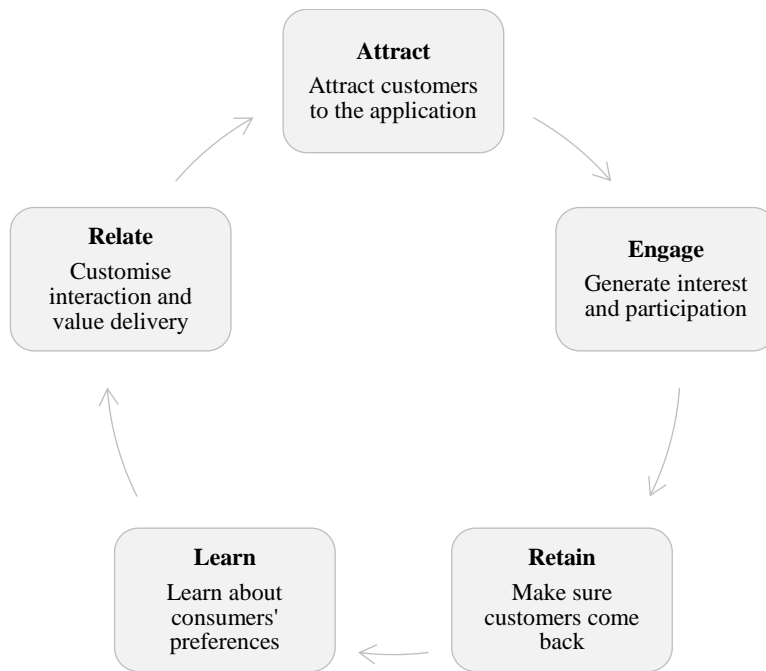


**Figure 2.2:** Digital marketing communications building blocks (author)

While the central element of DMC remains the company website, the other supportive DMC channels, including social media marketing, search engine marketing, e-mail marketing and mobile marketing, should complement and augment the website. Paid media, such as advertising on Facebook or Google can be also integrated with DMC strategy, however these are less applicable in B2B SME context and are thus beyond the scope of this thesis.

### 2.3. DIGITAL MARKETING FRAMEWORKS

The previous sections demonstrated how the emergence of digital marketing has resulted in various new communications channels available for marketers. These communications channels can be employed to achieve different marketing objectives, and therefore Kierzkowski *et al.* (1996) developed a digital marketing framework for interactive media, which is a valuable tool for understanding and organising digital media. Kierzkowski *et al.* (1996) present a framework for successful marketing to the digital consumer. While initially this framework was suggested for interactive media, it provides a useful lens through which to analyse DMC from a strategic view. The framework focuses on different steps in dialogic (two-way) communication between a company and its customers and has been adopted in a number of studies (Teo, 2005; Chong *et al.*, 2009; Chan and Guillet, 2011). It is suggested there are five stages of successful digital marketing: attract users, engage users, retain users, learn about users and relate back to users, as depicted in Figure 2.3.



**Figure 2.3:** Digital marketing framework (Kierzkowski *et al.*, 1996, p.12)

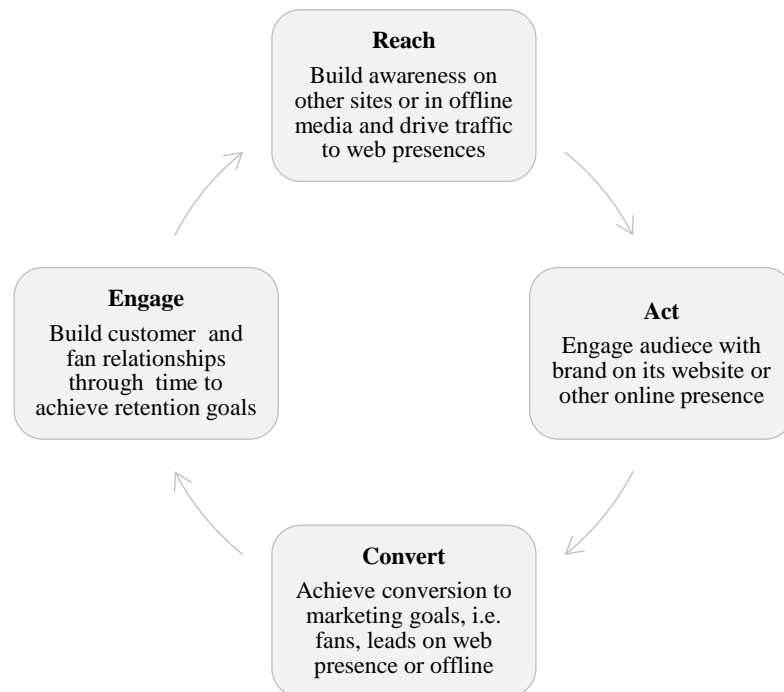
The first stage, *attract*, requires users to voluntarily visit an interactive application, for example, a corporate website. The second stage, *engage*, requires marketers to make users interested to participate in interactions with the company. To engage with the users, the attractive and engaging form and the content of the application is required. The *retain* stage requires the maintenance of on-going contact between the user and company to develop a relationship. If marketers can truthfully engage with users, they will also be able to retain them. Marketers should learn about users, their demographics, attitudes and behaviours in the *learn* stage. Finally, the *relate* stage requires customised and personalised interaction with individual customers. Table 2.8. below shows the original framework and its main elements and includes the strategies, defined as levers, needed to be successful within each stage.

**Table 2.11:** Digital marketing framework and levers (Kierzkowski *et al.*, 1996, p.12)

Digital Marketing Stages	What?	How?
<b>Attract</b>	Attract customers to the application	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Audience creation</li> <li>• Mnemonic branding</li> </ul>
<b>Engage</b>	Generate interest and participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creative programming</li> <li>• Interactive content</li> <li>• User-generated content</li> <li>• Transaction capabilities</li> </ul>
<b>Retain</b>	Make sure consumers come back	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dynamic content</li> <li>• Digital communities</li> <li>• Proprietary/unique content</li> </ul>
<b>Learn</b>	Learn about consumers' preferences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information capture</li> <li>• Continuous preference learning</li> </ul>

<b>Relate</b>	Customise interaction and value delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personalised/customised communications and products/services</li> <li>• Real-time interactions</li> <li>• Linkages to core business</li> </ul>
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Similarly, Chaffey in 2010 introduced RACE, a practical framework for digital marketing, which represents four stages of customer engagement with the company. The RACE acronym stands for *reach, act, convert, engage* and covers all stages of customer lifecycle or marketing funnel. According to Chaffey and Smith (2013), this framework should be the starting point for every company’s digital planning as there is a large variety of tools and tactics available, and, therefore, this model offers a structured approach. While the RACE includes the four stages of digital marketing, it is still somewhat analogous to the original digital marketing model, which reveals there are different stages of digital marketing.



**Figure 2.4:** RACE framework (Chaffey and Smith, 2013)

Additionally, Rowley (2001) suggests another somewhat similar framework, which consists of four stages of e-commerce development. She proposes looking into the role of marketing communications depending on the website development stage, as shown in Table 2.12.

**Table 2.12:** Stages of e-commerce service development (Rowley, 2001, p.205)

Stage	Characteristics	Website functionality
<b>Contact</b>	Promote corporate image Publish corporate information Offer contact information	Content
<b>Interact</b>	Embed information exchange	Communication

	Targeted marketing effort	
<b>Transact</b>	Online transactions Catalogue order/fulfilment Interaction with trading partners	Commerce
<b>Relate</b>	Two-way customer relationship Full integration of internet capability into the business Service interface integrated with delivery and other business operations	Community

The frameworks suggest that there are different customer stages, which require different marketing approaches. They also highlight that DMC platforms do not exist separately from each other; they are closely interlinked. The stages of a successful digital customer journey require different approaches and different mixtures of tools, platforms and channels to create successful communications. As a result, DMC is about choosing the right combination of tools and channels and integrating them successfully.

## 2.4. DIGITAL MARKETING IN PRACTICE

### 2.4.1. A Marketing Theory and Practice Gap

While a body of research has developed around some areas of DMC, there is an increasing gap between marketing practitioners and theorists. As discussed previously, areas of modern DMC practice, such as content marketing, e-mail marketing, mobile marketing and SEO, hardly feature in the academic literature. Some researchers (Evans *et al.*, 2002; Guo, 2004; November, 2004; Harrigan and Hulbert, 2011; Finch, Nadeau and O'Reilly, 2012; Charlesworth, 2014; Stone, 2014) have raised the question of how to close it. Lamberton and Stephen (2016) analyse the digital research agenda from 2000 to 2015 and identified major gaps, for example, while practitioners were always interested in how digital marketing can contribute to the long-term growth of the company, it was not of interest for the academic research, or one of the key disciplines for practitioners mobile marketing has received hardly any interest from scholars.

While some researchers identify the gap between marketing theory and practice (Evans, *et al.*, 2002; Guo, 2004; November, 2004; Finch, Nadeau and O'Reilly, 2012) others have focused on the gap between digital marketing education and practice (Mitchell and Strauss, 2001; Harrigan and Hulbert, 2011; Stone, 2014; Lamberton and Stephen, 2016). Their conclusions are that both academics and practitioners should collaborate more, especially in university marketing course curriculum creation. It is suggested that a growing gap between the priorities of academics and the needs of marketing practitioners occurs due to the use of the wrong research methods used (Davis *et al.*, 2013). Carson and Coviello (1996) raise the question how to make academic research more suitable to the practitioners. They explain that, while academic marketing researchers focus on social scientific research, which must be valid and rigorous with clearly noted cause and effect, in practice marketing practitioners use a much more naturalistic approach. In the same vein, Harrigan and Hulbert (2011) claim that technology is driving marketing practice, but that much less attention is given to technology in marketing theory and education. Therefore, there is a separation between marketing practice and marketing theory. It is

suggested “we are at the stage where marketing academia has a lot to learn from marketing practice” (Harrigan and Hulbert, 2011, p.254).

Some scholars have investigated how marketing education could help marketing practice and suggest a new model for marketing education curricula, concluding “we need to embed practitioner knowledge in our curriculums and understand that marketing is now so broad that those practicing it may not even see themselves as marketers” (Harrigan and Hulbert, 2011, p.269). November (2004) goes further and provides reasons why marketing practitioners should ignore marketing academic research. He states that “managers should continue to avoid reading academic work and avoid attending academic conferences because we are simply not yet able to produce knowledge that is useful to practitioners” (November, 2004, p.47).

Correspondingly, Charlesworth (2014) argues, while every academic text needs to have academic underpinnings, with the subject of digital marketing there is also a need to include practical underpinnings since some marketing practitioners have become digital marketing experts. Charlesworth (2014) stresses that, usually, academic research does not reveal any new knowledge since practitioners have learned it already by trial and error. An example could be De Vries, Gensler and Leeflang’s (2012) study, which analyses the popularity of posts on brand pages and provides managerial recommendations on how to enhance the number of likes and enhance the number of comments. They suggest that “when managers aim to enhance the number of likes, they can place highly vivid or medium interactive brand post characteristics such as a video or a contest”, and also add “managers who specifically want to enhance the number of comments should post a highly interactive brand post characteristic at a brand post, such as a question” (De Vries, Gensler and Leeflang, 2012, p.89). While the researchers undertake an exhaustive study to provide these insights, marketing practitioners already instinctively know this (Charlesworth, 2014).

There are some peer-reviewed journals dedicated to digital marketing, with a special focus on practitioners, including *Journal of Digital & Social Media Marketing* and *Journal of Direct, Data & Digital Marketing Practice*. However, their target audience is marketing practitioners, and thus the papers lack academic rigour. Papers seem to be more like best-practice papers rather than empirically tested research, and thus these papers are not included in this thesis. In addition, *Journal of Direct, Data & Digital Marketing Practice*, which was an official journal of the Institute of Direct and Digital Marketing, ceased in 2016. Thus, there seems to be a divide between marketing theorists and marketing practitioners and it is important to take into consideration these issues. The aim for the research should be its usefulness for both parties, thus this research aims to help close the gap by combining both theory and practice in a way that is academically rigorous.

## 2.4.2. Digital Marketing Practitioners

While the information provided by practitioners might be regarded as subjective, reflecting the commercial side of these businesses, it also presents up-to-date information regarding digital marketing. There are many influential organisations that function as knowledge bases for digital marketing strategy and practice. While this is not an exhaustive list of the websites, these organisations are identified as offering valuable and relevant information for the thesis.

One of the most influential digital marketing websites is *Smart Insights*<sup>5</sup>, which is dedicated to integrated digital marketing practices. The owner and main contributor is Dr David Chaffey, who is also the co-author of the textbooks *E-marketing Excellence*, *Digital Marketing Excellence* and *Digital Marketing*, widely adopted and used by academics. The website offers a lot of educational content, which can be found on its blog or as downloadable resources as part of basic or advanced membership. The resources include various whitepapers, guides, case studies and templates for registered users. The most popular website resources include a series of seven-step success guides, such as *7 Steps to Successful Social Media Marketing* or *7 Steps to Successful Digital Marketing Strategy*.

Another highly influential digital marketing website is *E-consultancy*<sup>6</sup>, which aims to help companies achieve digital excellence. The company provides market research, guides and training on digital marketing. It also includes advice on internet marketing strategy and best practice on digital marketing for e-commerce and marketing professionals. In addition, *MOZ*<sup>7</sup> provides marketing analytics and SEO software. They offer many free resources related to SEO in video, e-book and blog post format. These resources present the latest research and best practice advice regarding SEO. In addition, they offer free subscription to some of their SEO tools, which are frequently used by practitioners. *Hubspot*<sup>8</sup> and *Marketo*<sup>9</sup> are companies that provide consultancy services and software for inbound marketing and marketing automation and are the market leaders in their field. While these websites are commercially orientated businesses, they also have good content marketing strategies in place and share their content and knowledge in various forms, including podcasts, webinars, blog posts, e-books, whitepapers, reports and case studies. In addition, *Hubspot* offers free courses and certification in various digital marketing topics.

The final company providing digital marketing knowledge, research and education is *Google*<sup>10</sup>. It is a technology company which specialises in internet-related services and products, including search engine, online advertising, cloud computing, software and hardware. *Google* search engine is the most

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.smartinsights.com/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://econsultancy.com/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://moz.com/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.hubspot.com/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.marketo.com/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.google.com/about/>

used search engine in Western countries, and therefore, SEO, is closely related to website optimisation for Google search engine. The company provides various services and a large number of free courses related to digital marketing, such as courses related to *Google Analytics*, *Google AdWords* or simply *Google Digital Garage* courses related to digital marketing in general. A large number of specific resources and free tools are provided regarding websites, mobile optimisation, website speeds and best-practice guidelines. It also has a *Think with Google* initiative related to the latest marketing research and digital trends.

This section briefly reviewed some of the most important marketing consultancies and commercial organisations as they offer the large variety of literature available either in free downloadable format, or blog posts or even free software. Thus, DMC research should be aware of and consider the industry position in order to have a complete view, and therefore business research needs to consider the industry view in order to be truly relevant and impactful to provide deep understanding.

## **2.5. MARKETING AND DIGITAL MARKETING PRACTICES**

### **2.5.1. Marketing Practices and SMEs**

#### 2.5.1.1. SMEs Marketing

The research into SMEs marketing is generally scarce as for a long time it was believed that small firms are exactly the same as their larger counterparts, just smaller versions (Hill, 2001a), and only recently has there been a growth of research into SMEs marketing practices (Coviello, Brodie and Munro, 2000; Gilmore, Carson and Grant, 2001; Hill, 2001a; Hill, 2001b; O'Dwyer, Gilmore and Carson, 2009a; O'Dwyer, Gilmore and Carson, 2009b, Centeno and Hart, 2012; Gabrielli and Balboni, 2010; Reijonen, 2010; Einwiller and Boenigk, 2012). SMEs are important to every country and its development as they are important for economic growth, employment and competitiveness (Hill, 2001a; Centeno and Hart, 2012; Eid and El-Gohary, 2013, Quinton *et al.*, 2017). The European Commission (2018) notes that 99% of all companies in the EU are SMEs. Einwiller and Boenigk (2012) even argue that SMEs are a forgotten sector in communication research, though it is extremely important for all economies in ensuring competitiveness and employment.

It is therefore important to review SMEs marketing practices as they are different to large corporations. Gilmore, Carson and Grant (2001) aim to understand how SMEs marketing is completed in practice and conclude that the company owner-manager and his/her network building is the most important marketing activity in small organisations. Gabrielli and Balboni (2010) analyse SMEs practices and conclude that the vast majority of small organisations still prefer to use a single type of marketing communication tool, and therefore the integrated marketing communications concept is not successfully adopted by these organisations. Similarly, Reijonen (2010) raises the question of whether all SMEs



implement the same type of marketing practices and concludes that traditional marketing theories are not used in SMEs, which usually use informal and chaotic marketing strategies.

Researchers thus widely agree that marketing practices in SMEs differ a great deal from marketing in large organisations (Coviello, Brodie and Munro, 2000; Gilmore, Carson and Grant, 2001; Hill, 2001a, 2001b; Gilmore, Gallagher and Henry, 2007). These organisations have specific attributes: the owner-managers have more power, they have fewer resources, including financial and marketing knowledge, and they might also concentrate on short-term goals with flat and informal organization structures (Centeno and Hart, 2012). Gilmore, Carson and Grant (2001) add that these specific characteristics include the behaviour of the owner-manager, size or stage of organisation development with limited resources, lack of specialist knowledge and expertise and limited impact in the marketplace. O'Dwyer, Gilmore and Carson (2009b) further explain that the marketing function is usually obstructed by limited cash flow, limited marketing knowledge and expertise, business size with tactical and strategic customer-related issues. Therefore, "SME marketing is likely to be haphazard, informal, loose, unstructured, spontaneous, reactive, built upon and conforming to industry norms" (Gilmore, Carson and Grant, 2001, p.6). These small companies are also characterised by having limited resources, time, finance and marketing knowledge (Reijonen, 2010).

Hill (2001a, 2001b) describes how the owner-manager of the SME with his/her personal contact network and strong sales orientation is at the centre of every successful small enterprise. Centeno and Hart (2012) also add that the owner or key manager is the main influencer in the company and that this person is not only the key sales person, but also very influential in brand communication activities. On the other hand, O'Dwyer, Gilmore and Carson (2009b) highlight that, while the size of the company results in limited company resources, at the same time it also creates a competitive advantage for the organisation as there are few formal structures and models, which allows flexibility. They also add that SMEs marketing practices are influenced by competitors, customers, business environment, limited resources and owner-manager's skills and abilities. Therefore, small companies engage in marketing, though not always fully understand it (O'Dwyer, Gilmore and Carson, 2009b)

It is thus evident that small company marketing is more competency based, intuitive, and networking-based with financial and human resource constraints (Gilmore, Gallagher and Henry, 2007). Therefore, SMEs usually undertake informal, sporadic, reactive, unstructured marketing with a focus on short-term tactics rather than long-term strategic planning (Reijonen, 2010) meaning that the theories applicable to large organisations are of limited use for SMEs.

#### 2.5.1.2. SMEs Digital Marketing

The literature review reveals that there is a small number of studies in relation to SMEs and digital marketing (Karjaluoto and Huhtamäki, 2010; García, Díaz and Durán, 2012; Taiminen and Karjaluoto, 2015). Existing academic research seems to focus more on SMEs internet and e-business adoption

(Vescovi, 2000; Ramsey *et al.*, 2003; Truong and Simmons, 2010; Jones *et al.*, 2011; Kim, Lee and Lee, 2011; García, Díaz and Durán, 2012; Eid and El-Gohary, 2013) and social media marketing (Durkin, McGowan and McKeown, 2013; McCann and Barlow, 2015). Other studies analyse website optimisation for SMEs (Simmons, Armstrong and Durkin, 2011), digital customer loyalty (Donnelly *et al.*, 2012) or digital orientation for SMEs (Quinton *et al.*, 2017), however, the latter two studies are conceptual. Only two studies are identified combining DMC and SMEs (Karjaluo and Huhtamäki, 2010; Taiminen and Karjaluo, 2015). Bocconcelli *et al.* (2016) undertake a systematic literature review on SMEs marketing and conclude that research into SMEs communications is very scarce.

Since there is limited research into SMEs and DMC (Karjaluo and Huhtamäki, 2010; García, Díaz and Durán, 2012; Taiminen and Karjaluo, 2015) the other related and more researched area of internet adoption and e-business for SMEs is also reviewed (Vescovi, 2000; Mehrtens, Cragg and Mills, 2001; Ramsey *et al.*, 2003; Wagner, Fillis and Johansson, 2003; Pavic *et al.*, 2007; Jones *et al.*, 2011). These studies into SMEs tend to focus on technology adoption, with the focus more on internet, e-business and e-commerce use, rather than digital marketing practices, nevertheless, they give a deeper insight into SMEs and how they operate. Mehrtens, Cragg and Mills (2001) identify three factors that affect SMEs internet adoption: perceived benefits, organisational readiness and external pressure. Ramsey *et al.* (2003) examine e-opportunities for Irish service SMEs, however, the focus of e-opportunities is identified as e-commerce, and conclude that, due to limited resources, there are significant barriers for e-commerce adoption. Similarly, Wagner, Fillis and Johansson (2003) suggest that SMEs are not interested in using e-commerce as a business and supply chain tool. However, Pavic *et al.* (2007, p.345) conclude “SMEs use some form of internet technology in running their day-to-day businesses but most of them are not creating value by using e-business”. Similarly, Jones *et al.* (2011) suggest that studies into e-business adoption among SMEs have presented more optimistic results than is the case in the real world and conclude that there is a lower use of e-business, defined as use of websites, e-mails and e-commerce use, among Welsh SMEs than previous studies suggested.

Several studies investigate SMEs and their social media use (Durkin, McGowan and McKeown, 2013; McCann and Barlow, 2015; Ainin *et al.*, 2015). Durkin, McGowan and McKeown (2013) explore social media adoption in SMEs in Ireland and rely on previous research which emphasised the importance of personal contact networks (Gilmore, Carson and Grant, 2001; Hill, 2001a, 2001b) and strong relationships between the company and its customer base. Durkin, McGowan and McKeown (2013) also emphasise that, while there are several studies into the subject, these are more operations- and tactics-based rather than a strategic approach to social media in SMEs customers-company relationships. The main motivation to adopt and implement social media marketing are driven by the owner/entrepreneur, with private companies being reactive, seeing an opportunity in social media adoption, and publicly owned companies being more reactive, seeing a threat (Durkin, McGowan and McKeown, 2013). Social media can be used by SMEs to achieve marketing objectives such as improved

customer service, increase in sales, improved brand awareness, reduced costs, improved promotion of company products and services, improved relationships with business contacts and customers, increased traffic to website (McCann and Barlow, 2015).

McCann and Barlow's (2015) study shows that SMEs use certain types of social media, such as LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook, and the top three reasons for starting to use social media include desire to experiment with social media, customers' use of social media and staff knowledge of how to use social media in a work capacity. SMEs believe that social media is useful for certain marketing objectives, however, two-thirds do not measure it and thus do not have evidence of its usefulness (McCann and Barlow, 2015). Several studies analyse SMEs brand development within the online communication environment (García, Díaz and Durán, 2012; Centeno and Hart, 2012). García, Díaz and Durán (2012) conclude that SMEs are focusing more on short-term branding and simply transfer their brand from the offline to the online environment due to insufficient resources. Similarly, Centeno and Hart (2012) conclude that SMEs still use sales as an extremely important activity, which is supported by a large variety of brand communication activities, including e-marketing communications.

Researchers argue that the internet presents many opportunities for SMEs as it enables them to communicate globally, in the way that large organisations can do (Gilmore, Gallagher and Henry, 2007). They identify proactive and reactive drivers as motivations to adopt e-marketing activities: elimination of competitive disadvantage in peripheral areas, reduction of operating and marketing costs, better company promotion, richer overall marketing communication mix, management enthusiasm, sales increase, market research implementation, competition, shrinkage of local markets and competitive disadvantage. Similarly, Durkin, McGowan and McKeown (2013) conclude that SMEs can gain a strategic advantage in building and maintaining company-customer relationships by implementing social media engagement. Eid and El-Gohary (2013) suggest that the use of e-marketing has a positive impact on SMEs pre-sales, after-sales activities with marketing and performance effectiveness. The benefits of e-marketing for SMEs include better relationships with customers, sales increase, web traffic increase, reduced marketing costs, competitive advantage and improved product/service quality (Chong *et al.*, 2009). However, these benefits cannot be achieved over the short time; it requires a long-term approach to gain these benefits.

When it comes to DMC adoption within SMEs, Chong *et al.* (2009) identify the main reasons: competition in the marketplace, being a part of an overall marketing strategy, globalisation, following industry trends, senior management and customer satisfaction. Similarly, Karjaluo and Huhtamäki (2010) identify three types of factors: firm-specific and owner-manager, resource-related and environmental, as significant in influencing the use of e-channels. The main goals for DMC include increasing sales to current customers, enhancing customer service and facilitating communication (Taiminen and Karjaluo, 2015). Taiminen and Karjaluo (2015) identify that company websites,

followed by e-mail newsletters and social media, are the main channels used by SMEs. As the new DMC channels evolve, they present both opportunities for small companies to compete in the global economy and challenges as to how to utilise these new communication tools effectively. These challenges are even more prominent for small organisations (Eid and El-Gohary, 2013). Other problems arising from e-marketing adoption for SMEs include security, implementation, expertise, lack of resources, lack of senior management support and lack of time (Chong *et al.*, 2009). Research to date has focused primarily on technology use and barriers to adoption of DMC, with none undertaking a strategic view towards SMEs and their use of DMC in an applied context.

## **2.5.2. Marketing Practices and B2B**

### **2.5.2.1. B2B Marketing**

Business-to-business marketing is different to marketing consumer goods (Gilliland and Johnston, 1997; Coviello and Brodie, 2001; Rowley, 2001; LaPlaca and Katrichis, 2009). It is also widely acknowledged that research into industrial marketing is scarce (LaPlaca and Katrichis, 2009; Hadjikhani and LaPlaca, 2013; Wiersema, 2013; Cortez and Johnston, 2017). As LaPlaca and Katrichis (2009) state, after reviewing 31 academic marketing journals published since 1936, research in consumer marketing has received more attention while research in business marketing is still generally scarce as only seven per cent of studies have been undertaken in business marketing practices. Similarly, Lilien (2016) argues that although B2B and B2C companies contribute equally to the economy, very little marketing research has been undertaken for B2B marketing.

In the B2B case, the clients are other organisations while B2C companies create marketing strategies for individuals (Gilliland and Johnston, 1997; Coviello and Brodie, 2001; Rowley, 2001; Jerman and Završnik, 2011). The research into B2B marketing communication practices include highlighting the differences between B2B and B2C companies. LaPlaca and Katrichis (2009, p.2) explain “over the years many authors have suggested that little difference exists between B2B and consumer marketing”. While this could be the case in theory, in the marketing practice there are changes. Thus, to fully understand B2B marketing practices, it is imperative to understand the main differences between consumer and organisational markets. One of the earliest studies by Gilliland and Johnston (1997, p.15) on B2B marketing communications highlights that “inherent differences between business-to-business marketing and consumer marketing results in important differences in how marketing communication tools are processed and acted on by their targets”. Rowley (2001) provides a summary of the main differences between B2B and B2C markets, emphasising that the main difference is the strong established relationship with customers in organisational markets. Similarly, Hadjikhani and LaPlaca (2013) highlight that the relationship perspective is key within B2B marketing domain.

**Table 2.13:** Differences between B2B and B2C markets (Rowley, 2001, p.205)

<b>Organisational markets</b>	<b>Consumer markets</b>
Fewer customers and known customers	Lots of customers necessary for success
Fewer transactions	Large number of transactions
Each transaction of larger value	Relatively low value transactions
Net worth of key customers is high	Cannot predict growth rate
Regular transactions	Less regular transactions
Credit rating known	Credit rating not known

Investigating the main situational differences between B2B and B2C marketing communications, Gilliland and Johnston (1997) include contextual viewing conditions, advertisement itself, the buying process and consequent conditions of the advertisement. Avlonitis and Karayanni (2000) include long-term buying processes, quality customer service and close relationships are the main industrial marketing characteristics. Coviello and Brodie (2001) suggest that the main differences are in market characteristics, buyer decision processes and buyer-seller relationships, and therefore the same marketing strategies cannot be used for consumer and B2B markets. They argue that B2B companies are more relational, while B2C companies have a more transactional focus. In addition, Reed, Story and Saker (2004) propose market structure and demand, the buying unit and the decision-making process as the main differing factors between the two markets. While B2B customers should usually be treated at an individual level and relationship development is also required, individual customers are usually reached with mass communication. Similarly, Kotler and Keller (2012) suggest differences, which include the fact that B2B markets are associated with fewer and larger buyers, there is close supplier-customer relationship, and they involve professional purchasing with multiple buying influences and multiple sales calls.

Thus, there are major differences between B2C and B2B sectors, consequently marketing communications strategies should also be different and appropriate for the industry type. Since B2B customers are more knowledgeable, require more information and the products or services are more complex, the involvement and complexity of the purchasing process require different communications than when dealing with consumers directly. The differences also exist in the product complexity (Jerman and Završnik, 2011), and closer relationship (Coviello and Brodie, 2001; Reed, Story and Saker, 2004; Kotler and Keller, 2012). Tactics suitable for individuals might not be as relevant to B2B professionals as traditionally B2B organisations rely on face-to-face communications methods, which include personal relationships and networking, tradeshows and industry events (Charlesworth, 2014). Due to the focus on sales, Biemans, Brenčič and Malshe (2010) investigate the marketing-sales interface in B2B firms and suggest that, ideally, sales and marketing activities should be closely coordinated, though it is not always the case. They argue that marketing activities within B2B companies are conducted by various departments, and thus limited marketing knowledge exists. Tension between sales and marketing departments is also highlighted by Wang *et al.* (2017) since sales focus on personal selling

while marketing focus on communications aspects and sales see marketing as only providing marketing collateral for personal sales interactions. Typically, sales play a key role within B2B organisations as they maintain contact with customers using personal selling, and therefore marketing is seen as a separate and detached activity (Wang *et al.*, 2017).

#### 2.5.2.2. B2B Digital Marketing

There is a growing number of studies focusing on B2B companies and DMC, though the focus remains on social media research (Kärkkäinen, Jussila and Väisänen, 2010; Brennan and Croft, 2012; Jussila, Kärkkäinen and Aramo-Immonen, 2014; Swahi, Brown and Milne, 2014; Huotari *et al.*, 2015; Keinänen and Kuivalainen, 2015; Salo, 2017; Swahi *et al.*, 2017). At the same time Salo (2017, p.115) argues that research gaps “related to adoption, barriers, and reasons to use social media, are slowly being filled by academic research”. Several studies deal with DMC for industrial companies, with one of the first being Järvinen *et al.* (2012) who investigate social and digital marketing for B2B, followed by Karjaluoto, Mustonen and Ulkuniemi (2015). Other studies closely related to DMC include B2B companies and marketing automation (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2015), web analytics (Järvinen and Karjaluoto, 2015), industrial branding (Lipiäinen and Karjaluoto, 2015), content marketing (Holliman and Rowley, 2014; Järvinen and Taiminen, 2015; Wang *et al.*, 2017) and DMC for internal communication (Lipiäinen, Karjaluoto and Nevalainen, 2014).

While it is commonly believed that DMC and social media is important to B2B companies since social media can be used to “communicate with their customers and suppliers, build relationships and trust, as well as to identify prospective partners” (Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011, p.1153), some researchers (Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011; Brennan and Croft, 2012; Jussila, Kärkkäinen and Aramo-Immonen, 2014; Swahi, Brown and Milne, 2014; Brink, 2017) describe the existing situation as anecdotal, since experts claim that social media is very important to B2B organisations and it should be employed in every marketing strategy, but academic research in this field shows that B2B companies do not use social media. Salo (2017) is critical of existing research into B2B social media use as the focus is on tactical rather than strategic use of this channel. Wang *et al.* (2017) even provide a conceptual social media capability maturity model to advocate for more strategic and holistic approach rather than existing tactical-level research.

Again, studies dealing with DMC use among B2B companies highlight the different nature of companies, and thus the need for different digital communication approaches in comparison to B2C companies. Kärkkäinen, Jussila and Väisänen (2010) identify product complexity and type of customers as the main differing factors, which means that in the B2B sector there are usually fewer customers and the relationship between the company and its clients is closer. Jussila, Kärkkäinen and Aramo-Immonen (2014) add that, in the B2B sector, there are usually fewer customers, co-operation with customers are greater, products are purchased by professional purchasing personnel, and there is more emphasis on

physical performance and personal selling. They explain that B2B products are more complex, that development of new products takes a longer time, and customers are large organisations instead of a single person. Thus, there are fewer customers and co-operation with customers is more direct and intense, meaning industrial products are purchased by professional purchasing personnel who consider many different criteria when making buying decisions, thus they tend to acquire plenty of information about the industrial products and evaluate different alternatives. In industrial products, there is more emphasis on physical performance and personal selling than in consumer products, where psychological attributes and advertising are critical for success (Jussila, Kärkkäinen and Aramo-Immonen, 2014). Due to these differences, DMC are used differently: “it can be presumed that the incentives that motivate individual consumers or hobbyists to participate in social media-based user communities may, despite some possible similarities, be very different from those of professional (B2B sector) customers” (Jussila, Kärkkäinen and Aramo-Immonen, 2014, p.608).

Correspondingly Swami, Brown and Milne (2014) analyse Twitter communications, and conclude that some differences between B2B and B2C exist: in B2B, the corporate brand name is more frequent than in B2C tweets, B2B tweets include more functional appeals, while B2C include more emotional appeals, B2C tweets include more calls to purchase than B2B tweets and B2B tweets have more links and cues for information search than B2C tweets. In their later study on Facebook, Swahi *et al.* (2017) investigate the key factors that contribute to Facebook brand content popularity metrics in brand posts and conclude that viewers of B2B and B2C social media posts demonstrate notable differences in their liking and commenting behaviours. Regardless of message content, B2B content viewers are less likely to comment on messages, but more likely to like messages than viewers of B2C messages. Thus, different behaviours on using social media between B2B and B2C are demonstrated. It is thus suggested that due to the difference between B2B and B2C companies, a different approach for DMC use is required.

Even with an advocated focus on sales activities within the industrial sector, Obal and Lancioni (2013) suggest that buyer-supplier relationships are changing in the digital era, as it is less dependent on face-to-face communications and more on digital communications. The studies into DMC use reveal different results regarding channel use. In one of the first studies dealing with social media use by B2B companies, Kärkkäinen, Jussila and Väisänen (2010) reveal that only 11% of respondents use social media. Järvinen *et al.* (2012) study identify that the most important DMC channels for B2B companies include newsletters and e-mail marketing, followed by digital sales support material, which is perceived to be much more important than social media channels. Similarly, Karjaluoto, Mustonen and Ulkuniemi (2015) argue that B2B companies use basic DMC channels, such as website, digital sales material, e-mail, but still rely heavily on offline communication tools, due to the importance of personal and long-term relationships. A more recent study by Shaltoni (2017) concludes that 61% of responding companies in the emerging industrial sector use websites, however, more than half have “brochureware” websites for basic communications, with smaller companies not even having a basic website. Out of respondents,

who use social media, 71% had Facebook, though two-thirds had only profiles with no updates, 51% had LinkedIn, but 88% of them again just offered company profiles with basic information, and only 7% had a company dedicated YouTube channel.

The overall use of DMC channels seems to be limited within B2B companies, with some barriers identified by researchers. Keinänen and Kuivalainen (2015) suggest that, in the industrial marketing setting, the influence of corporate culture, colleagues' support and personal and psychological factors on consumer behaviour toward social media business use, together with user characteristics, such as age, gender and job level, affects social media use in B2B context. Another study proposes that factors related to DMC adoption include perceived advantage and compatibility, organisational innovativeness with customer and competitor pressure (Shaltoni, 2017).

Very early at the start of internet use in businesses practices, some researchers (Honeycutt, Flaherty and Benassi, 1998; Avlonitis and Karayanni, 2000) had already suggested that the internet could be useful for industrial B2B marketing, such as global opportunities, increased communication opportunities and effective business relationships. However, later studies suggest that the role of DMC for B2B organisations is in supporting traditional B2B marketing sales activities (Järvinen *et al.*, 2012). The two most important objectives for DMC use within B2B are related to the soft side of marketing, which includes creating brand awareness and enhancing brand image, which could then lead to growing sales and acquiring new customers (Järvinen *et al.*, 2012). The same objectives are also advocated by Karjaluoto, Mustonen and Ulkuniemi (2015, p.705), as they identify creating awareness and strengthening the brand as the main objectives for B2B companies, though it is also noted that "the role of marketing function in industrial firms are providing support to the sales function". Looking into specific objectives for social media, Jussila, Kärkkäinen and Aramo-Immonen (2014) suggest that the main functions for B2B companies include interface with the customer (marketing, communications, employer branding and recruitment, and sales support) and with partners (communication and collaboration, general communication, project communication and sharing best practices). It is again suggested that social media is a "vehicle for soft marketing through relationship and brand development, rather than hard-sell vehicle", for B2B companies to do content marketing, market research, business networking and sales prospecting (Brennan and Croft, 2012, p.113).

A number of challenges are identified for DMC use among B2B companies. Kärkkäinen, Jussila and Väisänen (2010) identify lack of understanding, difficulties assessing ROI, difficulties in adopting new practices required for social media use and lack of evidence of successful social media use, although they suggest that lack of knowledge is the most significant barrier in social media adoption. The major barriers for DMC use, as identified by Järvinen *et al.* (2012), include lack of human resources, lack of time, lack of know-how, challenges in content creation, unclear ROI, uncontrollability, lack of money, lack of overall business objectives support, lack of technical support and management resistance.



Similarly, while there are potential benefits, Jussila, Kärkkäinen and Aramo-Immonen (2014) identify the main reasons why B2B organisations do not engage in social media marketing: other projects being more important, businesses struggling to measure and assess social media benefits for their organisation, and a lack of relevant case studies and general understanding. Confidentiality in business relationships and reliance on R&D activities are also proposed as barriers to social media use within the B2B industry, since discussing these issues openly, could put at risk the company's competitive advantage (Karjaluo, Mustonen and Ulkuniemi, 2015).

While “DMC demands open-minded, innovative and courageous marketers, but currently such people seem scarce in industrial setting” (Karjaluo, Mustonen and Ulkuniemi, 2015, p.707), it is suggested that the main challenge and inhibitor of DMC adoption in the industrial sector is decision-makers' attitude towards it since most interactions remain face-to-face and DMC is not expected to have any significance in near future (Shaltoni, 2017). Furthermore, for B2B companies' social media use, additional challenges include that there are more different stakeholders involved: customers, manufacturers and partners (Keinänen and Kuivalainen, 2015). However, Huotari *et al.* (2015) propose that two types of social media users exist: internal users, such as corporate user and employee user, and external users, such as corporate, customer, professional and civilian users.

While content marketing has hardly featured in academic studies, it has had some attention in industrial marketing research (Holliman and Rowley, 2014; Järvinen and Taiminen, 2015; Wang *et al.*, 2017). Holliman and Rowley (2014, p.285) even propose an empirically grounded definition of B2B digital content marketing, which “involves creating, distributing and sharing relevant, compelling and timely content to engage at the appropriate point in their buying consideration processes, such that it encourages them to convert to a business building outcome”. It is suggested that content marketing can help to bring sales and marketing departments together, since there are constant conflicts between sales and marketing departments regarding leads generation and management (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2015). It is also advocated that content marketing is about providing relevant and useful content to the clients rather than persuasion with the changing focus from selling to helping customers (Wang *et al.*, 2017).

### **2.5.3. Marketing Practices and B2B SMEs**

Research into B2B SMEs marketing practices is very scarce as only three studies were identified dealing with marketing and B2B SMEs (Merrilees, Rundle-Thiele and Lye, 2010; Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011; Brink, 2017). The first paper deals with marketing practices for B2B SMEs, while the latter two deal with social media for B2B SMEs. While the special issue of *Industrial Marketing Management* journal no 40 is dedicated to industrial marketing by SMEs, the focus is on innovation, resource-based view to study marketing capabilities, CRM or internationalisation, and thus none of the studies focus on marketing communications in B2B SMEs.

Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides' (2011) study is one of the first with focus on industrial marketing and social media and investigates the usage, barriers and measurement of social media marketing for B2B SMEs. According to their survey results, the top reasons for using social media for B2B companies include to attract new customers, cultivate relationships, increase awareness and communicate the brand online. Receiving feedback and interaction with suppliers were perceived to be of much less importance. Less than one-third of respondents use social media. Brink (2017) explains that B2B SMEs cannot achieve sales directly from using social media, though increase of sales and profit can be subsequently achieved through enhanced business communication with employees, and about products, customer applications and product development for collaboration.

For that limited use, a large number of barriers to the use of social media use are identified. The top three reasons include that social media is not important in the industry where the company operates, uncertainty about how social media can help brands, and that the staff of the company are not familiar with social media (Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011). Similarly, Brink (2017) identifies two key reasons for slow social media adoption within B2B industries due to the nature of these industries: there are fewer transactions taking place and these are more economically significant than those in a B2C context, meaning that business relations have been traditionally characterised by face-to-face meetings to create personal relationships for B2B. He also argues that B2B SMEs have limited knowledge how social media can contribute to their businesses, which also acts as the major barrier, and thus do not know how to use and incorporate social media.

Even with these challenges, Brink (2017, p.57) proposes “through the application of social media, B2B SME managers have the opportunity to overcome the typical resource limitations of SMEs through enhanced online collaboration with customers, suppliers and partners to promote innovation and business opportunity creation for the involved parties”. Though overall in line with limited use of digital and social media among SMEs and B2B companies in general, B2B SMEs seem to follow the same trend.

#### **2.5.4. Marketing Practices and the Oil and Gas Industry**

##### **2.5.4.1. The Oil and Gas Industry**

The oil and gas industry has received some attention from researchers (Crabtree, Bower and Keogh, 1997; Green and Keogh, 2000; Cumbers, 2000; Green and Keogh, 2000; Cumbers and Martin, 2001; Chapman, MacKinnon, and Cumbers, 2004; MacKinnon, Chapman and Cumbers, 2004). However, the focus is on firm relationships, globalisation and diversification and no study has been identified on the industry's marketing practices. An extensive review of academic databases, including the oil and gas database *OilPro*, was undertaken to identify studies on oil and gas industry marketing, or oil and gas

industry communications, or oil and gas industry marketing communications; however, no studies were found in this area.

Oil and gas has been produced in the UK since 1967 and remains one of the most important contributors to the UK economy (Crabtree, Bower and Keogh, 1997; Green and Keogh, 2000). According to Oil and Gas UK (2013), in 2013 the total expenditure was £20 billion, and the industry supported directly and indirectly 450 000 jobs. The offshore oil and gas sector is described as the largest investing sector and largest contributor to the national gross value added among the industrial sectors of the economy. In 2014 total expenditure increased to £26 billion (Oil and Gas UK, 2014) and remained the largest contributor to the national gross value added. However, since 2014, the oil price has declined, which resulted in major changes within the industry. In 2016 the total expenditure decreased to £21.7 billion, and in addition there was a reduction of employment by 27% to 330 000 jobs (Oil and Gas UK, 2016). In 2017, the total employment in the industry reduced to 300 000 jobs (Oil and Gas UK, 2017). Capital expenditure dropped from £15 billion in 2014 to £5.6 billion in 2017, and supply chain revenues from £40.9 billion in 2014 to £27.4 billion in 2017 (Oil and Gas UK, 2018). However, even during the recession, the oil and gas industry remains a major contributor to UK economy.

The existing research into the oil and gas industry is mainly by the same group of researchers. Crabtree, Bower and Keogh (1997) investigate conflicts and collaboration in the UK oil and gas industry; Keogh and Evans (1998) study strategies and barriers for growth for technology-based SMEs with a focus on Aberdeen SMEs; Cumbers (2000) studies globalisation and local economic development in the Aberdeen oil complex; Green and Keogh (2000) explore collaboration in the upstream oil and gas industry; Cumbers and Martin (2001) investigate relationships between multinational corporations and their host regions in the Aberdeen international oil industry; Chapman, MacKinnon and Cumbers (2004) study the diversification of Aberdeen oil and gas complex SMEs; MacKinnon, Chapman, Cumbers (2004) investigate networking, trust and embeddedness in Aberdeen oil and gas complex SMEs. In addition, Hatakenaka *et al.* (2006) undertake a comparison study between Aberdeen and Stavanger oil and gas industry developments.

The Aberdeen oil and gas industry is also described as the North Sea region (Crabtree, Bower and Keogh, 1997; Cumbers, 2000; Cumbers and Martin, 2001), as the major oil and gas operations are based in the North Sea. It is important to distinguish upstream and downstream sectors, which refers to which part of supply chain company operates in and how close it is to the end-consumer. Aberdeen is the hub of activities related to upstream oil extraction (Crabtree, Bower and Keogh, 1997). Aberdeen is a base for some of the world's leading contractors and suppliers; "consequently, Aberdeen has been transformed from a relatively self-contained local economy to one heavily dependent upon events in the global oil industry" (Cumbers, 2000, p.372). Hatakenaka *et al.* (2006) also notes that the oil and gas industry is the largest industry in Aberdeen with limited diversification into other industries.

The oil and gas industry has some specific features as the whole industry consists of three different types of organisations (Crabtree, Bower and Keogh, 1997; Hatakenaka *et al.*, 2006). The first group of companies include operators, which are companies that produce licences for oil and gas rights and take the legal responsibility of exploiting these rights. These companies typically subcontract their exploration and production functions. Contractors are the second group of large companies, which deal directly with operators to arrange and provide various services. Typically, contractors take the responsibility of most field operations, including drilling, construction and production, maintenance, logistics and general support. The third group of companies include suppliers, either supplying basic items and services or highly specialised products and services. As Green and Keogh (2000) explain, there are around 20-30 large multinational organisations, which own and produce oil. These organisations are serviced and supported by approximately 50 contractors, which are then supported by another 2000 companies, which can be very small or large organisations, and which are either contractors or suppliers. Overall, the major multinationals hold oil and gas licence rights, the contractors provide services for the operators and the remaining companies provide various products and service to oil operators and contractors (MacKinnon, Chapman and Cumbers, 2004). Due to its composition, the North Sea industry is highly subcontracted (Crabtree, Bower and Keogh, 1997). Collaboration and interaction between these three types of companies is critical for innovation, especially the small specialised product and service supplier companies, which are the significant developers of new technologies (Hatakenaka *et al.*, 2006).

The Aberdeen oil and gas industry is described as an “industrial village” (Crabtree, Bower and Keogh, 1997). MacKinnon, Chapman and Cumbers (2004, p.93) explain: “it is not uncommon for Aberdeen to be described as an ‘industrial village’ where information about forthcoming events and opportunities is quickly circulated through localised networks in a relatively small and geographically peripheral city where all the key decision-makers will tend to know one another”. It is also suggested that it is important to have a visible presence in the Aberdeen area by attending key events, such as trade shows or golfing events (MacKinnon, Chapman and Cumbers, 2004). Thus, researchers conclude that, due to the specific industry and its regional focus, Aberdeen is “a highly localized ‘cluster’ of oil-related activities”, where the importance of personal contacts and networks is significant (MacKinnon, Chapman and Cumbers, 2004, p.103). Moreover, it is suggested that personal relationships are highly important as “the decision to award work to a particular company has as much to do with the presence of key individuals who were known, respected and trusted as with the overall reputation of the organization concerned” (Crabtree, Bower and Keogh; 1997, p.187).

#### 2.5.4.2. Aberdeen Oil and Gas SMEs

While there is no research in marketing and digital marketing in the oil and gas industry, there is research into the oil and gas SMEs cluster in Aberdeen. There are several studies that focus specifically on SMEs

in Aberdeen, including Keogh and Evans (1999), Chapman, MacKinnon and Cumbers (2004), and MacKinnon, Chapman, Cumbers (2004). Describing SMEs in the oil and gas industry, Crabtree, Bower and Keogh (1997) use the term STBORs, which is an acronym for small, technology based, oil-related companies, while Keogh and Evans (1999) use NTBF SMEs to define new technology-based firms.

They suggest that these oil and gas SMEs have specific attributes, such as a lack of strategic planning and reliance on informal communications and networks. Keogh and Evans (1999) conclude that technology SMEs understand the importance of the strategic planning, however, some of the companies use emergent or implicit rather than explicit strategy. It is also suggested that these companies require additional outside training and education as typically they are founded by engineers and scientists, who have limited management knowledge. MacKinnon, Chapman, Cumbers (2004, p.101) conclude that credibility and reputation is key in generating new business for SMEs from informal communication and typically “business coming from people whom the company already knew”. Thus, the activities of SMEs are particularly vital to the future of the Aberdeen economy. The competitive strategy will be especially important to these oil and gas SMEs, since they operate in niche markets and “it is also likely that they will not have specialist departments who can plan their corporate strategy and it may well be the owner managers or the senior managers of the company who have to formulate and implement their strategies” (Keogh and Evans, 1998, p.338).

While it is evident that some research into the Aberdeen oil and gas industry SMEs exists, there is no research into Aberdeen oil and gas SMEs and their marketing practices. The Aberdeen oil and gas cluster has been chosen for various research projects due to its importance to the UK economy, thus, it is suitable for exploring SMEs (MacKinnon, Chapman and Cumbers, 2004).

## **2.6. DIGITAL MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS FRAMEWORK**

### **2.6.1. Critical Success Factors Frameworks**

Successful DMC use is not simply a matter of using the right digital channels: there are several other factors influencing the strategy, its planning and implementation. This thesis adopts the view that DMC strategy is influenced by a number of key factors, both internal and external to a company. Critical success factors (CSFs) are defined as “characteristics, conditions, or variables that, when properly sustained, maintained, or managed, can have a significant impact on the success of a firm competing in a particular industry” (Leidecker and Bruno, 1984, p.24). Leidecker and Bruno (1984) argue that the CSFs concept can be applied in strategic planning and business strategy development. However, in their study on B2B international internet marketing, Eid, Elbeltagi and Zairi, (2006, p.88) define CSFs from the operational side and focus on execution as “the activities and practices that must be addressed to ensure successful implementation”. In this study the CSFs are the best practices and activities that a company must follow to plan and implement a successful DMC strategy. It is important to identify and

understand the key internal and external factors that benefit or hinder the success of DMC strategies to allow companies to derive benefits from DMC while avoiding its failures.

There are several studies identified in the literature that analyse CSFs for B2B or SME organisations (Eid and Trueman, 2004; Eid, Elbeltagi and Zairi, 2006; Wang and Fesenmaier, 2006; Chong *et al.* 2009; Chong, Shafaghi and Tan, 2011; Omar *et al.*, 2011). Different terms for digital marketing are used in the literature, including web marketing, internet marketing and e-marketing, which is indicative of digital being an emerging field. All six studies and their CSFs are presented in Table 2.14.

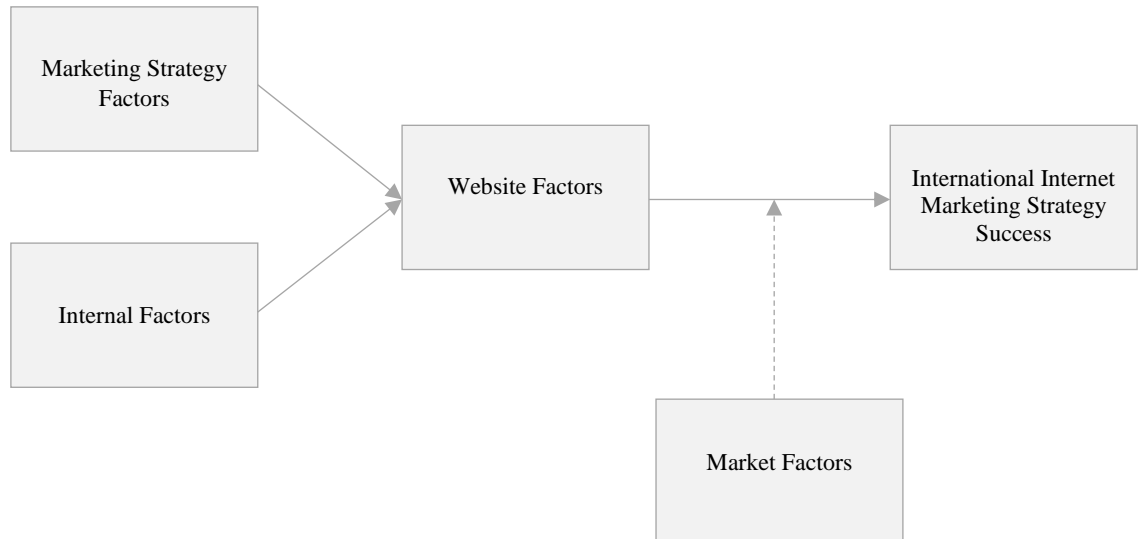
**Table 2.14:** Critical success factors frameworks for B2B and/or SME companies (author)

Author (Year)	Framework	Critical Success Factors
Eid and Trueman (2004)	B2B international internet marketing success	<i>Marketing Strategy Factors</i> (top management support and commitment; setting strategic goals; integrating internet with marketing strategy; complement and support traditional channels; relationships; large networked communities; collaboration; deciding the potential audiences); <i>Global Factors</i> (understanding foreign market environments; resources required working globally; multilanguage websites; culture considerations; international delivery availability); <i>Internal Factors</i> (technological infrastructure; internal culture; relationship between marketing and IT/IS departments; sales force role; training programme); <i>External Factors</i> (trust; security; successful relationships; internet affordable access; customer acceptance) <i>Website Factors</i> (website design (well-designed, simple, easy to use, clear, up-to-date, accurate, informative, website speed); effective marketing of website).
Eid, Elbeltagi and Zairi (2006)	B2B international internet marketing success	<i>Marketing strategy factors</i> (setting the strategic goal; having top management support (investment and commitment); integrating internet marketing with marketing strategy; collaboration: deciding the strategic partners (technology, distributors and suppliers); deciding the potential audience); <i>Internal factors</i> (technological infrastructure; internal culture; relationship between marketing and IT/IS departments; the role of sales force; training programs; in-depth understanding of foreign marketing environment; access to resources required for working globally); <i>Website factors</i> (well-designed site; multilanguage website to reach target customers successfully; culture considerations; effective marketing of the site); <i>Market factors</i> (trust; security and privacy; successful relationship; easy and affordable access to the internet; customer acceptance; in-depth understanding of foreign marketing environment; availability of international shipping).
Wang and Fesenmaier (2006)	Success factors of web-based marketing	<i>Organisational characteristics</i> (size, innovativeness); <i>Technology climate</i> (management support, internet literacy); <i>Web marketing strategy</i> (website features, website promotion strategy, CRM program).
Chong <i>et al.</i> (2009)	E-marketing for B2B	<i>People</i> (all stakeholders); <i>Information/resources</i> ; <i>Technology</i> .
Chong, Shafaghi and Tan (2011)	B2B CSFs for SMEs within	<i>Internal factors</i> (successful customer relationships, security and trust, transparency of information, IS/IT infrastructure, top management support, supply chain facilities);

	the e-commerce marketplace	<i>External factors</i> (global competitiveness, government commitments, cultural considerations).
Omar <i>et al.</i> (2011)	Internet marketing usage by SMEs	<i>Technology characteristics</i> (security and privacy, ease of use); <i>Organisational characteristics</i> (entrepreneur's attitude and knowledge, product fit, technical knowledge availability of the firm); <i>Environment characteristics</i> (customer pressure, competitor pressure, government support).

Wang and Fesenmaier (2006) identify the success factors of web-based marketing and emphasise that all three factors require integration and co-ordination to ensure that the web marketing strategy is successful. Chong *et al.* (2009) investigate the B2B marketplace and identify critical components required for successful e-marketing implementation. Similarly, Chong, Shafaghi and Tan (2011) investigate the B2B CSFs for SMEs within the e-commerce marketplace. Omar *et al.* (2011) investigate the factors affecting internet marketing usage among Malaysian SMEs. However, the most relevant CSFs framework for this thesis is Eid and Trueman (2004) and its later version as presented in Eid, Elbeltagi and Zairi (2006).

Initially, Eid and Trueman (2004) proposed 33 factors, grouped into five categories, of effective international internet marketing strategy for B2B companies, which are detailed in the Table 2.14. above. They present the CSFs for UK B2B companies' use of internet marketing to compete internationally. In the later study Eid, Elbeltagi and Zairi (2006) reduced the earlier framework from five to four categories of CSFs: marketing strategy, internal, market and website factors. The global dimension factors are included into the remaining four categories instead of being a separate group. Figure 2.5. shows the revised framework, depicting how key factors influence a successful international internet marketing strategy. The framework shows two types of relationships between CSFs and how they affect B2B internet marketing success. It shows the direct link between different components, for example, marketing strategy and internal factors directly affect and influence website factors. It also shows the factors that moderate the success of a B2B international internet marketing strategy, for example a positive external market positively influences the success. The framework illustrates that, in order to create a successful internet marketing strategy, various factors and elements need to be coordinated and integrated.



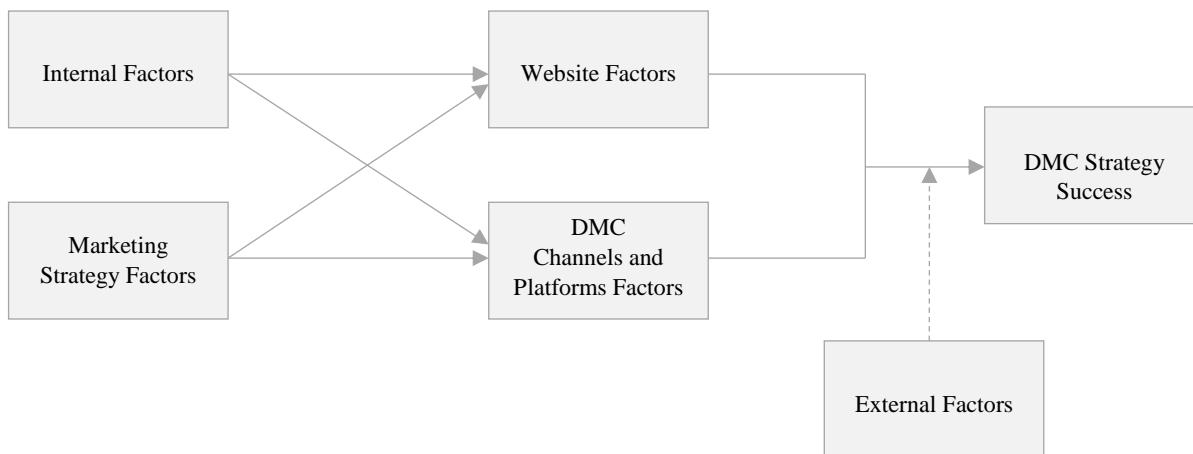
**Figure 2.5:** B2B international internet marketing critical success factors framework (Eid, Elbeltagi and Zairi, 2006, p.92)

These frameworks of CSFs are significant for this thesis as they allow the creation of a conceptual framework, which is used through the rest of the thesis. The framework is slightly adapted and is employed to investigate the CSFs of DMC within the specific context of oil and gas industry B2B SMEs to investigate its applicability and validity. The original framework was created in 2004 and revised in 2006, but since then digital marketing has evolved and changed significantly and new digital channels emerged, including a significant growth in social media. Therefore, the original model required adaption.

### **2.6.2. Digital Marketing Communications Strategy Critical Success Factors**

This study adapts Eid, Elbeltagi and Zairi (2006) framework and identifies the variables affecting the effectiveness of a DMC strategy for B2B SMEs as: external factors, internal factors, marketing strategy factors, website factors and DMC channels and platforms, as depicted in Figure 2.6. DMC channels category is added as this area has grown significantly since 2004, when the framework was initially developed. Together with website, other DMC channels include SEM, social media and e-mail with mobile marketing (p.38).





**Figure 2.6:** Conceptual digital marketing communications critical success factors framework (adapted from Eid, Elbeltagi and Zairi, 2006)

This thesis adopts the holistic approach that various factors influence DMC strategy and is constructed on the above framework, which illustrates the main groups of CSFs for successful DMC strategy. Based on the framework, internal and marketing strategy factors influences the choices on website and DMC channels and platforms, meaning that these two variables, influenced by external market factors, are significant in determining the success of a DMC strategy. The marketing strategy, internal and external factors categories were slightly updated, and global dimension factors were removed as the initial model was for international internet success, while this study investigates the DMC in general. The website category and newly added DMC channels category factors use five stages of marketing to a digital consumer framework (Kierzkowski *et al.*, 1996) (p.39). CSFs within each category for the conceptual model are presented in the Table 2.15. below.

**Table 2.15:** Digital marketing communications strategy critical success factors

Category	Factors
Internal factors	Technological infrastructure; Internal culture; Relationship between marketing and IT departments; The role of sales force; Training programmes; Access to resources.
Marketing strategy factors	Setting the strategic goal; Having top management support; Integrating internet marketing with marketing strategy; Deciding the strategic partners; Deciding the potential audience.
Website factors	Attract; Engage; Retain; Learn; Relate.

Digital marketing channels factors	Attract; Engage; Retain; Learn; Relate.
External factors	Trust; Security and privacy; Successful relationship; Easy and affordable access to the internet; Customer acceptance.

While several studies include CSFs for a successful digital marketing strategy (Wang and Fesenmaier, 2006; Chong, Shafaghi and Tan, 2011), they do not define what success is. Eid, Elbeltagi and Zairi's (2006) study does not explain the international internet marketing strategy success dimension either. This thesis adopts the view that a successful DMC strategy is one that meets business objectives (Eid and El-Gohary, 2013), where the main business objectives are defined as new customer acquisition and existing customer retention. These objectives are reflected in the proposed DMC definition (p.18), in alignment with existing literature that considered customer acquisition and retention a key objective of DMC (Wymbs, 2011; Fill, 2013; Egan, 2015; Chaffey and Smith, 2017). This approach is also reflected in literature on content marketing (Pulizzi, 2012; CMI, 2013) and marketing communications (Rowley 2001). In summary, following from the proposed DMC definition, this study argues that a successful DMC strategy is one that facilitates and drives customer acquisition and retention.

The study also proposes that using a website and other DMC channels in isolation without consideration of any context, will not result in successful DMC strategy, but all these factors together with internal, external and overall marketing strategy factors need to be coordinated and integrated. Thus, internal and marketing strategy factors will influence website and DMC channels factors, which, if there is a positive external environment, will result in a successful DMC strategy, where success is defined as customer acquisition and retention.

### **3. RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES**

#### **3.0. CHAPTER OVERVIEW**

The previous chapter reviewed the existing literature on digital marketing, B2B and SME marketing practices and revealed the knowledge gap within B2B SMEs marketing practices. The chapter ended with the conceptual framework. This chapter details the development of the research questions and presents the aim and objectives for the thesis. It ends with a justification of the choice of the oil and gas industry and its SMEs as the context for the study.

#### **3.1. INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH QUESTION, AIM AND OBJECTIVES**

Every research study starts with the identification of the broad research problem (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). After a comprehensive literature review on digital marketing and social media marketing, it is evident that there is a lack of unified digital marketing theory. In addition, after reviewing the features of SMEs and B2B marketing, it is apparent that digital marketing practices are even more complex for those organisations with limited resources operating in an industrial setting. As a result, this section defines the broad research question, the research aim and accompanying research objectives for the thesis. The aim, objectives and research questions have been informed by the literature review as suggested for qualitative studies (Perry, 2000; Creswell, 2014).

#### **3.2. RESEARCH QUESTION**

The literature review revealed that there is a significant gap in knowledge regarding DMC. Marketing communications is a vital element of every organisation's marketing strategy, which allows effective communication with current and potential customers (Chaffey and Smith, 2013). A constantly changing and still emerging digital environment has transformed traditional communications between companies and their customers and resulted in a variety of new digital marketing communication tools, which have started to play a fundamental role within many company's marketing strategies (Sharma and Sheth, 2004; Kietzmann *et al.*, 2011; Smith and Zook, 2011). The new digital environment affects both the overall marketing mix and the communications mix. As a result, the power has shifted from buyers to consumers (Mangold and Faulds, 2009; Wymbs, 2011; Kietzmann *et al.*, 2011; Smith and Zook, 2011). Therefore, the new digital communication platforms and changed market conditions cannot be ignored and present a challenge to every company aiming to remain competitive by creating successful communication strategies.

The current literature clearly emphasises the importance of digital marketing and the need for companies to adopt a new approach in their marketing strategies. However, most of the existing research has focused on the B2C industry and little research has been undertaken for B2B companies (Jensen, 2006; Kärkkäinen Jussila and Väisänen, 2010; Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011). In

addition, many differences exist between large corporations, which have large marketing budgets, and small and medium enterprises, which usually have limited resources (Hill 2001a; Gilmore, Carson and Grant, 2001; Reijonen, 2010), meaning that they are facing even more challenges to remain competitive in the marketplace. It has also been shown that research into SMEs is generally scarce, with only a few studies analysing social media marketing for SMEs (Durkin, McGowan and McKeown, 2013; McCann and Barlow, 2015) and DMC for SMEs (Karjaluoto and Huhtamäki, 2010; Taiminen and Karjaluoto, 2015). Brennan and Croft (2012) call for more research into social media use for small companies as they identify that there is much variation in social media use among large and small companies.

The focus of this thesis is B2B SMEs from the oil and gas industry. Only a few studies have been identified that deal with B2B SMEs and digital marketing, and most focus on social media marketing (Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011; Salo, 2017). No study has been found which combines B2B SMEs and DMC channels in general rather than focusing on social media. It has also been suggested that research into social media adoption by SMEs and industrial companies has reached saturation. Salo (2017, p.115) argues that research gaps “related to adoption, barriers, and reasons to use social media, are slowly being filled by academic research” and he criticises the existing research into B2B social media use as the focus is on tactical rather than strategic use of social media.

Previous research has focused on specific DMC channels, such as social media (Mangold and Faulds, 2009; Kärkkäinen, Jussila and Väisänen, 2010; Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011; Brennan and Croft, 2012; Castronovo and Huang, 2012; Järvinen *et al.*, 2012; Clark and Melancon, 2013; Dateling and Bick, 2013), and has not produced a strategic approach to DMC as an integrated concept. Although some research exists (Jensen, 2006; Wymbs, 2011; Durkin, 2013), it is fragmented and little or no research on marketing communications for B2B and/or SME companies in the oil and gas industry has been undertaken. The identified gap in the literature on DMC strategies leads to the research question for this study. In addition, the researcher worked as a marketing manager in the oil and gas industry, and thus her professional experience has also contributed to the identification of the research problem since there is an identifiable need to create effective communication strategies for small B2B organisations with limited resources. While working in the oil and gas industry, questions were raised of what the practice of marketing and digital marketing is and how important marketing is in general in the industry.

Given these existing challenges for organisations in the current market-place conditions, it seemed appropriate and timely to study these topics in an academic context. Literature review shows that academic research in the digital marketing area is limited. In addition, no study on DMC and B2B SMEs was identified. Before the main research aim was developed and clarified, a number of questions evolved, which lead to the formulation of the central research question:

- What are the key elements of a marketing communication strategy for B2B SMEs?
- What are the features of B2B SMEs marketing practices?
- Why is the managing director a key person within oil and gas SMEs?
- How is oil and gas industry different to other sectors?
- What are the marketing practices within the oil and gas industry?
- What role does marketing play in the oil and gas industry?
- What are the main DMC channels used in the oil and gas industry?
- How are traditional communication channels integrated with digital channels?

These questions lead to the identification of the main research question:

*What is the role and use of digital marketing communications for B2B SMEs within the oil and gas industry?*

The broad research question was then translated into a research aim and research objectives (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). While Creswell (2014) suggests using qualitative research questions for qualitative studies, including one central question and associated sub-questions, Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) argue that research objectives are likely to lead to greater specificity than investigative research questions, which are formulated to achieve the overall aim.

### **3.3. RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES**

The identified research question leads to the research aim:

*To critically evaluate the role and usage of digital marketing communications in oil and gas industry B2B SMEs.*

This thesis aims to identify CSFs affecting DMC strategy for oil and gas B2B SMEs. In order to identify how to create successful communication strategies, it is imperative to understand the recent changes across the communications landscape, the theory of digital marketing, how social media is related to digital marketing, which DMC channels exist, and the specifics of B2B and SMEs marketing. This thesis intends to contribute to the emerging theory of digital marketing, specifically regarding DMC strategy and the effective use of DMC channels for oil and gas industry B2B SMEs.

In order to achieve the research aim and answer the research question, the research objectives have been devised as follows:

**RO1:** *Define digital marketing and explore key concepts of digital marketing communications channels.*

**RO2:** *Identify and evaluate the characteristics of marketing and digital marketing in the context of SMEs and B2B enterprises.*

**RO3:** *Analyse the effectiveness of digital marketing communications in achieving strategic marketing objectives in oil and gas SMEs.*

**RO4:** *Investigate the challenges and opportunities of utilising digital marketing within the industrial context of oil and gas SMEs.*

**RO5:** *Critically evaluate the success factors of digital marketing communications use in B2B SMEs.*

**RO6:** *Produce best practice recommendations for digital marketing communications applicable to B2B SMEs based on primary and secondary research findings.*

This study includes six research objectives. Due to the complexity and emerging nature of DMC, the first two objectives are related to secondary research. The next three objectives are directly related to primary research and empirical data. Because of the study's inductive nature, and to create and enhance the existing theory related to DMC, it combines both primary and secondary data to produce a best practice model for B2B SMEs DMC strategy.

### **3.4. RESEARCH CONTEXT**

Academics widely agree marketing practises in SMEs differ a great deal from marketing in large organisations, usually due to limited resources (Coviello, Brodie and Munro, 2000; Gilmore, Carson and Grant, 2001; Hill, 2001a; Hill, 2001b; Gilmore, Gallagher and Henry, 2007). In addition, there has been limited research on the subject of SMEs marketing in general. Therefore, any additional theoretical knowledge will be beneficial as most marketing research generally focuses on large corporations with only a limited number of studies on smaller companies (Gilmore, Gallagher and Henry, 2007; Einwiller and Boenigk, 2012), which is inadequate since SMEs are extremely important to economies as economic drivers (Hill, 2001a; Centeno and Hart, 2012; Einwiller and Boenigk, 2012; Eid and El-Gohary, 2013). SMEs play a major role in every country's economy with 99% of businesses being SMEs (European Commission, 2018).

Aberdeen scores high on various economic and business indicators and the city that stands out for businesses and jobs (Swinney, 2015; Centre for Cities, 2014; Centre for Cities, 2015). The vibrant and

positive environment for business results in a large number of SMEs operating in the city. In addition, the small business indicator reveals that cities in the North outperform their counterparts in the South (Clayton, 2014). While Aberdeen is also included in the top 10 UK cities based on enterprise measures, the city is not a hub for traditional services, but instead specialises exclusively in the oil and gas industry (Clayton, 2014). *Small Business Outlook 2014* (Centre for Cities, 2014) reveals that there are 348 SMEs per 10,000 population in Aberdeen, which ranks the city in sixth position among the top 10 UK cities. Aberdeen also has 57.1 start-up businesses per 10,000 population, second only to London with 75.5. The professional sector SMEs are the largest employer in Aberdeen. It also has the highest Enterprise Index in the North with Aberdeen SMEs being “one of the highest performing in the country” (Clayton, 2014, p.2). The vast majority of these SME firms operate in the knowledge-intensive and high-technology sectors connected to oil and gas. In addition, Aberdeen has one of the highest proportions of SMEs operating internationally 34.6% with 15.3% of SMEs being high-growth, which lists Aberdeen in third position in UK cities.

In addition, HM Government (2013, p.2) highlight that the oil and gas industry is a fundamental element of the economy as “there is no other industrial sector which has created more prosperity for United Kingdom”. While the oil and gas industry is spread throughout the UK, the two key industry clusters are in London and Aberdeen (HM Government, 2013). The oil and gas supply chain contribution to the economy is well recognised by both British and Scottish governments.

The importance of oil and gas industry research can be justified by its contribution to the UK economy. In addition, the oil and gas industry in Aberdeen has its own features, which adds stronger justification for this study context. The review of existing academic research with the dearth of research into the subject together with the growing importance of digital marketing clearly calls for the research in the subject. Thus, it is topical and worthwhile to investigate DMC practices in the context of oil and gas B2B SMEs, in light of current academic research in marketing and oil and gas industry being scarce.

## **4. METHODOLOGY**

### **4.0. CHAPTER OVERVIEW**

This chapter introduces the research methodology. It details marketing research methodology theory and provides underpinnings for the methodological choices made. Chapter starts with an introduction to marketing research methodology, which is followed by an outline of the approach to research, including research philosophies, research design and specific research methods. Three phases of data collection and analysis are further explained. The final sections discuss research reliability and validity issues, ethical considerations and study limitations.

### **4.1. INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Business and marketing research is a branch of social science research. Business research is a structured and systematic investigation into a specific business issue or problem and is defined as “an organized, systematic, data-based, critical, objective, inquiry or investigation into a specific problem, undertaken with the purpose of finding answers or solutions to it” (Sekaran and Bougie, 2014, p.3).

Business research studies can be placed on the applied and basic research continuum, with the two extremes being basic research on one side and applied research on the other (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). Applied research aims to solve a problem identified by a manager in the workplace and requiring a quick solution, while basic/pure research aims to produce a body of knowledge with the aim of understanding how problems occur in organisations and how they can be solved (Sekaran and Bougie, 2014). Applied research is associated with direct and instant relevance to managers, while basic research is associated with the academic community, with usually very limited use for practitioners, with the main aim being to understand business and management processes and their outcomes (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). While business research usually starts with an interesting and contemporary business problem or issue, for scholarly business research it is not enough to identify, describe and solve business issues, a new body of knowledge should be produced (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008). Thus, at the end of the study new theory, a new conceptual model or some additions to existing theory is expected.

Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2012) identify three management and business research features, which make it different from other social studies. Firstly, the on-going debate about qualitative and quantitative methods for conducting management and business research. Secondly, the debate about whether research should result in new academic theory development or in practical solutions. Thirdly, research usually takes place within an organisation, which provides a specific context, and thus requires the involvement of the organisation and its managers. Business research is a process that involves several interrelated steps: identification of the broad problem area, definition of the problem statement,



hypotheses development, measures of determination, data collection, data analysis and data interpretation (Sekaran and Bougie, 2014). Therefore, to undertake any business research, the research methodology needs to be defined. Methodology is “the theory of how research should be undertaken” (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009, p.3).

## 4.2. RESEARCH DESIGN

The aim and objectives, detailed in the Aim and Objectives Chapter (p.63), also informed the development of the research design, which acts as the outline for the rest of research (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). Sekaran and Bougie (2014, p.95) define research design as a “blueprint for the data collection, measurement, and analysis of data, based on the research questions of the study”. While Rowley (2002, p.18) suggests viewing research design “as an action plan from the questions to conclusions”, Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2012, p.73) conclude that “research designs are about organizing research activity, including the data collection, in ways that are most likely to achieve the research aims”.

There are various suggestions on how to approach research design. Some researchers (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009) suggest using the research onion concept in creating research design, which consists of several layers, others (Sekaran and Bougie, 2014) suggest considering six elements of research design. While Sekaran and Bougie (2014) do not include research philosophies as one of the research-design elements, they identify the philosophical approaches as important underpinnings for the researcher, who should be aware of the different viewpoints that affect research design. Table 4.2. below summarises some of the most popular approaches suggested for research design.

**Table 4.1:** Approaches to research design (author)

Author	Approach to research design	Research design elements
Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009)	Research onion	<i>Research philosophies</i> (positivism, realism, interpretivism, pragmatism); <i>Research approaches</i> (deductive, inductive); <i>Purpose of research</i> (exploratory, descriptive, explanatory); <i>Research strategies</i> (experiment, survey, case study, action research, grounded theory, ethnography, archival research); <i>Research choices</i> (mono method, mixed methods, multi-method); <i>Time horizons</i> (cross-sectional, longitudinal); <i>Data collection and data analysis</i> (techniques and procedures).
Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2012)	Metaphor of tree	<i>Ontology</i> (realism, internal realism, relativism, nominalism); <i>Epistemology</i> (positivism, social constructionism, hybrid); <i>Methodology</i> (Experiments, surveys, action research, archival research, ethnography, narrative, case method and grounded theory); <i>Methods and Techniques</i> (Interviews, critical incident, observation, video recording, photographs and visual metaphors, questionnaires).

Sekaran and Bougie (2014)	Six elements and philosophical approach	<i>Purpose of study</i> (exploratory, descriptive, causal); <i>Extent of researcher interference</i> with the study (minimal, moderate, excessive); <i>Study setting</i> (contrived, non-contrived); <i>Research strategies</i> (experiment, survey, observation, case study, grounded theory, action research); <i>Unit of analysis</i> (individuals, dyads, groups, organisations, cultures); <i>Time horizon</i> (cross-sectional, longitudinal); <i>Philosophical approach</i> (positivism, constructionism, critical realism, pragmatism).
Creswell (2014)	Approach to research	<i>Philosophical worldviews</i> (post positivist, constructivist, transformative, pragmatic); <i>Research design</i> (qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods); <i>Research methods</i> (questions, data collection, data analysis, interpretation, validation).

Creswell (2014, p.3) uses the term “approaches to research”, which are defined as “plans and the procedures for research that span the steps from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation”. According to Creswell (2014), the main three research approaches are qualitative, quantitative and mixed-methods, with all these approaches consisting of three elements: philosophical worldviews, research design and research methods. However, it is widely agreed that every research study should start with the selection of a research philosophy, which guides the rest of the research (Deshpande, 1983; Perry, Riege and Brown, 1999; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2012; Creswell, 2014; Sekaran and Bougie, 2014). Thus, the next section analyses existing research philosophies to choose the most appropriate for this thesis’ research aim and objectives.

#### 4.2.1. Research Philosophy

Research philosophy includes the assumptions of how the researcher views the world, and these assumptions underpin the choice of research strategy and research methods (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). Deshpande (1983, p.101) uses a scientific paradigm definition proposed by Kuhn (1962), which defines research philosophy as “a set of linked assumptions about the world which is shared by a community of scientists investigating that world [...] this set of assumptions provides a conceptual and philosophical framework [...] for the organized study of the world”. While Creswell (2014, p.6) uses the term “philosophical worldviews” and define them as “a general philosophical orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher brings to the study”, Sekaran and Bougie (2014) use the term “scientific approach” instead. It is thus evident that various terms are used to define research philosophy, the choice of which is imperative as it affects and influences the ontological, epistemological and axiological researcher’s stance (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009).

While there are several research philosophies, Deshpande (1983) argues that, for the sake of simplicity, it is enough to analyse two major schools of thoughts – positivism and idealism, which mainly relies on the differences between the qualitative and quantitative paradigms. Table 4.3. represents the main

differences and characteristics of the qualitative and quantitative research paradigms, which are not mutually exclusive extremes, but should be viewed as a continuum from positivism to idealism (Deshpande, 1983).

**Table 4.2:** Characteristics of quantitative and qualitative paradigms (Deshpande, 1983, p.103)

Qualitative Paradigm	Quantitative Paradigm
Qualitative methods preferred.	Quantitative methods preferred.
Concerned with understanding human behaviour from the actor's frame of reference.	Seeks the facts or causes of social phenomena without advocating subjective interpretation.
Phenomenological approach.	Logical-positivistic approach.
Uncontrolled, naturalistic observational measurement.	Obtrusive controlled measurement.
Subjective; "insider's" perspective; close to the data.	Objective; "outsider's" perspective; distanced from data.
Grounded, discovery-oriented, exploratory, expansionist, descriptive, inductive.	Ungrounded, verification-oriented, confirmatory, reductionist, inferential, hypothetico-deductive.
Process-oriented.	Outcome- oriented.
Validity is critical; "real", "rich", and "deep" data.	Reliability is critical; "hard" and replicable data.
Holistic – attempts to synthesise.	Particularistic – attempts to analyse.

While Deshpande (1983) suggests the two main contrasting paradigms are positivism and interpretivism and the main difference being objectivism and subjectivism, Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) suggest considering four main philosophies: pragmatism, interpretivism, realism and positivism. However, other researchers use the following terms for research philosophies: post-positivist, constructivist, transformative and pragmatic (Creswell, 2014); or positivism, realism, critical theory and constructivism (Perry, Riege and Brown, 1999). Together with the different terms used to define scientific research paradigms, such as philosophical positions, paradigms, epistemologies, research philosophies or research traditions (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008), there are different types of main philosophical positions and ideologies that need to be considered by every social sciences researcher. Whereas the majority of scholars are concerned with the debate on qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, Sobh and Perry (2005) argue that the acknowledgement of research paradigms is the main issue.

It is suggested that every research paradigm consists of three main elements: ontology, epistemology and methodology (Perry, Riege and Brown, 1999). These philosophical stances are different and explain how researchers approach the study and what values are guiding the scholar. Hence, Table 4.3. introduces the four main research paradigms – positivism, realism, critical theory and constructivism, revealing the differences on their ontology, epistemology and methodology.

**Table 4.3:** Research paradigms (Perry, Riege and Brown, 1999, p.17)

Item	Paradigm			
	Positivism	Realism	Critical Theory	Constructivism
<b>Ontology</b>	<i>Naïve realism:</i> reality is real and apprehensible	<i>Critical realism:</i> reality is ‘real’ but only imperfectly and probabilistically apprehensible and so triangulation from many sources is required to try to know it	<i>Historical realism:</i> ‘virtual’ reality shaped by social, economic, ethnic, political, cultural, and gender values, crystallised over time	<i>Critical relativism:</i> multiple local and specific ‘constructed’ realities
<b>Epistemology</b>	<i>Objectivist:</i> findings true	<i>Modified objectivist:</i> findings probably true	<i>Subjectivist:</i> value mediated findings	<i>Subjectivist:</i> created findings
<b>Methodology</b>	<i>Experiments / surveys:</i> verification of hypotheses: chiefly quantitative methods	<i>Case studies / convergent interviewing:</i> triangulation, interpretation of research issues by qualitative and quantitative methods such as structural equation modelling	<i>Dialogic / dialectical:</i> Researcher is a ‘transformative intellectual’ who changes the social world within which participants live	<i>Hermeneutical / dialectical:</i> Researcher is a ‘passionate participant’ within the world being investigated

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) propose a similar approach to research paradigms; however, they add axiology as an important element in comparing the four main research paradigms and use the terms interpretivism and pragmatism instead of critical theory and constructivism. Table 4.4. portrays the four main research philosophies and show the main differences between their ontology, epistemology, axiology and data collection techniques (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009).

**Table 4.4:** Research philosophies in management research (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009, p.119)

Item	Objective		Subjective	
	Positivism	Realism	Interpretivism	Pragmatism
Ontology (the researcher’s view of the nature of reality or being)	External, objective and independent of social actors	Is objective. Exists independently of human thoughts and beliefs or knowledge of their existence (realist), but is interpreted through social conditioning (critical realist)	Socially constructed, subjective, may change, multiple	External, multiple, view chosen to best enable answering of research question
Epistemology (the researcher’s view regarding what constitutes)	Only observable phenomena can provide credible data, facts. Focus on causality and law like generalisations,	Observable phenomena provide credible data, facts. Insufficient data means inaccuracies in sensations (direct realism).	Subjective meanings and social phenomena. Focus upon the details of situations, a reality behind these	Either or both observable phenomena and subjective meanings can provide acceptable knowledge

acceptable knowledge)	reducing phenomena to simplest elements	Alternatively, phenomena create sensations which are open to misinterpretation (critical realism). Focus on explaining within a context or contexts	details, subjective meanings motivating actions	dependent upon the research question. Focus on practical applied research, integrating different perspectives to help interpret the data
Axiology (the researcher's view of the role of values in research)	Research is undertaken in a value-free way, the researcher is independent of the data and maintains an objective stance	Research is value laden, the researcher is biased by world views, cultural experiences and upbringing. These will impact on the research	Research is value bound, the researcher is part of what is being researched, cannot be separated and so will be subjective	Values play a large role in interpreting results, the researcher adopting both objective and subjective points of view
Data collection techniques	Highly structured, large samples, measurement, quantitative, but can use qualitative	Methods chosen must fit the subject matter, qualitative or quantitative	Small samples, in-depth investigations, qualitative	Mixed or multiple method designs, quantitative and qualitative

The positivism paradigm separates the researcher from the world they study, while the other three paradigms (critical theory, constructivism and realism) recognise that the researcher to some extent participates in the real world in order to understand it better (Healy and Perry, 2000). Perry, Riege and Brown (1999, p.18) summarise the main ideological differences of research paradigms by stating “realists acknowledge the difference between the world and particular perceptions of it, [...] constructivists and critical theorists consider there are many realities, while realists consider there is only one reality although several perceptions of that reality must be triangulated to obtain a better picture of it”.

In general, the positivism paradigm is close to the natural scientific approach, which seeks causal relationships between variables. The research is theory testing (deduction), and the researcher does not influence data and data analysis, because they disconnect themselves from the world they study (Perry, Riege and Brown, 1999). These assumptions are more suitable for quantitative research rather than qualitative studies (Creswell, 2014) and is very similar to the scientific approach, associated with observable phenomena and research hypothesis with generalisations produced at the end of the research (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). Critical researchers aim to critique and transform existing values (Healy and Perry, 2000). The research studies are usually longitudinal and are essentially subjective (Perry, Riege and Brown, 1999). The constructivism paradigm uses a particular belief system for particular contexts; therefore, there are multiple realities, where meaning is more important than measurement, and the researcher is an active participant in the study (Perry, Riege and Brown, 1999). Individuals hold subjective meaning about the world and subjective experiences, hence, the researcher seeks for complex views rather than one and relies on participants' views of the situation being studied

(Creswell, 2014). Realism is a scientific approach, which is “observable phenomena provide credible data, facts” and it is objective, independent from the researcher’s thoughts, beliefs and knowledge (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009, p.119). It is suggested that reality is too complex to understand and creating definite facts and laws for social world and business is just not possible (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). Thus, realism research is about “an understanding of the common reality of an economic system in which many people operate independently” (Perry, Riege and Brown, 1999, p.18), which is the case of DMC within oil and gas SMEs. Realists aim to understand the reality of a common economic system, where people function inter-dependently, meaning there is “a ‘real’ world ‘out there’ to discover” (Sobh and Perry, 2005, p.1200).

Although there is debate about which paradigm is more suitable – objectivist or subjectivist, Perry, Riege and Brown (1999) suggest that the realism paradigm encompasses both dimensions with their advantages and, therefore, can be used successfully for marketing research as it enables the capturing of real-world complexity. While objectivism is associated with explaining and predicting phenomena, and subjectivism highlights the describing and understanding phenomena: realism could be viewed as a blend of these two approaches (Perry, Riege and Brown, 1999). Healy and Perry (2000) also propose that, since most marketing research describes and/or explains complex phenomena, the most suitable research paradigm is realism, with Riege (2003, p.75) concluding that “realists share the positivist’s aim of explaining and predicting social phenomena, however, where phenomena have not yet been fully discovered and comprehended”. Therefore, the realism philosophy is the most suitable for an investigation of the role and usage of DMC channels since there is limited knowledge about the phenomenon and thus it is important firstly to describe and understand it. In addition, realism it is more practitioner-orientated (Riege, 2003), since there is a gap between marketing practitioners and academics, who focus on problems that are too far away from practitioners while using the positivism paradigm and are not able to provide answers for practitioners (Sobh and Perry, 2006). DMC is a highly practitioner-orientated research issue, as it is a part of an organisation’s day-to-day processes (Cepeda and Martin, 2005; Gibbert, Ruigrok and Wicki, 2008). In addition, the research subject of DMC is an observable phenomenon, which is independent from the researcher’s thoughts and beliefs.

Sobh and Perry (2006) further explain why realism is the most suitable paradigm for marketing research. Firstly, existing theory is important as a conceptual framework using existing literature should be developed before data collection. The literature review ends with a conceptual framework of DMC success factors. Secondly, triangulation is applicable to realism only and not all qualitative research as it assumes there is only one single reality. The research study uses three phases of data collection to ensure data triangulation. Thirdly, the realism paradigm is associated with replication. Realism research methodologies are usually related to qualitative studies, including case studies, process-orientated focus, and non-statistical data-analysis techniques (Perry, Riege and Brown, 1999). However, Sobh and Perry (2005, p.1196) note that “there is no ‘objective’ ground for choosing a paradigm”; the researcher simply

needs to choose a paradigm which is consistent with his/her beliefs and presumptions, thus, a realism paradigm was also advocated by the researcher.

Therefore, a brief review of existing research philosophies, with scholars (Perry, Riege and Brown, 1999; Healy and Perry, 2000; Sobh and Perry, 2005) advocating for the choice of realism paradigm for marketing research, and the researcher’s personal philosophical underpinnings reveal the most appropriate research philosophy for this thesis aiming to critically evaluate the role and usage of DMC channels is realism. The object of study is a complex phenomenon (DMC), but there is a common and shared reality of an economic system (the oil and gas industry) in which people and organisations operate independently and may have different perceptions of that reality.

#### 4.2.2. Research Design

Research design should be viewed as procedures of enquiry (Creswell, 2014) and they can be of three types: quantitative, qualitative and mixed-methods designs. Table 4.5. represents the main types of study associated with the different research designs.

**Table 4.5:** Research designs (Creswell, 2014, p.12)

Quantitative	Qualitative	Mixed Methods
Experimental designs; Non-experimental designs.	Narrative research; Phenomenology; Grounded theory; Ethnographies; Case study.	Convergent; Explanatory sequential; Exploratory sequential; Transformative, embedded, multiphase.

The literature review revealed that there is a significant gap in literature on DMC and that research into B2B SMEs marketing practices is also scarce. Thus, the research aims *to evaluate the use and role of DMC channels for B2B SMES within the oil and gas industry* suggests there is a need for a qualitative research approach, which usually involves emerging questions and procedures, data collection occurs in the participant’s setting, data analysis is performed from details to broader general themes, and the researchers perform data-meaning interpretations (Creswell, 2014). A qualitative approach is most suitable when there is little research about the phenomenon or concept that needs to be understood and explored, when the variables are not known, because the topic is new, the subject has not been researched within the certain sample and existing theories do not apply (Creswell, 2014). Digital marketing itself is a still-emerging discipline, while DMC within a B2B SMEs setting and the oil and gas industry context for marketing practices have been little researched.

Bonoma (1985) states that, for the vast majority of marketing phenomena, qualitative research is the most appropriate strategy because it meets two conditions: there is little theoretical knowledge and the high complexity of the phenomena being studied, which is evidenced throughout the literature review on digital marketing. In the same vein, Davis *et al.* (2013, p.1249) add “when the phenomenon of interest

is new, dynamic or complex, field-based, qualitative methods are often the preferred starting point in order to build understanding of relevant variables grounded in detailed descriptions of the phenomenon". Furthermore, Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008, p.3) state "qualitative business research gives a researcher an opportunity to focus on the complexity of business-related phenomena in their contexts", which allows them to produce knowledge about real-life businesses and their practices. Therefore, the study of the role and use of DMC strategies for B2B SMEs necessitates a qualitative research design as it deals with a complex phenomenon, which needs to be investigated within the business context from a company's perspective. The realism philosophy is associated with both qualitative and quantitative methods (Perry, Riege and Brown, 1999; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009), depending more on the research problem which needs to be addressed, and thus it is also consistent with the choice on research paradigm.

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) suggest including as part of the research design a decision on whether the study is inductive or deductive. Since there is a lack of well-accepted theory on DMC and the main variables of DMC are not defined, this study is associated with building theory rather than theory testing. However, an extensive literature review was undertaken to create a conceptual framework prior to the empirical stage. Induction means that the collected data informs theory development as a result of data analysis (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). The inductive business research process usually starts with empirical data, which proceeds to theoretical results (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008). The inductive research approach is linked with the understanding of research context, qualitative data collection, more flexible research structure, the researcher being a part of the research process and less emphasis on the need for generalisations (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009), which is in line with the research aim of this thesis.

The purpose of the study can be exploratory, descriptive or explanatory. Exploratory study is mainly used when little information exists about the situation that needs to be explored and there is no information about how similar research problems were solved, or "when some facts are known, but more information is needed for developing a viable theoretical framework" (Sekaran and Bougie, 2014, p.96). Exploratory research is flexible and adaptable (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). In line with previous choices, qualitative inductive study on DMC requires exploratory design as it seeks to identify the DMC use factors for B2B SMEs. Exploratory studies usually include qualitative data gathering using, for example, case studies, and study results usually cannot be generalised to the whole population (Sekaran and Bougie, 2014).

While there are a large number of research strategies associated with qualitative research design, including narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, and ethnographies (Creswell, 2014), qualitative inductive exploratory research necessitates a case-study approach as it is an in-depth study of distinct oil and gas industry B2B SMEs. The aim of the study is to thoroughly understand a specific



phenomenon, DMC within a highly specific industry, located in Aberdeen. The main feature of case-study research is that it investigates the phenomenon (the use and role of DMC) within a specific context, which cannot be taken away (the oil and gas SMEs). A case-study approach is also congruent with the realism paradigm (Perry, Riege and Brown, 1999). An in-depth justification of case-study design is subsequently presented, to further underpin this approach both in the context of case-study theory and existing research studies.

Case study is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the ‘case’) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (Yin, 2009, p.18). Woodside and Wilson (2003, p.493) provide a broader definition and suggest that case studies can be used to study more than one issue and define case study as “inquiry focusing on describing, understanding, predicting, and/or controlling the individual (i.e. process, animal, person, household, organization, group, industry, culture, or nationality)”. Creswell (2007, p.73) proposes that “case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports) and reports a case description and case-based themes”.

There are many studies identified across the literature which deal with the case-study methodology and its appropriateness for business and marketing research. Yin (2009) states that case studies are a particularly useful method when “how” or “why” questions are being posed, the investigator has little control over events, and the focus is on contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context. Rowley (2002, p.16) also suggests “case studies are useful in providing answers to ‘How?’ and ‘Why?’ questions, and, in this role, can be used for exploratory, descriptive or explanatory research”. Yin (2009, p.18) adds “the case study enquiry copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and one result relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulation fashion, and as another result benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis”. Case-study research “is about theory construction and building and is based on the need to understand a real-life phenomenon with researchers obtaining new holistic and in-depth understandings, explanations and interpretations about previously unknown practitioners’ rich experiences, which may stem from creative discovery as much as research design” (Riege, 2003, p.80). Since the study aims to provide answers to how and why DMC is used by B2B SMEs in a real-life context, the investigation is highly congruent with a case-study design and its suggested use.

Researchers argue for the applicability of case-study research to the marketing discipline (Bonoma, 1985; Perry, 1998; Perren and Ram, 2004; Gibbert, Ruigrok and Wicki, 2008), and its applicability for industrial marketing research (Johnston, Leach and Liu, 1999; Woodside and Wilson, 2003; Borghini,

Carù and Cova, 2010; Piekkari, Plakoyiannaki and Welch, 2010; Järvensivu and Törnroos, 2010). LaPlaca, Lindgreen and Vanhamme (2018) even call for more industrial B2B marketing research employing case studies. In addition, case study is applicable for small business research (Perren and Ram, 2004). Perry, Riege and Brown (1999) suggest that a case-study approach is particularly suitable for research on marketing issues for three reasons. Firstly, a case-study approach deals with theory building rather than theory testing and verification, with the main aim being testing elements of theory rather than looking for population generalisability. Secondly, the case-study objective is to fully understand the phenomena. Thirdly, the goal is to define separate categories as accurately as possible and then identify relationships between these categories. Other researchers (Cepeda and Martin, 2005) also suggest similar reasons why case-study research is the most appropriate strategy for management research. Firstly, the research problem can be studied in the natural environment, which could be the latest and most-up-to-date, and theory can be developed from practice. Secondly, case studies allow the investigation of “how” and “why”. Thirdly, case studies are particularly useful for research issues where the academic research is limited. This research method is also particularly useful for contemporary events, which cannot be influenced.

Moreover, Bonoma (1985) highlights that many phenomena that are being researched cannot be fully understood if context is taken away, and this is enabled using case study. Though Cepeda and Martin (2005, p.852) state “no strategy is more appropriate than all the others for all research purposes”, case studies are especially useful when research and theory on the subject is at the early stages and when the research problem is associated with practice-based issues, with context being important, which is the case of DMC within B2B SMEs. In addition, a realism worldview relies on “research methods in those that have an inductive nature for discovering and building theory rather than testing theory through analytical generalisations” and “case studies commonly follow realistic modes of inquiry, for the main objectives are to discover new relationships of realities and build up an understanding of the meanings of experiences rather than verify predetermined hypotheses” (Riege, 2003, p.77). Lastly, the inductive research approach is in line with case-study theory construction, though prior theory is required (Riege, 2003).

An in-depth review of existing literature was performed to design the rigorous case study. While there are studies that deal with the case-study methodology (Gibbert, Ruigrok and Wicki, 2008; Beverland and Lindgreen, 2010; Borghini, Carù and Cova, 2010; Piekkari, Plakoyiannaki and Welch, 2010) and the whole special *Industrial Marketing Management* issue 39 was dedicated to case-study research in industrial marketing, there are no clear guidelines or established unified approach regarding how to undertake a rigorous case study, meaning it depends on the researcher to design the case study. A rigorous case study can assist both marketing research practitioners and academics (Riege, 2003). To ensure rigour, Yin (2009) suggests developing a case-study research protocol, which is a plan of how to achieve conclusions from an initial research question, including five components: study questions, study

propositions, unit of analysis, linking data to propositions, and criteria for interpreting findings. It is also suggested that a high-quality case study should use various forms of data collection, including documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation and physical artefacts (Yin, 2009), or observations, interviews, documents and audio-visual material (Creswell, 2007).

Thus, a case-study protocol and database are employed in this thesis. To ensure a variety of evidence, data was collected from multiple sources, thus increasing rigour and quality. One source of primary data was gathered directly from an analysis of companies' websites and other DMC channels, the other was semi-structured interviews with two distinct interest groups in B2B oil and gas DMC: marketing agencies, who provide DMC services, and managers from B2B SMEs, who either have a responsibility for marketing communications or buy these services. Together, these three different types of evidence are necessary due to the complexity and largely unexplored nature of the research question. This thesis thus uses an in-depth case study to understand how and why DMC channels are used and oil and gas B2B SMEs are the unit of analysis for this study (Yin, 2009).

It is also suggested that existing literature review is important, and it should allow the creation of a conceptual framework, which would guide the data collection and analysis in case-study research (Perry, 1998; Healy and Perry, 2000; Riege, 2003, Cepeda and Martin, 2005, Sobh and Perry, 2006). Therefore, an in-depth literature review was undertaken, and a conceptual framework of CSFs created before the primary data collection. This framework guided the interview protocol creation (Perry, 1998) and structured the primary data analysis and discussion.

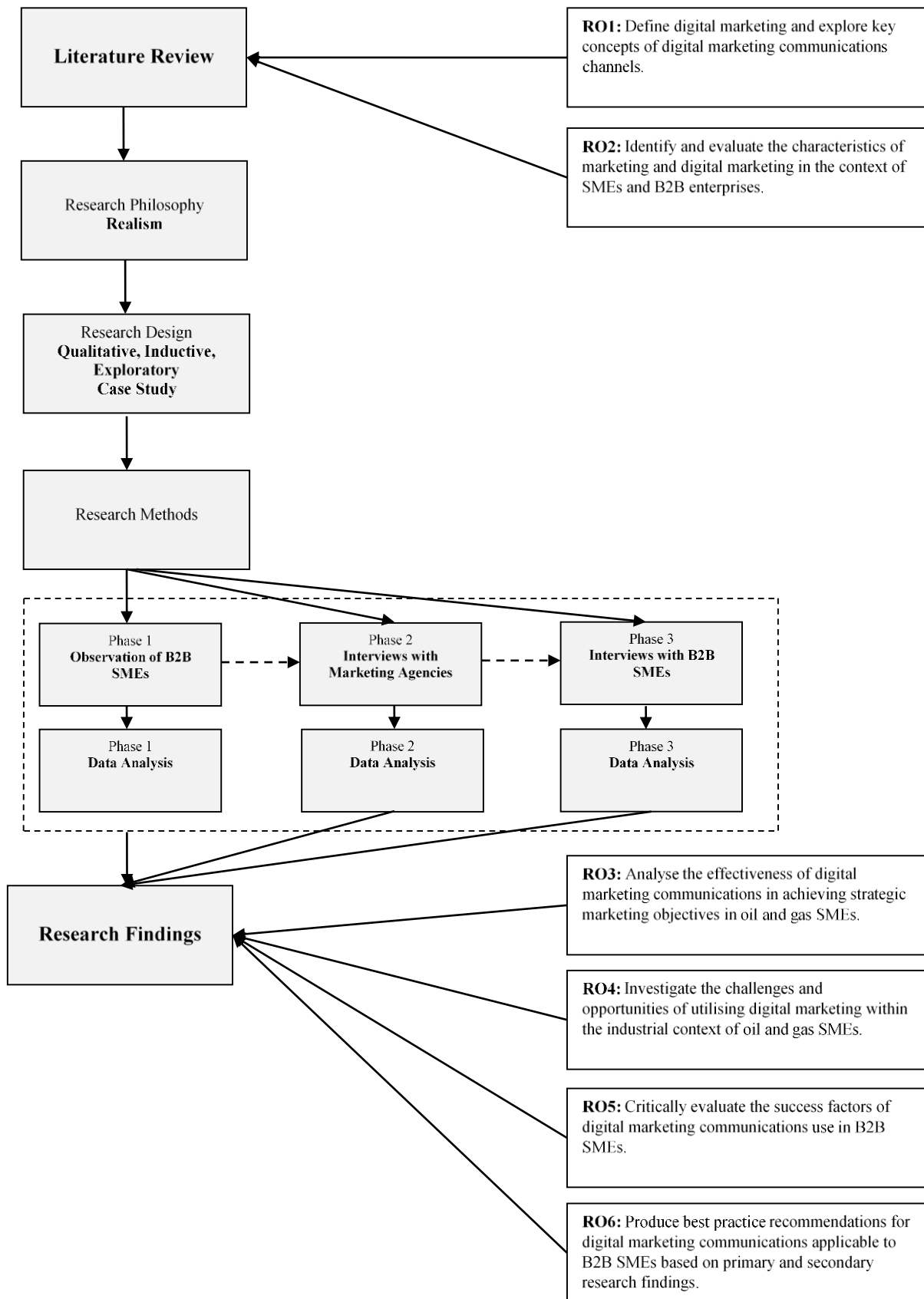
#### **4.2.3. Research Methods**

The previous review demonstrated the need for a customised research design to address the research aim *to critically evaluate the role and usage DMC channels in oil and gas industry B2B SMEs*. In light of the choice of a realism research paradigm, the thesis tends towards theory building. The case-study research method was chosen to investigate the use and role of DMC within the context of oil and gas SMEs given there is a lack of well-established theory on DMC plus the fact that B2B SMEs have been under researched. In addition, while various research paradigms are applicable to case-study research, the most appropriate paradigm is realism since a case-study approach analyses contemporary issues, which are still pre-paradigmatic, meaning there is no adequately established principles (Perry, 1998). Case studies are used for exploratory studies (Perry, 1998), which is the case for this thesis.

The final decision for a research design is the choice of the research methods, which are the specific methods for data collection, analysis and interpretation (Creswell, 2014). This section presents the development of specific research methods employed to collect primary data for a qualitative, inductive, exploratory case study, which collects data using various sources of evidence (Yin, 2009). Silverman

(2013) with Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) note that the research question is the most important element in choosing the research design and methods, since the methods themselves do not have inherent value and therefore a qualitative researcher faces a large number of choices when designing research methods (Ritchie *et al.*, 2014).

While Yin (2009) suggests there are six sources of evidence for case-study research, he also notes that interviews and observations are most often used data-collection methods for case studies. This thesis used three phases of data collection: observation of DMC as it is used in a real-life context over a period of time, semi-structured interviews with marketing agencies to gain an external perspective by a professional provider of DMC services, and semi-structured interviews to gather companies' internal perspectives on DMC. These three phases were required to achieve a full view of the role of DMC within oil and gas industry B2B SMEs given the complexity and relatively unexplored nature of the topic. It also allowed for data triangulation and ensured an in-depth analysis, which is required for rigorous case-study design (Yin, 2009). The figure below graphically depicts the summary of the thesis design. Within qualitative business research, data collection and data analysis are two closely interrelated stages and activities (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008), thus, each phase of data collection and analysis was undertaken simultaneously. Figure 4.1. depicts the relationship between the thesis' research methodology and research objectives. While the arrows show the main links between the objectives and research stages, the actual research process is more complicated, with closely interrelated stages and arrows in all directions as research objectives are not satisfied in isolation but are informed by the whole range of different parts of the research study.



**Figure 4.1:** Research study design and relationship with research objectives

Yin (2009) suggests three important data-collection principles: usage of multiple sources of evidence, creation of a case-study database and a chain of evidence, which directly links research questions with data collection and research conclusions. To display the chain of evidence, Table 4.6. shows the relationship between research objectives and the research phase, while Table 4.7. shows the relationship between the conceptual framework categories and the data-collection phases.

**Table 4.6:** Relationship between research objectives and research phase

<b>Research Objectives</b>	<b>Research Phase</b>
<b>RO1:</b> Define digital marketing and explore key concepts of digital marketing communications channels.	Secondary research
<b>RO2:</b> Identify and evaluate the characteristics of marketing and digital marketing in the context of SMEs and B2B enterprises.	Secondary research
<b>RO3:</b> Analyse the effectiveness of digital marketing communications in achieving strategic marketing objectives in oil and gas SMEs.	Observation; Interviews with B2B SMEs.
<b>RO4:</b> Investigate the challenges and opportunities of utilising digital marketing within the industrial context of oil and gas SMEs.	Interviews with marketing agencies; Interviews with B2B SMEs.
<b>RO5:</b> Critically evaluate the success factors of digital marketing communications use in B2B SMEs.	Observation; Interviews with marketing agencies; Interviews with B2B SMEs.
<b>RO6:</b> Produce best practice recommendation for digital marketing communications applicable to B2B SMEs based on primary and secondary research findings.	Secondary research; Observation; Interviews with marketing agencies; Interviews with B2B SMEs.

**Table 4.7:** Relationship between conceptual framework factors and research phase

<b>Factors Category</b>	<b>Data Collection Phase</b>
Internal factors	Interviews with B2B SMEs;
Marketing strategy factors	Interviews with B2B SMEs; Interviews with marketing agencies;
Website factors	Longitudinal observation; Interviews with B2B SMEs; Interviews with marketing agencies;
DMC channels and platforms factors	Longitudinal observation; Interviews with B2B SMEs; Interviews with marketing agencies;
Market factors	Interviews with B2B SMEs; Interviews with marketing agencies;
DMC strategy success	Secondary research; Longitudinal observation; Interviews with B2B SMEs; Interviews with marketing agencies.

The starting-point of the case-study research was the first phase of data collection, which collected data on DMC activities over a period of time (from November 2014 to September 2017). Since the research aim and objectives are concerned with what companies do in relation to their digital marketing activities, one way to discover it is to observe them (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). Observations can be of various forms, ranging from casual to formal observations (Yin, 2009), and Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) suggest a large amount of quality information can be found on corporate websites. Furthermore, using the internet for observations offers an un-intrusive approach with the reduced possibility of observer bias (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). “Structured observation may form only a part of your data-collection approach because its function is to tell you how often things happen rather than why they happen” (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009, p.300). Structural observation is more quantitative and is concerned with frequency of actions, which is required for understanding how B2B SMEs used DMC channels and if there were any changes over the time. In addition, a longitudinal time horizon was chosen as it allowed the identification of change and development (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). In line with current research priorities, it is suggested that researchers into digital marketing employ a longitudinal perspective as it “allow us to see how things change over time, which is particularly important in a fast-paced environment such as DSMM<sup>11</sup>” (Lamberton and Stephen, 2016, p.168).

Interviews are the most often used methods to collect empirical data in business research (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2012). Ritchie *et al.* (2014) also note that interviews remain the principal qualitative data-collection method. In addition, “interviews are an essential source of case study evidence because most studies are about human affairs or behavioral events” (Yin, 2009, p.108). There is a large and diverse range of interviews available, ranging from unstructured in-depth face-to-face to semi-structured online interviews or focus groups, which can be conducted face-to-face, over the phone or using the internet (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) suggest there are three main types of interviews: structured and standardized, guided and semi-structured and unstructured, informal, open and narrative interviews. Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2012) define these interviews as highly-structured, semi-structured, and unstructured. In line with realism case-study research, semi-structured interviews were chosen, as they offer structure and standard procedures (Riege, 2003). As part of a semi-structured interview, an interview protocol is required (Perry, 1998; Perry; 2001; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009) with themes derived from the prior literature review and conceptual framework.

Perry (2000) argues that, as part of case-study research, it is important to include interviews with industry associations or consultants to capture the context. In this thesis marketing agencies provide the context as they were deemed to be local experts, who could help to understand the role of DMC channels

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<sup>11</sup> Digital, social and mobile marketing

within local B2B SMEs. These marketing agencies provide DMC services to the oil and gas industry and can thus shed light on the use of DMC by oil and gas SMEs from a professional practitioner view, which is an important part of case-study design (Cepeda and Martin, 2005; Gibbert, Ruigrok and Wicki, 2008). The final phase includes interviews with managers from B2B SMEs in the oil and gas industry. These interviews allowed the achievement of a full understanding of internal company perspectives on DMC channels use and importance.

#### **4.2.4. Data Collection**

##### 4.2.4.1. Phase One – Longitudinal Observation

###### 4.2.4.1.1. Research Instrument Development

Structured observations are systematic and have predetermined structure. Therefore, a digital marketing checklist was designed specifically for this thesis derived from the research aim and objectives, research questions and existing literature review (Appendix 1, p.259). The extensive literature review of academic research on digital marketing, social media and websites informed the creation of a primary data-collection research instrument, which was used for longitudinal observation of how four B2B SMEs from oil and gas industry used DMC channels.

At the time of observation start (2014) a large number of DMC channels and social media platforms were available, including website, social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Google+, YouTube and company blogs, company forums, product and services review sites, price comparison sites, Delicious, Reddit, Flickr and etc. While Chaffey and Smith (2013) use “social media marketing radar” to illustrate the existing variety of social media channels and categorise 32 social media channels into eight categories, this thesis only deals with the following DMC channels: the company website with SEO, the social media channels of Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube together with the mobile and e-mail marketing. These channels and platforms were identified as the most important and popular channels at the time of the research and the top four main social media channels for the UK expressed as the percentage of Internet users who had accounts (Facebook 79%, Twitter 44%, Google+ 33%, LinkedIn 22% (Kemp, 2014)). However, the initial observations of oil and gas B2B SMEs suggested that instead of Google+ companies used YouTube.

The main literature used for the creation of research instrument include Kierzkowski *et al.* (1996), Teo (2005), Chan and Guillet (2011), Lovejoy, Waters and Saxton (2012), Waters *et al.* (2009), and He, Zha and Li (2013). Kierzkowski *et al.* (1996) framework was successfully adopted in several studies (Teo 2005; Chan and Guillet, 2011; Nikunen *et al.*, 2017). Teo’s (2005) study used this model for an analysis of B2C firms’ websites, Chan and Guillet (2011) applied it specifically to the investigation of social media marketing in the hotel industry and Nikunen *et al.* (2017) analysed the use of digital marketing



tools for building customer relationships within the micro-enterprise context. However, it is important to note that the first two studies used the framework for a B2C context, while this study is for a B2B context.

The first part of the checklist, website analysis, dealt with the analysis of company websites. The website checklist is based mainly on Teo's (2005) study, which was built on Kierzkowski *et al.*'s (1996) original study. However, some changes were made to the original framework for the purpose of this thesis: some of the variables were deleted since they were out-of-date and no longer accurate, such as adequate bandwidth, piggyback advertising or banner ads. The engage and retain stages were analysed together as they seemed to be very similar and the same website tactics were included under both stages, and therefore, it was not necessary to divide these stages for the purpose of this research.

The second part of the checklist deals with SEO. Major aspects of SEO such as on-page and technical SEO are tactics and activities that companies can control to improve the performance of their websites and increase the chances of achieving visibility in SERPs (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2017). While SEO is a complex activity involving various factors, for the purposes of this thesis on-page SEO elements were chosen as the focus, as these are the elements under the control of the website owner. Off-page SEO, which includes external links building with other credible websites, is also an important part, however, it is outside the scope of this study. Free online software was used to run SEO tests for the websites: *SEO Site Checkup*<sup>12</sup>. This free SEO tool was chosen because it was available from the beginning of the observations, which started in December 2014. More free software tools became available later, but, for comparison purposes, the same tool was used through the remaining five observations. The test gives a relative SEO score based on 100-point scale on how different aspects of SEO are implemented on a website. While the actual algorithm for Google search engines ranking is not known, there is a consensus amongst practitioners on which elements are important for website optimisation (MOZ, 2015). Another tool for page and domain authority was added during observation 2: *MOZBar*<sup>13</sup>. Developed by MOZ, page authority (PA) and domain authority (DA) are 100-point scale scores, which predict how well a specific page or entire website will rank on search engines. As explained by MOZ (n.d.), these are most useful when used “as comparative metrics when doing research in the search results and determining which sites/pages may have more powerful/important link profiles than another”. In addition, screenshots were collected of the four main website pages: homepage, about company page, products/service page, and contact page to capture any changes made during the period of observation. Furthermore, a checklist was prepared based on the best Google practices to assess how easy to use the websites were from a user's point of view (Google, 2018).

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<sup>12</sup> <https://seositecheckup.com/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://moz.com/products/pro/seo-toolbar>

The final part, social media, deals with social media sites and their use as a marketing communication channel. It was established to capture companies' overall use of social media channels and to collect companies' posts from Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn for the observed months. Some quantitative measures were used plus more qualitative information relating to branding, including use of corporate logos, colours, vision and mission statements with taglines and value propositions. The depth of company description and links to the company website was also recorded, to gain an indication of how the channels were integrated. Quantitative measures included the total numbers of followers for each social media channel, giving an indication of potential audience. Any growth in social media audience would indicate an increasing awareness about the company. In addition, the number of posts indicates the actual use of the channel, and thus frequency of posting gives an indication of how important the channel was perceived to be. Actual posts are also collected for the observed months together with the interaction figures these posts achieved. It is argued that the number of likes and comments on brand content is a brand popularity signal (De Vries, Gensler and Leeflang, 2012; Swahi *et al.*, 2017), and therefore it is a useful metric to measure brand engagement. Posts and figures were collected for one month, following the study of He, Zha and Li (2013).

#### 4.2.4.1.2. Research Participants

In line with qualitative inductive study, non-probability sampling was used. For the longitudinal observation a purposive sampling was used to choose the companies, since the aim is "to select cases that will best enable you to answer your research question(s) and to meet your objectives" (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009, p.237). Perry (1998) suggests that purposive sampling is most suitable for qualitative research like case studies. A typical case-sampling approach was chosen to provide a typical view of what was happening with B2B SMEs DMC channels (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). In addition, the aim of the longitudinal observation was to understand what the industry was doing in general, rather than the approach of each of the companies individually.

The criteria for choosing organisations included: that companies were from the oil and gas sector and provided products and/or services to other companies (business-to-business), and that they were classified as SMEs based on the European Commission (2018) definition. In addition, these companies needed to be engaged with DMC, which was described as having company website and presence on one of more social media channels. While Perry (1998, p.793) concludes "there are no precise guides to the number of cases to be included" but suggests two to four cases as a minimum requirement, and a maximum of 10, 12 or 15, and Creswell (2007) argues for four to five cases in case-study research, for this study four companies were chosen.

#### 4.2.4.1.3. Observation Execution

Observation data was collected a total of six times over the period of four years (2014-2017). Websites and other DMC channels were assessed on what was judged to be a typical month of the year, November as it was deemed to be an average month that represents “business as usual” activities. In addition, two more instances of data collection occurred during major oil and gas industry events: *Offshore Europe*, organised every two years in Aberdeen, and its corresponding trade show, *Northern Offshore*, organised every two years in Stavanger. These special events were included in order to identify whether there were changes within companies’ use of DMC during major industry events.

The first observation was undertaken in November 2014, before the recession hit the oil and gas industry. The later observations were completed during the recession, with the recession starting in 2015, deepening in 2016, and still affecting the industry in 2017, although to a slightly less extent than in 2016. One of the observed companies was acquired by a large multinational corporation in 2016 and merged with that company some time before the final observation (September 2017). Therefore, the final observation for this company was not completed.

#### 4.2.4.2. Phase Two – Semi-Structured Interviews with Marketing Agencies

##### 4.2.4.2.1. Research Instrument Development

For this study the semi-structured interviews method was chosen. Semi-structured interviews include the researcher having a pre-determined themes or questions to be covered, however, the main advantage is its flexibility as themes might be different from interview to interview, some of them might be omitted depending on the specific context and the sequence might also vary depending of the interview flow, and additional questions might be added (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). The main advantage of this interview type is that “the materials are somewhat systematic and comprehensive, while the tone of the interview is fairly conversational and informal” (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008, p.82). While the observation focused on oil and gas SMEs use of DMC, the semi-structured interviews explored the context and potential reasons behind the findings of the observation (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009).

Semi-structured interviews require an interview guide, which includes the main topics and themes to be covered during the interview (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). A guide was thus prepared specifically for this study, consistent with the research aim and objectives. Themes with questions for the marketing agencies were derived from existing literature and the conceptual framework (Appendix 4, p.266). The interviews aimed to investigate how the marketing agencies understood and defined DMC and their views on DMC practices within the oil and gas industry. These practitioners were directly

involved with DMC, and thus would help to understand the use and role of DMC channels in oil and gas industry.

The interview guide included four themes. *Theme 1* was a general theme about digital marketing aimed to identify how agencies defined and understood DMC and which communication channels were important to them. It also aimed to understand interviewees' understanding of the requirements for each channel to be successful. *Theme 2* focused on the oil and gas industry and its marketing practices. It aimed to understand which communication channels were important for the oil and gas companies and whether there were any differences between large and small oil and gas companies in relation to DMC. *Theme 3* focused on digital marketing practices in the oil and gas industry during the recession with the aim of understanding how important DMC was to oil and gas industry and how companies were using DMC as part of their marketing strategies. It also aimed to understand how the recession in the oil and gas industry had impacted on marketing and digital marketing practices. The final part of interview included concluding remarks to capture any other additional observations and comments from the interviewees.

#### 4.2.4.2.2. Research Participants

Non-probability convenience sampling was used to identify semi-structured interview participants which "involved selecting haphazardly those cases that are easiest to obtain" (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009, p. 241). According to *Yell.com*<sup>14</sup> listing (2016), 24 companies provided marketing services in Aberdeen. Marketing agencies that described themselves as providing digital marketing services were deemed to be suitable for the interviews and freelancers were excluded. Another criterion was the marketing agencies' involvement with the oil and gas industry and B2B marketing and therefore potential marketing agencies' websites were checked for information about their clients.

A total of 12 marketing agencies were shortlisted and contacted. The existing relationships between the university, where the researcher was based, and the agencies were explored. In addition, the researcher contacted the agencies she previously worked with as a part of her marketing manager's role. Before contacting the companies by e-mail, a project information sheet was prepared detailing the purpose of the research (Appendix 2, p.264). However, gaining the access to agencies proved to be a difficult task. Out of 12 agencies, four agencies did not reply to the e-mail inviting them to participate in the research. In addition, one agency initially agreed to participate in the research, but cancelled the meeting at the very last minute and asked to send responses by e-mail. Only a few, very generic, answers were e-mailed back, and thus it was not included in the interview analysis. After intense negotiation, various conversations and several rearrangements, five interviews with marketing agencies were secured. The

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.yell.com/>

interviewees were managers in the agencies and were partly or fully in charge of providing digital marketing services to their clients.

During the time when interviews were conducted (spring 2016), the overall climate for marketing agencies in Aberdeen was challenging and agencies were going bankrupt or merging together following the recession in the oil and gas industry. It can therefore be presumed that companies were reluctant to participate in the research due to the challenging times for their businesses. As a result of these challenges, just after the interview in March 2016, one agency went into administration and was bought by another firm. The interviewee from this agency left the company at this point and moved to another position with another marketing agency. Similarly, shortly after interview, another agency merged with another company and expanded its service offering. However, the new merger had a different name and marketing services became a small part of overall business.

#### 4.2.4.2.3. Undertaking Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with six respondents from five Aberdeen-based marketing agencies during March-June 2016. The interview participants from the marketing agencies varied in their role and included a managing director, director, two marketing directors, creative studio manager and digital marketing strategist. The interviewees chosen for the interviews were leading managers in the agencies and were partly or fully in charge of providing marketing and digital marketing services to their clients but were not necessarily involved in day-to-day hands-on execution. Five out of six interviewees were men working in marketing agencies, while one agency was represented by two participants: a managing director and a marketing director, who was the only female interviewee. A major digital marketing survey undertaken by DMI (2016) highlights that women are under-represented in the digital marketing sector with only 30% percent of respondents being female. In addition, men dominated in higher-level marketing jobs. A similar study shows that men dominate in senior roles: “organisation with a single person with overall responsibility for marketing said that job is occupied by a man (62% vs 38%)” (Webber, 2017). Men also dominate in highly technical and financial industries.

The semi-structured interviews had pre-defined themes and open questions to guide the interviews, but there was a lot of scope for interviewees to participate in guided conversations rather than interviews (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). The aim of these interviews was to gain perspective on DMC from the industry practitioners’ angle and how they see, define, understand and approach DMC, and thus the discussions were open. To ensure the protection of interviewees’ rights, an informed consent form was prepared (Appendix 3, p.265).

However, some of the interviewees felt slightly uncomfortable when talking about certain questions relating to digital marketing, which required specific and in-depth knowledge, and the researcher felt that the interviewees themselves did not have enough knowledge regarding digital marketing practices.

Therefore, some responses were very short and brief, while other responses were much more detailed with specific examples and in-depth explanation. During the interviews, the researcher observed the interviewees carefully and allowed them to focus on and elaborate more on the topics on which they felt comfortable as it is suggested to remain sensitive as an external researcher for the participants and their goodwill to participate in the study (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009).

#### 4.2.4.3. Phase Three – Semi-Structured Interviews with B2B SMEs

##### 4.2.4.3.1. Research Instrument Development

The final phase was semi-structured interviews with managers from B2B SMEs in the oil and gas industry. The same rationale was followed as it was deemed that semi-structured interviews were the most suitable to gain companies' perspective on why and how they used or did not use DMC channels. An interview guide was prepared specifically for this study, consistent with the research aim, objectives and conceptual framework (Appendix 5, p.268).

The guide focused on four major themes derived from the conceptual framework and previous research stages (Perry, 1998). *Theme 1* aimed to understand which marketing communication channels were used and how important DMC channels were in the oil and gas industry in general. *Theme 2* focused on marketing practices in the oil and gas industry and aimed to understand how the industry operated. It aimed to understand which communication channels were used to communicate with current and potential clients. *Theme 3* focused on each separate DMC channel and aimed to identify its suitability for each company and understand what role it played, including websites, search engine marketing, social media sites, e-mail and mobile marketing channels. The final part of the interview focused on concluding the interview and identifying issues not previously covered.

##### 4.2.4.3.2. Research Participants

Non-probability convenience sampling was used again in line with previous methods to identify and select the interview participants. The criteria for selecting participants included they needed to be managers or owners of SMEs, following European Commission (2018) definition, operating in the oil and gas industry and providing products or services to other companies, meaning they were B2B organisations. Another important selection criterion was that these companies needed to be active on DMC channels to some degree, which for the purpose of this study was defined as having a company website and being involved with one or more social media channels, including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube. In general, most of the companies were involved with DMC activities and had their websites and presence on social media. It was presumed that, if companies were engaged with digital marketing activities, they possessed at least some knowledge of DMC.

To gain access, the researcher used previous connections from working in the industry and existing connections between the university, where she was based, and local companies. However, as with gaining access to marketing agencies, there were challenges. In total 20 companies were contacted. The companies were contacted by e-mail and the targets were managing directors and/or sales managers/engineers, who were believed to be in charge of the marketing. These interviewees were chosen as they were involved in their companies' marketing, with some of the interviewees being fully in charge of the marketing function and some adding to the organisation's marketing activities, which were distributed among several employees. They were e-mailed with an invitation to participate in the research themselves or suggest another colleague from their company. A project information sheet was also attached (Appendix 2, p.264).

However, once invited to participate in the study on marketing and digital marketing practices, many oil and gas SMEs refused to participate, explaining that they did not do digital marketing and in general they did not do much marketing for their organisations either. Additionally, the interviews were undertaken during the recession (spring 2016), when a large number of companies were going bankrupt and making people redundant, and therefore, the overall climate for marketing and digital marketing was quite negative as companies were reducing their spending in all areas, including marketing. It was thus not surprising that, when the majority of companies were struggling, companies did not want to participate in the research study. It is noted that participants might be sensitive about the topic and companies are not likely to participate if they are not performing well in any part of their business (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). Therefore, the topic of DMC became a barrier for gaining access to the participants and their companies.

Typically, no clear rules are suggested in relation to the size of sample for non-probability sampling techniques (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). For qualitative data collection, data saturation is more importance than the actual number, however "for research where your aim is to understand commonalities within a fairly homogenous group, 12 in-depth interviews should suffice" (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009, p.235). On the other hand, to gain deeper insights, Perry (2000) suggests arranging more than one interview with an organisation. However, he also acknowledges that, in small organisations, this is difficult, and thus advocates for interviews with industry bodies and experts to capture the context, which in this study were the interviews with marketing agencies. It is also acknowledged that meaningful insights from qualitative data are more important than the size of samples (Perry, 1998; Perry, 2001). Therefore, the researcher aimed to interview 10-12 companies, however, since gaining access proved to be difficult, and due to the limited time resources, interviews were undertaken with 10 interviewees from nine organisations.

#### 4.2.4.3.3. Undertaking Interviews

Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were carried out with nine Aberdeen-based oil and gas SMEs in May-June 2016. The ten interviewees varied in their roles and included business development managers, directors, operations managers and sales engineers, who all were involved in their organisations' marketing activities to a greater or lesser degree. One company was represented by two interviewees: a sales engineer and a managing director. In addition, one interviewee represented two companies as he was working part-time in two different roles: business development manager and customer solutions and support director. Due to the limited resources within SMEs, the marketing role was typically scattered between various employees and in none of the participating companies was there a specific role of marketing manager, which is quite common with SMEs.

The interviews were planned as semi-structured interviews with an interview protocol prepared. However, due to the nature of the topic, some interviewees were unfamiliar with certain marketing and digital marketing concepts and terminology, and therefore some interviews became less structured and the interview schedule was not fully followed. This resulted in deeper insights and understanding of how DMC channels were used in organisations and to what extent they were a part of overall marketing communications strategies. This was not surprising, as the interviews with marketing agencies revealed that marketing was seen more as a supporting activity within the oil and gas industry. Due to the nature of qualitative research, these changes were possible and allowed the research to focus on issues that mattered to the interviewees and their understanding of marketing (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009).

#### **4.2.5. Data Analysis**

Case-study data analysis is a challenging activity as no best approach has been identified (Yin, 2009; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2012). Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2012) define case-study analysis as framing, which means to make sense out of information and data collected. They suggest that, while there are different methods of analysing data, the most important decision when choosing data-analysis techniques is consistency with philosophical and methodological assumptions (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2012). In addition, Yin (2009, p.126) suggests "data analysis consists of examining, categorizing, tabulating, testing, or otherwise recombining evidence, to draw empirically based conclusions". This thesis adopts a qualitative research data-analysis approach in line with previous methodological choices on inductive exploratory case-study research design with the aim of recombining evidence most effectively to draw empirically-based conclusions (Yin, 2009). Thus, qualitative data as a part of analysis needs to be summarised, categorised and structured into meaningful narrative (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009).



Sobh and Perry (2006) provide principles for qualitative realism research data analysis consisting of data reduction and data display. The first stage is related to how codes are generated in order to reduce the data into a manageable form. Since realist research is not interested in every single detail of respondents' perception, the codes to reduce data are generated from the conceptual framework rather than from the data itself. The second stage is data display. Again, the conceptual framework is used to inform the display. While data can include numerical frequencies, the focus is on interpretation and explanation of why certain things appeared. Representative quotes should be used with the details of the respondent to provide in-depth understanding. These principles of data reduction and display are employed in this thesis and the two phases of semi-structured interview analysis follow Braun and Clarke (2006) principles, which are in line with the above and applicable for realism research. The research study aims to evaluate the role and usage of DMC channels, and therefore the findings from each phase of data collection are presented separately first, under the main themes related to DMC and the conceptual framework.

#### 4.2.5.1. Phase One – Observation Data Analysis

The observation of companies' DMC activities was undertaken six times due to the nature of a longitudinal case study. Each of the multiple observation data was analysed before another set of data was collected. This was important as case studies are qualitative research studies when data analysis is undertaken at the same time as data collection to inform the study further (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008). Since the aim of the longitudinal observation was to understand what the industry in general was doing, rather than each of the companies individually, each observation is presented separately to show changes in how the companies were using DMC channels, and within each observation all four companies are analysed together to show how the industry was doing in general rather than each company separately. Within each observation, the main themes used were separate DMC channels.

#### 4.2.5.2. Phase Two – Semi-Structured Interviews Data Analysis

The phase two interviews with Aberdeen-based marketing agencies aimed to identify the agencies' perspectives on DMC and how oil and gas industry companies were using and adopting DMC. For semi-structured interviews an interview protocol was prepared, however, since the structure was flexible, other themes emerged. Thematic analysis, which is "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.79) was chosen for the interview analysis. All five interviews were transcribed and entered in NVivo 11 software for analysis. NVivo 11 is a computer-aided qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). Computer-assisted tools can improve qualitative data analysis and are advocated for case studies by Yin (2009). In addition, Sobh and Perry (2006, p.1206) suggest that data-analysis software "may help in indexing those limited number of perceptions that are relevant to the purpose of realism research project" as they are not interested in every single detail.

The six phases of thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) were followed, which included: (1) familiarising yourself with your data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. The whole process was not linear, but more recursive with movement back and forth within these phases (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). Congruent with Perry (2000) and Sobh and Perry (2006), the codes were initially generated based on the conceptual framework and themes found in the literature. This process resulted in 29 codes (Appendix 7, p.271), which were established as nodes in NVivo 11. Data supporting each theme was extracted from the interview transcripts and coded to appropriate nodes. These codes were then grouped into four major categories and 21 sub-categories to answer the research question. The four major categories were digital marketing, digital marketing channels, oil and gas industry and marketing agencies. The findings are presented in the form of analytic narrative following these categories (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009).

#### 4.2.5.3. Phase Three – Semi-Structured Interviews Data Analysis

Phase three included semi-structured interviews with nine Aberdeen-based B2B SMEs. As with the marketing agencies interviews, an interview protocol was prepared to collect the data. Once all nine interviews were completed, they were transcribed. The same six phases of thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) was followed for this set of interview analysis. In this case, in total of 48 codes were established as nodes in NVivo 11 (Appendix 8, p.272). These codes were later grouped into 10 major categories to facilitate the analysis: most popular marketing communication channels, sales focus, industry features, website, search engine marketing, social media marketing, LinkedIn, e-mail marketing and mobile applications with agency role.

### **4.3. VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY**

While there is an on-going discussion about validity and reliability issues within qualitative research, some researchers argue that it is possible to achieve validity and reliability in case-study research and suggest various guidelines (Perry, 2000; Riege, 2003; Cepeda and Martin, 2005; Yin, 2009). However, there is no unified agreement on the most suitable approach for case-study reliability and validity (Riege, 2003), thus, this section reviews several suggested methods to ensure rigour.

After in-depth analysis of case-study research validity and reliability issues, Riege (2003) provides guidelines on how to achieve validity and reliability in marketing case-study research. He suggests that, for realism-orientated research, there are four tests that are more related to quantitative research, and four corresponding tests more related to qualitative research. All are applicable to case-study research, which “can and should be incorporated to enhance the quality of case study methods in marketing research (Riege, 2003, p.80). He also adds that “design tests are not the primary drivers of rigorous case study research and even could suppress the discovery of new meaningful insights and as a result not

maximise the quality of the research”. As shown in Table 4.8., these techniques occur in various stages of case study from research design to report writing.

**Table 4.8:** Tests and techniques for validity and reliability in case-study research (Riege, 2003, pp.78-79)

Test	Techniques	Corresponding test	Techniques	Phase in which techniques occur
<b>Construct validity</b>	Use multiple sources of evidence; Establish chain of evidence; Have key informants review draft case study report;	Confirmability	Confirmability audit (examine the data, findings interpretations and recommendations);	Data collection; Data analysis; Report writing;
<b>Internal validity</b>	Do within-case analysis, the cross-case pattern matching; Do explanation building; Assure internal coherence of findings and concepts are systematically related;	Credibility	Triangulation; Peer debriefing; Member checks; Researcher’s assumptions, worldview and theoretical orientation; Researcher self-monitoring;	Research design; Data collection; Data analysis; Report writing;
<b>External validity</b>	Use replication logic in multiple-case studies; Define scope and boundaries of reasonable analytical generalisation; Compare evidence with literature;	Transferability	Pre-determined questions; Thick description; Cross-case analysis; Specific procedures for coding and analysis;	Research design; Data collection; Data analysis;
<b>Reliability</b>	Give full account of theories and ideas; Assure congruence between research issue and study design; Develop and refine case study protocol; Use multiple researchers; Record observations as concrete as possible; Develop case study database; Assure meaningful parallelism of findings across multiple data sources; Use peer review.	Dependability	Dependability audit (examine and document the process of inquiry); Clarify researcher’s theoretical position and biases.	Research design; Data collection; Data analysis.

Throughout the research process the best practices and techniques outlined above were followed to ensure validity and reliability. As validity and reliability tests have rather different application in quantitative studies than qualitative studies, Yin (2009) also suggests using four design tests as depicted in the table below, which provides tactics for construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability at different research stages. These tests are incorporated within Riege’s (2003) guidelines above.

**Table 4.9:** Case study tactics for four design tests (Yin, 2009, p.41)

Tests	Case study tactic	Phase of research in which tactic occurs
<b>Construct validity</b>	Use multiple sources of evidence; Establish chain of evidence; Have key informants review draft case study report.	Data collection Data collection Composition
<b>Internal validity</b>	Do pattern matching; Do explanation building; Address rival explanations; Use logic models.	Data analysis Data analysis Data analysis Data analysis
<b>Eternal validity</b>	Use theory in single case studies; Use replication logic in multiple case studies.	Research design Research design
<b>Reliability</b>	Use case study protocol; Develop case study database.	Data collection Data collection

On the other hand, Cepeda and Martin (2005) suggest that every researcher answers the following questions, which will ensure higher construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability for a positivist case-study project. While these researchers propose questions for positivist research, Riege (2003) argues that the same validity and reliability tests apply since realism follows a similar positivism tradition. In order to ensure the rigorous study, the proposed questions were also used as a checklist throughout the research process.

**Table 4.10:** Predominant criteria for evaluating design tests in the positivist paradigm (Cepeda and Martin, 2005, p.855)

Requirements for sound research	Design tests in positivist case	Evaluation questions
<b>Validity</b>	Construct validity	Are the study's general methods and procedures described explicitly and in detail? Do we feel that we have a complete picture, including "backstage information"? Are study data retained and available for reanalysis by others?
	Internal validity	How rich and meaningful or "thick" are the descriptions? Are the findings internally coherent? Are concepts systematically related?
	External validity	Do the findings include enough "thick descriptions" for readers to assess the potential transferability appropriateness for their own settings? Are the findings congruent with, connected to, or confirmatory of prior theory?
<b>Reliability</b>	Reliability	Are the research questions clear and are the features of the study design congruent with them? Have things been done with reasonable care?

#### 4.4. LIMITATIONS

This thesis, like any other research, includes methodological limitations. One of the biggest limitations might be considered to be the fact that this is qualitative research, which means that results cannot be statistically generalised, and thus the results might not be applicable outside the study context. A qualitative research approach results in convenience-sampling techniques and a large number of qualitative data gathered. However, the focus is on analytical generalisation instead (Yin, 2009), meaning that insights generated from qualitative inquiry are more important than sample size. In order to deal with reliability and validity issues to ensure a rigorous approach to case study, a large amount of methodological literature was reviewed, and best practices were followed. Another limitation would be the context of the oil and gas industry and the recession in the industry. The recession impacted DMC practices and resulted in changes in how the industry used DMC as a part of their practice. This means that, if the same study had been completed at a different point in time, it might yield different results. Similarly, the oil and gas industry is a distinct industry, and thus the results of this study might be not applicable to other industries.

#### 4.5. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This research study followed ethical procedures and requirements imposed by the university in accordance with the *Research Governance and Research Ethics Policies*<sup>15</sup>. It also received an ethical approval as a part of process *Student Project Ethical Review*. In addition, research guidelines provided by *Association of Internet Researchers*<sup>16</sup> were followed. As a part of primary-data collections, best practices for ethical research were followed (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). Before contacting the potential research participants, an information sheet about the project was prepared. Once participants agreed to be a part of the research study, an informed consent form was prepared, detailing the rights of the interviewee. In addition, anonymity was offered to all interviewees together with the observed companies.

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.rgu.ac.uk/research/research-governance>

<sup>16</sup> <https://aoir.org/ethics/>

## **5. FINDINGS**

### **5.0. CHAPTER OVERVIEW**

This chapter reports on the results of the three data-collection phases, as outlined in the Methodology Chapter. The discussion of the findings within the wider context of a conceptual framework and existing academic research is detailed in the Discussion Chapter. The analysis of case-study data should be undertaken in the way that makes most sense to the reader (Yin, 2009). Therefore, the findings chapter is structured into three sections, each reporting the results of a separate data-collection phase. While the data collection started with the observation, it was decided to start with findings from marketing agencies as they presented an expert view of DMC and its use in oil and gas industry. The longitudinal data is then presented to portray what was happening in the industry, and the final part deals with the interviews with managers from B2B SMEs, which aimed to understand why DMC were executed in a specific way.

### **5.1. INTERVIEWS WITH MARKETING AGENCIES**

#### **5.1.1. Introduction**

Detailed interviews were carried out with six participants from five Aberdeen-based marketing agencies during March-June 2016. The respondents from these marketing agencies varied in their role and included managing director, director, two marketing directors, creative studio manager and digital marketing strategist. Five out of the six interviewees were men working in marketing agencies, while Agency\_A was represented by two people: a managing director and a marketing director, who was the only female interviewee. It is important to note that Agency\_A is always represented by both the managing director and marketing director during client meetings, industry engagement and events as they believe it is important to complement each other during meetings and, therefore, they were both interviewed. Table 5.1. below summarises the agency types and interviewees' roles.

Marketing agencies had different positioning within the industry and focused on providing different marketing services. Agency\_A's website described it as a growth agency, focused on using data-driven decisions to build sustainable and transparent growth strategies for clients. As a part of its services the agency offered digital design and development, together with digital marketing services. The website of Agency\_B described it as a fully integrated audio, media and communications agency, which offered digital marketing and social media management services. It is important to note that, after the interview in March 2016, this agency went into administration due to the recession in the oil and gas industry which had led to significant declines in revenue and was bought by another firm. The interviewee from this agency left the company at this point and moved to another marketing agency. Agency\_C described itself as an integrated communications agency, offering creative marketing, PR and emergency response together with digital media and online engagement services. This agency was also affected by the recession in the oil industry and in April 2017 merged with three other agencies in Aberdeen to form

a new organisation. Agency\_D positioned itself as a B2B integrated corporate communications agency for the energy and oil and gas industries. This was the only agency with a specialisation in the oil and gas industry and the agency had offices in major oil and gas industry hubs, such as Aberdeen, Houston, Singapore, Rio de Janeiro, Stavanger and Dubai. In addition, as part of its services, the agency offered digital strategy services. In contrast, Agency\_E was a design agency that specialised in creating brand identities and advertising campaigns with web design and development.

**Table 5.1:** Interviewees from marketing agencies

Agency	Agency Type	Interviewee	Interviewee's Position	Interview Date	Interview Length
Agency_A	Growth agency	Manager_A1 and Manager_A2	Managing director and marketing director	01/03/2016	01:04:30
Agency_B	Media and communications agency	Manager_B	Creative studio manager	10/03/2016	44:52
Agency_C	Integrated communications agency	Manager_C	Marketing director	17/05/2016	43:24
Agency_D	B2B marketing communications agency	Manager_D	Digital marketing strategist	17/05/2016	58:36
Agency_E	Brand agency	Manager_E	Director	23/06/2016	46:53

These differences in market positioning of these agencies were important because the interviewees' views on digital marketing varied significantly depending on which organisation they represented. It therefore might be suggested that the interviewees' views of digital marketing were impacted by the type of agency for which they worked. While all five agencies had clients from the oil and gas industry in Aberdeen, mainly because it was the most dominant industry in the city, each of the interviews revealed significantly different views on DMC. Since interviewees were in leading management roles, the time available for an interview was limited. Therefore, the interviews were comparatively brief, lasting from 45 minutes to 1 hour and 15 minutes with Agency\_A, which was represented by two interviewees.

In addressing the research question, 29 separate codes were grouped into four broad categories for analysis and 21 sub-categories, as shown in Table 5.2. It is important to highlight that marketing agencies use the term digital marketing instead of digital marketing communications.

**Table 5.2:** Categories and sub-categories for interviews with marketing agencies analysis

Category	Sub-category
Digital marketing	Digital marketing strategy
	Digital marketing definition
	Digital marketing planning
	Digital marketing implementation

	Strategic digital marketing
	Online and offline integration
	Digital and traditional marketing differences
	B2B and B2C marketing differences
	Internal factors
	External factors
<b>Digital marketing channels</b>	Websites
	SEO
	Social media
	Mobile-optimised websites
	Mobile applications
	E-mail marketing
<b>Oil and gas industry</b>	Oil and gas industry features
	Oil and gas industry marketing practices
	Oil and gas digital marketing before recession
	Oil and gas digital marketing during recession
<b>Marketing agencies</b>	Agency role
	Issues and challenges

### 5.1.2. Digital Marketing

Given the focus of the project, it is not surprising that the interviewees discussed digital marketing in some depth. However, it is interesting to note that the managers expressed quite different views on what the focus of digital marketing should be. They outlined differences between traditional and digital marketing and advocated for integration. In addition, different marketing approaches for B2B and B2C companies were advocated and internal and external factors were identified as being important and influencing how companies approach digital marketing.

#### 5.1.2.1. Digital Marketing Strategy

One of the main topics discussed during the interviews was the general concept of a digital marketing strategy. The interviewees from all five agencies discussed what digital marketing was, how it should be planned and implemented within organisations, what the best practices of digital marketing were and how to use it successfully within an organisation. For the purpose of this thesis, and because of the large amount of data regarding digital marketing strategy, this category was sub-divided into four smaller categories.

##### 5.1.2.1.1. Digital Marketing Definition

As can be seen in Table 5.3., there was no commonly agreed understanding of digital marketing as the suggested definitions focused on quite different aspects. While Manager\_D offered a definition of digital marketing and described the actual role of digital marketing within a company, Manager\_E, from a brand agency, defined digital marketing quite differently as a “*brand story*”. The growth Agency\_A interviewees again described digital marketing from a different angle. Finally, Agency\_C, the communications agency, focused mostly on the communication aspect of digital marketing. Table 5.3.



shows some of the definitions provided by interviewees.

**Table 5.3:** Digital marketing definitions

Manager	Proposed Digital Marketing Definition	Focus/Key Elements
Manager_A1	<i>“Digital marketing [...] is about PPC, organic search, social media and email marketing, referral traffic, whatever it might be. Digital marketing [...] means information.”</i>	Digital channels and information
Manager_C	<i>“I would define it as any content that is being displayed, viewed, heard on digital media, new media, websites, the social media platforms, blogging, likes of YouTube.”</i>	Content on digital channels
Manager_D	<i>“Historically digital meant a website, [...] but now like digital is so much more than just a website, [...] digital now is [...] social media, it’s online PR, it’s the site itself, there is search engine optimisation, there is online advertising.”</i> <i>“Ultimately it is feeding the sales funnel, it’s uncovering leads and opportunities for sales. So, it’s going out with the right messages to the right targeted audiences and getting people engaged back through to your website, where you can then start to [...] nurture them, and be a bit more personalised, and how you communicate with these people moving forward.”</i>	Website and other digital channels which assist in the sales funnel by sending the right message to the right customer
Manager_E	<i>“I see digital marketing as a way of telling that brand story directly to very specific audiences in the way that they would expect to receive it.”</i> <i>“It is to take that brand story, whatever that happens to be – products, services, people – and create content that supports it across the different platforms.”</i>	Digital channels and how to identify the best channels for a company

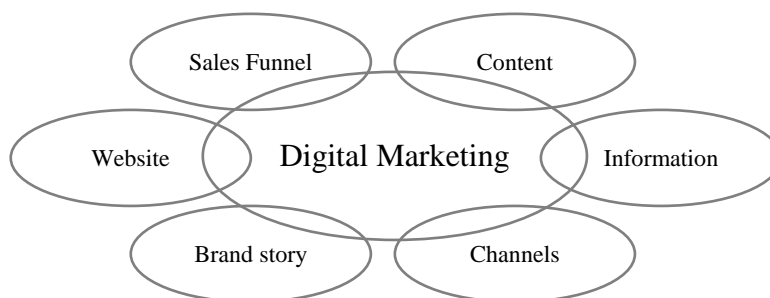
Once the understanding of digital marketing was established, the interviewees discussed digital marketing strategy. Manager\_D highlighted that a corporate website needed to be at the centre of a (digital) marketing strategy:

*“The centre point of your strategy needs to be your website [...], because effectively that is a global salesman who is working, 24 hours a day, every single day of the year, and is available to anybody in any corner of the world at any given time, so you need to really invest in that asset and see that as important as your lead sales person, so you should invest as much in your website as you would pay a salary to your top salesman, ‘cause that is how important website needs to be.”*

This interviewee also suggested that a multi-stage approach was required to create and maintain a successful website, seeing this as the key element of digital marketing. The interviewee’s detailed approach to websites is presented in the website section (p.111), which deals with specific DMC channels. For Manager\_D, the digital marketing process started with creating a website that could cater to all customers. Once the website was fully built and established, the focus shifted towards building the traffic to that website and utilising all other DMC channels for building this traffic: *“the ultimate end-point for all these channels is getting people from these channels back to your website, so everything is geared towards driving targeted traffic from all your channels back to the website”*. He explained that the main goal of digital marketing was to uncover sales leads, because digital marketing could help to

identify all the people who were engaging with the company’s content on various digital channels, and who were then coming to the company website. Companies were then able to identify the different traffic and understand what these people might need, and this could then help “*build the picture of what part of service they might be interested in*”. Manager\_D presented the most integrated approach towards digital marketing and how it should relate to overall business objectives, suggesting that the purpose of digital marketing was to help customers understand their needs and to reach customers on the various digital channels that they are using while communicating the same consistent brand message. It was strongly advocated that the website should be a lead-generation tool.

Interestingly, the other agencies did not provide such an in-depth explanation of digital marketing. This could be due to the fact that only the interviewee from Agency\_D had a separate role as digital marketing specialist, while the interviewees from other agencies were directors, communication managers, and marketing managers. These managers’ discussions focused on more tactical approaches towards DMC. Figure 5.1. presents the different approaches to digital marketing as discussed by interviewees. As can be seen, the focus moved from the brand story, website and sales funnel, to content and information, but all interviewees agreed that digital communication channels were an important part of digital marketing.



**Figure 5.1:** Digital marketing elements

Only Manager\_C mentioned the term “*digital marketing communications*”. This emphasis could be because Agency\_C positioned itself as an integrated communications agency. Overall, the communications aspect and communications theory were quite important to this interviewee. Manager\_C took a strong stance on this subject, stating, “*we tend not to differentiate [...] digital media versus traditional media, we see it very much as one, it is just another means of reaching your audience*”. It is important to indicate that, in the marketing industry, digital marketing is used instead of digital marketing communications. This would explain why other interviewees made no distinction between digital marketing, which is a broader term and includes more than the communications aspect, and digital marketing communications, which is the focus of this study.

It is, therefore, evident that the marketing agency interviewees understood and defined digital marketing differently as the focus moved from brand story, to information and digital marketing channels. These differences in defining digital marketing appear to be related to the different identities of the individual agencies and could be the reason why each interviewee’s suggested approaches to digital marketing

planning and implementation was different. Furthermore, the interviewees also offered very diverse opinions on the relative importance of different digital channels and how to utilise them successfully. It could also be suggested that these differences in understanding, represented by the different marketing agencies, will have influenced how client companies were using digital marketing and how successful they were, depending on which marketing agency they worked with.

#### 5.1.2.1.2. Digital Marketing Planning

Another important aspect emphasised was digital marketing strategy planning. Three agencies raised the importance of planning, suggesting that companies tend to get carried away with tactics and forget the planning. Several approaches to digital strategy planning were proposed. Manager\_C explained:

*“People get carried away with the tactical side of digital marketing, about what they can do and on the different platforms, whether it is Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn. But all good planning needs a strategy. It’s like any kind of marketing, [...] so don’t just think [about digital marketing] as about an add-on, it needs to be carefully planned. You need a direction, hence, a strategy.”*

Manager\_E argued that a long-term strategy was the key to success. He explained that, when there were no positive results, managers in the oil and gas and other industries tried to use some tactics and actions without any prior planning with a focus on the tactical side rather than strategic planning. They then expected immediate rewards rather than appreciating the value of long-term planning, however, it never delivered the results as *“they don’t have fair expectations”*. Manager\_D suggested the steps required to plan a digital marketing strategy and the associated questions that needed to be answered at each stage, as shown in Table 5.4.

**Table 5.4:** Digital marketing strategy planning stages

No	Stage	Questions
1	Customer identification to understand buyer types and their issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who buys from the company?</li> <li>• What types of customer exist?</li> <li>• What are customers’ “pain points”?</li> <li>• What can the company do to help these customers in their day-to-day lives?</li> </ul>
2	Content audit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What content could the company produce that would engage with this customer and alleviate the problems they have?</li> </ul>
3	Content planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What content themes and content types could the company produce?</li> <li>• What content format could the company produce? (Infographic, article, blog post, video, film)</li> </ul>

For some interviewees, digital marketing was all about being customer-focused and providing content or brand stories to these very specific audiences and satisfying their needs. Manager\_D also introduced *“content marketing”* to describe the above steps and highlighted that strategy was influenced by existing company resources. In his opinion, the most important element was to *“try and get as much mileage*

from each piece of content that we possibly can”, which he also related to spending the marketing budget effectively. This could be achieved through the re-purposing of content: for example, an article for a magazine could be e-mailed to an existing mailing list or spread through social media channels, which could then drive traffic back to the website, where the same article could be turned into a downloadable whitepaper. In his own words, “create once and use many times”. It is therefore evident that, to this interviewee, intensive planning was required for a successful digital marketing strategy, which was also highlighted by Managers C and E.

On the other hand, Manager\_E offered a different definition of digital marketing and thus a different approach to strategy: “One of the main challenges is identifying which part of that story fits best for which platform, for which audience. [...] We need to identify the parts of it that will work for Instagram, or parts that work for LinkedIn, or parts that are great for an e-mail campaign and use it that way.” He suggested the following questions, shown in Table 5.5., to identify the right channels. Similarly, Manager\_C noted that a basic understanding of audience and medium was very important, which was a “fundamental part of communications planning”. This could then inform creative ideas, unique selling points and marketing propositions, which should be aligned with all these factors. To achieve this understanding, the questions proposed are also shown in Table 5.5.

**Table 5.5:** Questions required to answer as a part of the planning process

Manager_E	Manager_C
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are you actually as an organisation?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Who is your audience?</li> <li>○ Who actually is your true audience?</li> <li>○ Who are your clients?</li> <li>○ Who are your potential clients?</li> <li>○ Which markets you are in?</li> <li>○ What are you interested in?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• What are you actually capable of managing in terms of any campaign or any digital marketing that you are doing?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does your audience act?</li> <li>• How do they behave?</li> <li>• What are the emotional drivers?</li> <li>• How medium works?</li> <li>• How audience interacts with the medium?</li> </ul>

Even though the interviewees had different perspectives on what digital marketing was, they all noted that organisations need to answer certain questions during the DMC planning process rather than rushing to the implementation stage and, creating profiles and posting on various social media channels.

#### 5.1.2.1.3. Digital Marketing Implementation

The third theme was related to the previous element of planning and focused on implementation. Discussion focused on whether digital marketing plans needed to be implemented by the agencies or by companies themselves. The interviewees acknowledged significant variance across their clients, with

some organisations only requesting digital planning from agencies while others opted for full strategy implementation undertaken by the marketing agencies.

According to Manager\_E, DMC should be undertaken by the company itself and therefore it was very important to know the extent of a company's resources as *"there is no point coming up with a huge strategy and then not being able to fulfil it"*. This manager suggested that the role of the agency should be in strategy formulation and planning only. Similarly, Manager\_B suggested that social media strategy should only be a consultancy project for companies to assist in the beginning: *"it's setting up the rules, helping them get it launched"*. However, Manager\_C added *"some of our clients are uncomfortable with organic social media, so they ask us to do this for them"*. Manager\_D agreed: *"it's very varied across our client mix, some from doing it all to doing just a bit of consultancy or support"*. He also advocated for working with clients at DMC strategy level rather than implementation to help identify which channels were important, what content should be created for these channels and help with the reporting and analytics. Manager\_C highlighted the challenges associated with strategy and its implementation:

*"I have worked on both sides. Many years ago I worked on the consultancy side, so I was involved in strategy, whereas now I am on the implementation side. I think that there are a lot of people out there that claim to be marketing strategists, and they may do a very good job in that aspect, but when it comes to implementation, the big difference in our business is creativity and you need specialist people to do that."*

There were different opinions and approaches suggested on whether DMC should be implemented by the companies internally themselves or should be undertaken by the agencies. While it was expected that agencies would advocate that DMC needed to be managed by the agencies, this approach was not suggested. This was because they realised that, for DMC to be successful, it needs to be fully understood and integrated by a company internally rather than relying on outside marketing companies. In addition, it could depend on agency's business model as often the tactical execution has low profit margin.

#### 5.1.2.1.4. Strategic Digital Marketing

Strategic digital marketing was highlighted by only three interviewees. This theme is also closely related to the planning discussed above. While Manager\_D focus was on DMC contribution towards the overall business goals, the other two Managers (C and A) noted that successful DMC strategy was that achieved specific goals, which were set for DMC by these companies.

Manager\_D had the most strategic approach towards DMC that it should contribute towards business goals. He emphasised that digital was different to traditional marketing and expanded on his opinion of the ultimate goal for DMC:

*"Marketing is becoming a lot smarter. They are putting content out to targeted audiences across digital platforms. Audiences are engaging with that and are coming back to their website. The automation software is picking up this traffic, is able then to tell marketing who these people are and what companies they work for. So, marketing is then able to go back to their sales team with leads and say [...] 'we have done this campaign, here is the*

*people who clicked on and gave us their e-mail addresses, here is a list of warm leads for you Mr Salesman to go on and to nurture and follow up.”*

On the other hand, Manager\_D suggested the presence of what he termed as “vanity” and lack of strategic thinking in the industry: *“Things like ‘likes’ are used as a vanity metric, [...] We put this post and we got thousand ‘likes’, but it is ‘like’, so what? What did that do for you? The end goal is always about enquiries, data, and customers’ details, and being able to follow up rather than just putting posts out and getting ‘likes’ and ‘comments’.”* He elaborated further that the goal of DMC was to get people to enquiry stage and keep a dialogue going with these individuals. Other managers also argued that successful DMC was the one that had the specific objectives. Manager\_A1 explained *“it [successful DMC] is something that comes back to the business, whether that is business growth, whether that is improved efficiencies”*. Manager\_C added that it was not necessary to be on all the channels to be successful because *“it again comes back to objectives, campaign objectives. What is the most important media you can use to reach your audience at any given time”*. For a company to successfully implement DMC practices, it needed to be fully integrated within the company with the aim of contributing to overall business objectives, and every campaign or initiative also needed to have specific objectives.

#### 5.1.2.2. Online and Offline Integration

Another aspect mentioned to some degree in all the interviews was online and offline marketing or traditional and digital marketing integration. Managers (D and C) mentioned that online and offline media channels integration was required to reach full potential for DMC. These managers took slightly different approaches, but both discussed the subject in detail and strongly advocated that online and offline channels should be integrated.

Manager\_D suggested that there should be an integrated approach in general: *“It should really be just your marketing strategy rather than having a digital strategy and a not-digital strategy. You obviously need to have a marketing strategy and digital really needs to be at the heart of that, it absolutely has to.”* Manager\_C also highlighted the idea of online and offline integration, however, from a different perspective, where no medium is more important than the other and *“we wouldn’t say that one medium is more important than the other, they all have their importance, it’s rooted to the commercial objectives of the business”*. Manager\_C further added: *“Digital media is new, but this is just another means of communicating. We don’t think in terms of traditional and digital, we think about content across both traditional and digital”*. In addition, Agency\_C had created a communications model built around 5Cs, integrating both traditional and digital, as shown in Table 5.6.

**Table 5.6:** 5Cs model

Cs	Explanation
Community	your audience
Content	everything around us, including words, pictures, images
Channels	how we deliver our message to our community, which is essentially media
Creativity	creativity and content which is a central point
Conversion	ways to achieve conversion

Manager\_D suggested an alternative approach to integration by giving an example:

*“If you have got your press release, that you want to put in the P&J<sup>17</sup> or one in the oil and gas publications, that’s fine. But let’s look at digital channels, let’s look at what we can do and taking that press release and re-purposing it, and putting it out through digital channels driving traffic through to your website. And we will tell you exactly how many people saw it, exactly how many people clicked on it, and exactly how many people came through to your website based on that. [...] You can say, it will cost us this much to create the ad, it will cost us this much to seed it out through LinkedIn, through paid for posts or paid for sponsored updates. What we can tell you exactly what that achieved, and there is no other medium that you can really do that, with traditional print ads you can’t do that, with press releases you can’t do that.”*

The above examples demonstrate the idea that there was a need to integrate both traditional and digital channels and have the same message delivered across various online and offline channels. However, interviewees argued for different ways of integration.

### 5.1.2.3. Traditional and Digital Marketing Differences

Another theme similar to channels integration, was the differences between traditional and digital channels and the advantages digital has over traditional marketing. Again, the same Managers (C and D) highlighted the benefits and advantages of using digital in comparison to traditional marketing communications. Manager\_D had a strong preference for DMC channels, arguing they bring many advantages, such as highly targeted LinkedIn advertising campaigns; drive traffic to the website directly; provide the exact numbers of how many people viewed the piece of content, clicked it and landed on the website; produce figures on what has been achieved; provide insights and analytics and are more accountable. Manager\_D felt that none of these benefits were possible with traditional channels, suggesting that only assumptions can be made about the success of an advertisement in a local newspaper. Similarly, Manager\_B suggested that *“there is no better way right now to reach people on the emotional one-to-one level, than digital”* and strongly agreed with Manager\_C on the main DMC advantage being measurability. Interviewees strongly believed in the benefits and advantages of digital

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<sup>17</sup> *Press & Journal* is the daily newspaper for North East Scotland

marketing in comparison to more traditional approaches, including measurability.

#### 4.1.2.4. B2B and B2C Marketing Differences

All six interviewees highlighted the differences between B2B and B2C organisations, which resulted in different marketing strategies for these companies. It was suggested there was a knowledge gap about DMC between B2B and B2C. Manager\_B explained that the *“digital way of thinking is a lot more natural thing to B2C companies in Aberdeen than it is to B2B.”*

While Manager\_E noted that differences existed in terms of channel choice, type of story and behaviours, Manager\_C suggested that DMC for B2B organisations was more about brand building and brand reputation and therefore was different to B2C. Manager\_B further argued that *“with retail or consumer, you can say, we did x and y happened, with B2B it can be slightly different”*. He added that B2B organisations usually focused on *“enhanced visibility, which then leads to maybe increased sales”*. It was suggested that building brand on DMC channels for B2B companies was more important, while B2C companies could even achieve sales from DMC channels directly. On the other hand, Manager\_D was slightly more sceptical about B2B organisations and the assumed necessity of having social media and asked: *“Why? Why do you want to have a Twitter page and a Facebook page? What do you have to say? And what are you going to use it for?”* He emphasised the need for resources commitment: *“because you need to keep a constant stream of content going out across all of them”*.

Overall, it was acknowledged that B2C and B2B organisations required a different type of marketing. In essence, these organisations had different goals and reasons for participating in social media and digital channels. While direct sales from digital channels were possible for B2C companies, this was much harder to achieve for B2B companies.

#### 5.1.2.5. Internal Factors

Four interviewees raised the idea that internal factors, such as people, resources and managing directors, influenced DMC use within organisations. Manager\_E suggested that, in Aberdeen, digital marketing was a *“generation thing”* and managing directors from older generations were more used to relying on traditional marketing approaches. Thus, their position and attitudes towards DMC played an important role in influencing the use of DMC. Similarly, Manager\_B noted that an important aspect in the use of DMC was the board’s attitude and whether DMC drivers came from top management. Typically, there was a negative attitude towards digital, and thus top management was considered as a barrier for DMC.

Furthermore, Manager\_B argued that digital marketing *“has to be fully grasped by everybody from board all the way down, so say this is where you are all ambassadors for the company and you are ambassadors for the company via digital media”*. He also recommended *“if you don’t have people who are really on the ball internally, don’t do it [DMC]”*. It was argued that DMC was a responsibility of



the wider organisation and not only the marketing department and companies internally needed “*people who are champions of digital marketing*” and “*that passion always shines through*”. In particular, the most suitable people for social media were business development and sales people, as advocated by Manager\_B. Thus, it was emphasised that companies needed to have enough resources for DMC and especially employees with the required knowledge. It was also suggested that internal company structure needed to be more flexible and digital marketing needed to be introduced to the organisation and integrated rather than used in isolation.

The interviewees thus argued that, for digital marketing to be successful within an organisation, it had to have a positive internal environment, including support at board level, full integration within various departments, and an understanding that all employees could play an important role in digital and social media marketing.

#### 5.1.2.6. External Factors

It was suggested that external factors, such as competitive influence, played an important incentive for companies to adopt and use digital marketing. Manager\_B explained “*Externally, competitors always raised the bar for other companies, so we do get a lot of enquiries to say ‘well they have got a better website, so we have to update ours’*”. However, instead of strategic use of DMC, Manager\_D noted a “*bandwagon approach*” and “*me too mind-set*” in the oil and gas industry. When competitors created a mobile application or LinkedIn or Facebook page, companies simply follow them “*rather than really thinking why and what’s your strategy, what are you going to do with this, when you have this, is there really a need for it*”. Thus, it was suggested that, if competitors used DMC, companies also considered them as a part of their communication toolkit. Though if no competitors used DMC, there were no proactive approaches in seeing DMC as an opportunity and gaining a competitive advantage.

#### 5.1.2. Digital Marketing Communications Channels

Interviewees’ discussion tended to focus on the website itself, which Manager\_D suggested should be seen as the core channel of any DMC strategy. In addition, social media was discussed in some depth by all managers. Interestingly, some Managers (B and E) used the term social media (marketing) and digital marketing interchangeably, which was a surprising finding, and could partly explain why some companies struggled with their DMC initiatives as there was a lack of knowledge demonstrated. While the website was discussed in some depth by all agencies, the closely related activity of SEO was noted by only two managers. Some managers talked in general about social channels, while others highlighted major differences between Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn as a DMC channel. Moreover, the use of mobile and e-mail marketing as DMC received little attention and was only briefly mentioned.

### 5.1.2.1. Website

Manager\_D advocated for websites to act as the main DMC channel for a company. According to him, the website should be the centre point of any marketing strategy. He suggested that the first step in digital marketing was to build an excellent website for all types of customers and stakeholders. When building a website, the concept of the buyer journey became relevant, as highlighted by Managers D and C. They suggested that there were clear steps that needed to be gone through when building and creating a website. These stages are presented in Table 5.7.

Managers suggested that the first stage of the process was identifying and knowing all customers and stakeholders for that particular website. Knowing all the stakeholders was highlighted as being particularly important because different types of stakeholders would require different types of content. Further developing the idea of successful websites, Manager\_D suggested that, once the website was created, the next stage was to start building traffic to that website. In order to build this traffic, owned, earned and bought media needed be considered, and a different strategy was required for each. A website is an owned channel as it belongs to the company, therefore it should receive the most focus. He highlighted that *“the ultimate end point for all these channels is getting people from these channels back to your website, so everything is geared towards driving targeted traffic from all your channels back to the website”* and added this can be achieved by using automation software *“as the glue that joins all of this”*.

**Table 5.7:** Website development stages

No	Stage	Questions to Answer
1	Identifying and knowing all customers and stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Who are the different customers and stakeholders?</li> <li>✓ When they get to the website, what are they looking for?</li> <li>✓ What information do they need to find on the website that’s going to nudge them closer and closer to feeling comfortable enough to pick up the phone, and approach the company, and engage with and speak about the sale?</li> </ul>
2	Discovery sessions	When customer lands on the homepage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ What do we want them to do?</li> <li>✓ What do we want them to see?</li> <li>✓ Where do we want them to go?</li> </ul>
3	Content audit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ What content is on the site at the moment?</li> <li>✓ What should be there?</li> <li>✓ What are the pain points that the product and service that you offer solves for the customer?</li> <li>✓ How do you articulate that on the website?</li> <li>✓ How do you tell these stories on the website, so that somebody would go from not knowing who you are, to coming to your website, to understanding what it is you do, and how you can help them, as they get deeper into their involvement with your organisation?</li> <li>✓ Do we have case studies?</li> <li>✓ Are we able to demonstrate things that worked previously?</li> </ul>
4	Traffic building to website using owned,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ What other channels do we have at our disposal?</li> <li>✓ How you are going to use them?</li> <li>✓ What content are you going to put on there?</li> </ul>

	earned and bought media	✓ What's the purpose of that channel?
5	Use marketing automation software (Optional)	
6	Website maintenance and evolution	✓ Does the website address the needs of your customers, whether they are at the very early stages of finding out about you, or they are at the stage, where they are literally ready to pick up the phone and engage with you on a sales conversation?

The final ongoing phase, according to Manager\_D, included making sure the website's content addressed the needs of customers *"at each stage of the decision-making process, so that the website can help nurture them down and get them to that sales-ready position"*. He also explained that it was important to *"make sure that on your website there is a window for people to give you their e-mail address, or give you their name, or just part with some sort of data, that enables you to keep a conversation going with them"*.

The above extracts capture the key points about the website as a DMC channel. Manager\_C also highlighted that there was a big problem with *"brochure type"* websites, when companies just created websites and left them: *"website never finishes, we start working on new website and it is never finished, it just evolves"*. Similarly, Manager\_B noted that some companies blamed websites for not bringing any business. However, he argued that these companies did not invest in their websites, they just built *"brochure type"* websites and did not use it as a business tool but left with no improvements. Managers suggested that website development was a multi-staged process, which required a lot of input from organisations, and websites should be viewed as an important investment.

Overall, the website as a DMC channel, its importance and how it should be created, integrated and managed, was discussed in detail by two agencies. The other three agencies did not go into detail about websites, suggesting they were not sure where they fitted as a DMC channel and lacked knowledge, although they noted the importance of websites, but could not fully explain why.

#### 5.1.2.2. Search Engine Optimisation

Another digital channel closely related to the website is SEO. However, this topic only came up a few times during the interviews and was discussed by only two interviewees (B and C). They mentioned an increased interest from their clients in SEO activities. The interviewees suggested that organisations had started to focus more on search as a way to acquire new clients, especially because this channel was considered to be free by clients. According to managers, the main goal of SEO was achieving higher rankings on search engines for key terms relating to their business, thus increasing visibility online. Manager\_C commented: *"we always advise our clients that they should invest in SEO, so they can build up their rankings, their positions, organically"*. However, it was clear that interviewees had limited knowledge on this subject and simple terms were used. This might be because managers were not involved in the day-to-day execution of SEO.

However, it was surprising that the other three agencies did not mention SEO activities at all. Again, this could be related to the previous point that, depending on the business model, marketing agencies might not necessarily want to be involved with SEO services. Nevertheless, it seemed to be strange that these marketing agencies were selling website development services, but SEO was ignored, perhaps on the assumption that SEO services would not bring high revenues.

#### 5.1.2.3. Social Media

During the interviews, social media was discussed frequently and in-depth by all participants. In general, managers agreed that social media, together with websites, were the most important channels for organisations. In some cases, Managers B and E used the terms “*social media*” and “*digital marketing*” interchangeably. In addition, when talking in general about digital marketing, the answers and examples given were about social media. Thus, they appeared to see digital marketing largely as social media, which may indicate a lack of understanding.

Managers started by noting the advantages the use of social media could bring to organisations. As Manager\_C explained that social media was “*about the personality of your business, so it is all about brand building, brand profile*”. Manager\_B also added the need to have a social media presence as a way of building relationships: “*the relationship is built there; the reason why it is important, because sometimes you need that relationship when times are really bad, you will need people to support you.*” Going further, Manager\_B used an example to illustrate how two different companies responded to an oil and gas leak. One company had a social media presence and large fan base while the other did not. When a major leak incident happened, the first company used social media to appear transparent in its response to the incident and received suggestions and advice from its followers on social media, who wanted to help the company. The second company did not engage with social media and, therefore, received no help and support from the community. Despite the fact that the company was not on social media itself, there was a good deal of negative criticism of the company on social media.

Manager\_B argued that it was not enough to use social media promotionally, because it needed to be a “*two-way conversation*” to be successful, which was still quite rare among companies. Managers suggested that other elements, such as internal company factors, were important influencers on successful social media marketing within organisations. It was proposed that employees needed educating in social media use and its importance, that social media required more involvement from other departments, not only the marketing team, and that a company’s culture, in particular the managing director’s personality, played an important role. Manager\_E suggested that people who were in charge of social media in companies should use it personally: “*People understand Facebook, they understand LinkedIn, they understand Instagram, and if you are really using those personally that’s going to be a lot easier for you to use them within the business.*” Similarly, Manager\_B noted that his agency did not like to manage social media channels for clients and encouraged companies to manage these channels

themselves, because it needed to be understood by all in the organisation and fully integrated: *“Social media has to be grasped within the organisation, that this is a key part of their marketing mix and that’s how you communicate with your customers one-to-one.”*

It is evident that, in the opinion of the interviewees, social media required different approaches from the organisations that wanted to employ these platforms as a communication channel. Nevertheless, a number of challenges for using social media were also identified. Manager\_C noted that some of their clients were afraid of social media. He felt that the main challenges that came with social media included control of the message and argued that there are two types of control: the message and employee’s behaviour. To avoid the control issues, it was important to have a social media policy within the organisation, which would include instructions on what the company’s employees could and could not do with social media. Other issues included social media being 24/7 as it did not finish at 5 o’clock when office hours were finished. However, Manager\_E argued that the challenges that came with social media can be turned into advantages:

*“What is important about that is you can manage that problem, don’t be scared of negative feedback, don’t be scared of negative comments, because at least if you are involved in it, you have a chance to counteract that. If you are not involved, if you are not online, if you are not occasionally there, they are still complaining about you. You just don’t know it and you can’t do anything about it.”*

The differences between B2B and B2C social media marketing were highlighted again. Manager\_C explained that, for B2B organisations, social media was more for brand building and brand reputation, while it was possible to achieve sales for B2C, such as restaurants and fast-food outlets. Manager\_E argued that social media for B2B organisations was a more complex process that required time: *“you are not going to get any new sales out of that for B2B, you might, but the chances are you will not”*. Manager\_D also acknowledged that social media was significantly different for B2B and B2C organisations and went further, questioning the need of social media for B2B organisations in general: *“We just have these pages and don’t nurture them, they very quickly become out of date, because nobody has got the time to keep them updated and you need to have a strategy, how you are going to use them in the first place”*. He also added that social media required a lot of resources.

Manager\_E, on the other hand, was a strong advocate of using social media and suggested a strategy for choosing social media channels. He pointed out that the starting-point should be the big social networks, but it was not necessarily the end-point. He argued that it was important to measure social media to see if it was working for what was planned, in terms of devised goals. Once these companies knew what they wanted to communicate, who their target audience was, it was only then possible to identify how to share the brand story. Again, Manager\_E’s views were based on his agency’s views that digital marketing was *“telling the brand story across different channels”*. However, he acknowledged that it was important to measure social media *“to see what is working, what is not working and have actions*

*at the back of that, so you can improve*". He concluded: *"We do it in traditional ways as well, 'cause we are a brand agency, we are not concerned about the end platform, because we are just concerned about how to communicate a company"*.

Facebook was briefly noted separately as a communication channel. Manager\_B explained that *"Facebook communications is about community building around that interest, which is a company's product or service"*. Managers B and C associated Facebook with corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities and a softer story. In practice, in some marketing agencies, Facebook is a part of the PR offering and not digital marketing. As Manager\_C explained *"people are reading this [Facebook] in their leisure time, they don't want to be sold to, so you talk about CSR aspects of your business, you talk about personality of your business, so it is all about brand building, brand profile."* Manager\_B also suggested that Facebook was useful for graduate recruitment, but *"to drive sales through, it's not being taken seriously as a business source"*. Twitter was another channel mentioned briefly with some questions posed about its use. One of the reasons for this could be the nature of Twitter, as it was suggested by Manager\_B *"they [Twitter tweets] shy away from any personality, they shy away from two-way conversations"*. While Manager\_C highlighted the complexity of this channel *"Twitter is slightly different, because it is such a fast-moving medium"*.

LinkedIn was seen positively by all interviewees as a useful social media channel for organisations, and in particular its benefits for B2B organisations were highlighted. Manager\_D highlighted the various benefits and importance of LinkedIn, especially for the B2B industry: *"If there was any one channel that I would suggest you invest in, in B2B space regardless of the size of your company, that would be LinkedIn"*. He also suggested that LinkedIn had very targeted and cost-effective advertising options and was a great platform for sharing existing content, which could be easily re-purposed for LinkedIn: *"You can track how well that performed, either by how many people have clicked through to your site, or how many people have decided to follow your LinkedIn company page of the back of that, so it is just a super smart way of working"*.

Other advantages of LinkedIn included that it was a useful platform for recruitment and business development, together with networking, and that it could help create an authority for the company and increase brand visibility. It could also help with communication and discussion with information gathering and sharing. However, at the same time, some problems associated with LinkedIn were identified, such as lots of noise and the difficulty of getting noticed. It was suggested that some people used LinkedIn like Facebook, it required effort to build authority and there were too many irrelevant connections. Lastly, Manager\_C suggested that one of the biggest challenges was how businesses used LinkedIn, as organisations did not engage in two-way conversations with their audience but used it as a promotional one-way communication channel.

#### 5.1.2.4. Mobile-Optimised Websites

Website optimisation for mobile devices is closely related to SEO. Three interviewees brought up mobile optimisation as an important element for DMC. Manager\_D again provided a strong stance on mobile-optimised websites:

*“Website needs to work as hard for you as it possibly can, so I really cannot stress the importance of having the website that operates across all devices, ‘cause you will be surprised, how many oil and gas companies still don’t have a site that works on mobile, or works on tablet, and that’s a pretty fundamental requirement now, that you have a responsive site that works across any device.”*

Managers B and C also noted that responsive websites, which work on desktop, tablet and mobile devices, were now their default websites and that companies have only started to ask about responsive websites. According to Manager\_B, the shift has occurred because the focus has shifted to visibility on search engines and search as a channel for reaching customers. In addition, both managers mentioned that clients understand changing search behaviours and the importance of mobile technology.

#### 5.1.2.5. Mobile Applications

Only two managers mentioned mobile applications. Even when probed about mobile applications, interviewees were quite short and did not go into much detail about this channel. In addition, these two managers were quite sceptical about the mobile applications. As Manager\_B explained *“it’s not a marketing piece and it’s not just something you can get on your website”*. In the same vein, Manager\_D added: *“We always say to our clients, before we would take an app project, you have to convince us that the app is doing something that the website can’t do, otherwise, don’t build an app.”* It could be concluded that mobile applications were not deemed to be an important DMC channel.

#### 5.1.2.6. E-mail Marketing

Similarly, only two managers mentioned e-mail marketing as a DMC channel. It could be the case that interviewees did not see e-mails as a part of digital marketing, meaning that they used a definition of digital marketing that focused on websites and social media channels.

Manager\_B commented *“e-mail marketing is very under-used in B2B, [...] I have always been a big fan of it: it’s one-to-one, it’s immediate, and it’s relevant, or you can make it be as good as that. But it’s not used often or a lot by B2B, but, perhaps, it should be.”* On the other hand, Manager\_D was not convinced about e-mail marketing as a separate tool for organisations but suggested it should be used more as a channel that was an integrative part of automation software. When using e-mail marketing as a part of marketing automation, it could deliver the following benefits: *“To create different e-mails to send out to different lists, and through automation software we can see how many people have opened it, how many people have gone back through to the website, if they clicked around through the website, and how valuable each person, who has opened, has been”*.

Manager\_D mentioned that e-mail marketing could still be used for digital communications, but the e-mail communication campaigns needed to be clearly targeted to specific people and the same messages cannot be sent to the whole mailing list: “*you need to do it in the correct way, you need to be segmenting and you need to be getting the right messages to the right people*”. While e-mail marketing as a channel could offer benefits, it was not mentioned and discussed by the interviewed agencies in detail apart from noting that its use needed to be fully integrated with the other channels.

### **5.1.3. Oil and Gas Industry Marketing**

In general, interviewees suggested that the oil and gas industry was different to other industries. Thus, understanding how oil and gas industry operates, was important in trying to understand DMC practices.

#### **5.1.3.1. Oil and Gas Industry Features**

The difference of the oil and gas industry emerged as one of the key determining factors for marketing practices. It was suggested by interviewees that the oil and gas industry operated differently in comparison to other industries. All six managers mentioned that the industry was very specific, and therefore it was important to understand how the industry operated in general in order to understand the marketing practices employed by companies in this industry.

The important aspect related to the oil and gas industry was the fact that it was very localised and, therefore, strong local professional networks had been formed. As Manager\_A1 explained: “*In Aberdeen the oil and gas market is very localised, it’s very people engaged with knowing each other for a long time*”. Therefore, he suggested there was no need for online search activities as people already knew who sells what. Manager\_E went even further on the networking topic and emphasised the business networks and how they operated in Aberdeen by giving an example:

*“We are working with a decommissioning company [...] and those five guys, who started two years ago, all worked at the same company three years ago, and now they are starting to work together. And then, two months ago, they set up a sister company, and the three people in the sister company, they all worked together before. And they got another joint venture with a technology company and it’s the guy that worked with them two companies ago.”*

When describing how the oil and gas industry operated, Manager\_E used the term “*old boys club*” because these people knew each other, they were from an older generation and the industry was dominated by men. Manager\_E referred to this term quite a few times during the interview to highlight how the industry functioned. Such people in the industry, according to the manager, did not see marketing as being important in driving sales. Due to the importance of professional networks, the industry needed a different approach when it came to marketing, as Manager\_E explained:

*“Their marketing isn’t the same as [...] in other industries would be, because they know each other, they got that network. It [marketing] is really back-up of what they are saying, clarity of what they are saying, and ensuring that their names and what they do are just*



*kept in the forefront of the industry's mind. [...] Generally, they all still see marketing as a role down, that the right one-to-one business development is how they still see it. [...] That's what I heard a lot of times is like, 'well the only problem is that we can't get in front of people, and we know who to speak to'."*

The extract above illustrates how marketing was perceived in the industry as being less important, because the focus was on one-to-one business development activities. Manager\_E continued that oil and gas companies “*see marketing in general as a tier below in business development*”. He also used an industry example to illustrate the situation and again noted that search activities were not required in the industry:

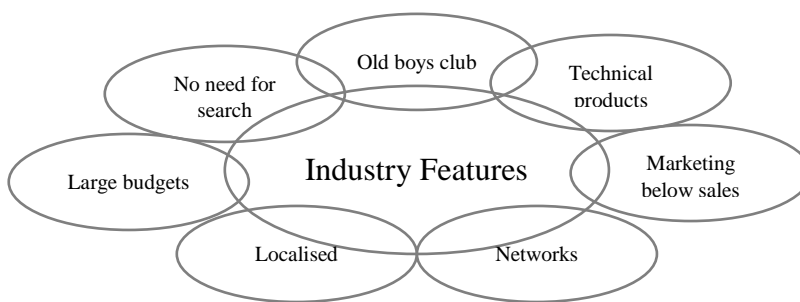
*“If you are a technology company that offers drillers some technical [...] widget that allows them to see what's going on down the hole, you will know the 20 people who you need to talk to. You will know them face-to-face, so they are not finding you through the website, they are not doing a search, for example, downhole widgets, you know who they are already.”*

Furthermore, in the oil and gas industry, products were very technical – an example being used by Manager\_A1 was “*a rotating circuit for a horizontal drilling sub*” – which meant that only a very few companies would need that product and, thus, companies that do not need the product would never search for it online, which would result in low search volumes, as explained by Manager\_E. The technicality of the products was related to the networking aspect of the industry, where people knew each other and thus Manager\_A2 explained that digital marketing in oil and gas industry “*is about giving somebody more real estate for their sales message and less about an organic search strategy, because no one is looking for what they have got, when only six people in the world know what it is*”. It was suggested that, due to technical products in the industry and strong networks, there was a limited need for search activities, as client companies knew where they could potentially get the specific product and the companies themselves, who provided these specific products, knew all their potential clients. This aspect of the industry is closely related to how companies use their websites and the relative importance of SEO. In general, SEO as a tactic to acquire new customers were not applicable to the industry, as it was more important to make sure that potential clients know the company name and can do a brand search to find that specific company.

Interviewees explained that, historically, there had been large budgets for all parts of the business, including marketing, in the industry. However, because of these, Manager\_A1 suggested there was “*a little bit of laziness*” in the industry “*because there has been an abundance of marketing budgets, in terms of big budgets, people were getting away with doing a bare minimum; if it doesn't work it doesn't work, and they would get to the end of the month and they can go to another one*”. Manager\_A1 also explained that the oil and gas industry was a very lucrative market, with the actual market sizes being much smaller in comparison to other industries, which, in his opinion, affected the way online and digital marketing could be used in general. The example given was a comparison between a window-cleaning company, which would require a large number of the clients to keep going because of the very low cost

of its services, and a company in the oil and gas industry with one contract earning up to £100,000 or £150,000.

The oil and gas market consisted of the main oil and gas operators and large services companies, which were supported by many smaller organisations in the whole supply chain. As suggested by Manager\_A1, this factor affected which marketing approaches were used in the industry. The main approaches included oil trade shows, brochures, presentations and receptions, which were associated with sales activities. The composition of the industry also meant that dynamics and industry structure was different as these small servicing companies usually needed only a few big clients to sustain a profitable business. Figure 5.2. summarises the main oil and gas industry features that emerged from interviews with marketing agencies. Interviewees argued that, due to very technical products, strong business networks and localised industry, the oil and gas industry considered marketing below sales activities, and thus argued it was not necessary to focus on search marketing.



**Figure 5.2:** Oil and gas industry features

### 5.1.3.2. Marketing Practices in Oil and Gas Industry

Interviewees argued that the oil and gas industry had different features to other industries and thus very specific marketing approaches were required. An important aspect that emerged during the interviews, was companies’ attitude towards marketing in general and how, in these interviewees’ opinion, it was not treated as an important function within the organisations, but only as a supporting activity. These views are displayed in Table 5.8.

**Table 5.8:** Quotations illustrating the perception of marketing as a supporting activity

Quote – Evidence from Interviews
<i>“I always feel that some companies treated you like you [marketing manager] are ordering mugs, or you are buying cutlery for the kitchen, it is like it’s something they have to do, but they don’t really put any value in it.” (Manager_E)</i>
<i>“I have been involved in meetings, in board level meetings [...] it [marketing] is never taken as in-depth as some operational stuff and the production issues.” (Manager_B)</i>

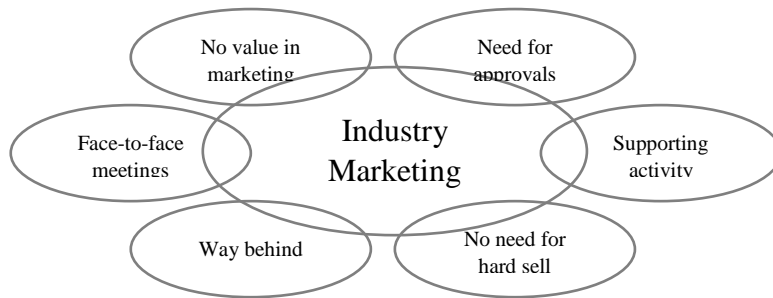
*“In our experience [marketing manager] could have been someone organising events or organising the branded pens and they give the title of the marketing manager without actually being the professionals. Not once have any of these organisations in my experience asked a marketer to join their budgeting discussions.”*  
(Manager\_A2)

Manager\_E also mentioned how complicated it was to hold a marketing position in the oil and gas industry: *“Whether the role was marketing manager, communications manager, we don’t envy that role at all, because it seems to be their office fighting the battle just for companies to see the value in marketing alone”*. However, it was advocated that marketing should work together with business development in order to drive success to the companies because marketing *“gives the tools to those business development people, it’s a consistent way, it’s a consistent voice, it’s again a way of supporting what they are selling; what you don’t want is 20 sales people going out there and talking about everything in 20 different ways”* (Manager\_E).

Manager\_D, who came from a digital agency in London back to Aberdeen, highlighted several times the issue of the oil and gas industry being *“well behind”, “far behind the curve”* and *“way behind in terms of digital marketing”* than other industries as *“doing press releases and working with newspapers again was almost like taking a step back really”*. In his opinion, age was a barrier for the industry as *“the decision makers in the oil industry tend to be older people, who haven’t quite embraced that, and don’t get that, and are a bit suspicious of it [digital marketing]”*. Another challenge with marketing was identified by Manager\_B as the need for approvals because everything *“must be approved.”* In addition, Manager\_E suggested that, because of the industry type and its features, there was no hard sell in the oil and gas industry as B2B companies *“haven’t had to sell a lot in recent years, because oil was so booming, you were just waiting for a phone call”*.

Manager\_D added that there was lack of accountability from marketing as *“it didn’t really matter what they [marketing managers] did, and they weren’t really judged, they weren’t really scrutinised on exactly what the results were for what they were doing”*. As a result, these *“people got quite comfortable and everyone was quite safe and nobody was really asking what the money was spent on, and everyone just kept doing what they always have been doing”*. As Manager\_A1 explained, there was *“a little bit of laziness”* in the industry. Moreover, another challenge suggested by Managers D and A2 was the challenge of identifying the right people to speak to in organisations about digital marketing. The issue was to choose between marketing managers or managing directors, because managing directors did not understand the marketing and marketing managers did not have any power.

Figure 5.3. represents the main themes in relation to marketing practices in the oil and gas industry. In general, historically, the oil and gas industry did not see value in marketing activities, and there was a lack of knowledge and respect for the marketing function. On the other hand, there were large marketing budgets, no accountability for marketing practices and a strong focus on sales activities instead of marketing.



**Figure 5.3:** Marketing in the oil and gas industry

### 5.1.3.3. Digital Marketing before the Recession

Digital marketing practices were also discussed with interviewees. The overall impression gained from the interviews was that digital marketing was not deemed to be an important activity within the oil and gas industry in line with views towards marketing in general. However, the recession in the industry had resulted in changes in how digital marketing was seen. This section presents the views of digital marketing before the recession and the following section deals with digital marketing during the recession.

As Manager\_E suggested, marketing in the oil and gas industry was simply the “*old B2B way of working*”. Correspondingly, Manager\_D mentioned several times that the oil and gas industry was “*way behind*” and “*far behind*” when it came to DMC practices. Managers A and D referred to marketing in the oil and gas industry as being old-style PR activities, where no accountability was required as illustrated in Table 5.9.

**Table 5.9:** Quotations illustrating the focus on PR activities

Quote – Evidence from Interviews
“There is a lot of people who tend to think ‘I saw my picture in the P&J <sup>18</sup> , so that’s great and that’s all that I am interested in’ and that’s success for them. What is really said about your company, and what you do, and why should people buy from you, and what’s the impact of that have been? Have you had enquiries? Have you had visits to your site? Or people want to find out more about you?” (Manager_D)
“In our market, particularly in oil and gas-based industry, there has been lots of money thrown away; in some cases of charging £10,000 for a PR campaign.” (Manager_A1)

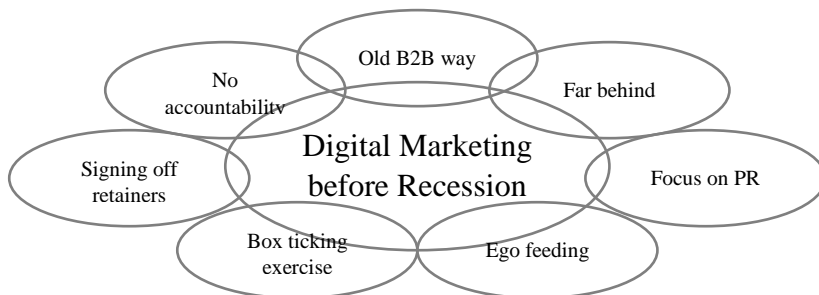
Manager\_D explained that, historically in the oil and gas industry, the focus was on PR activities, because “*in the good days when the oil price was high, marketing wasn’t really something people cared, [...] you didn’t have to be quite as accountable as you do now, [...] you had your marketing budget, which was a sizable sum of money, and you just spent it.*” Another important aspect related to this focus on traditional PR activities was the lack of, or even no, accountability, for these practices. To illustrate the situation, Manager\_D used an example of “*clients, who were spending, signing-off monthly retainers with agencies and not really asking what they were getting for that*”. It was common practice in oil and

<sup>18</sup> *Press & Journal* is a daily newspaper for North East Scotland

gas industry to pay monthly agency fees for marketing services that they did not know what they were getting as no questions were asked.

Interviewees noted that DMC practices were not widely used within the oil and gas industry. Their explanations for this related to attitudes towards marketing in general, as detailed in the section above. One example given to illustrate the situation by Manager\_B was that a company wanted to redesign its website simply because the competitors had a nicer one. This example also illustrates how companies did not see websites and digital marketing as a valid and important tool in their strategies. In general, according to Manager\_B, (digital) marketing was seen as a “*box-ticking exercise*” as “*money was no object*”. This manager also expressed his frustration about these practices: “*We would tell them that they need people internally to help manage digital marketing and push that, but whether they attribute somebody to [work on marketing] or not, sometimes they just build it and then left it like that, there was no continuous effort to maintain that and push that*”.

The terms associated with DMC practices before the recession are displayed in Figure 5.4. It is evident that digital practices were seen negatively as not adding any value in the oil and gas industry. The focus was on traditional PR activities with limited accountability and large associated budgets, which meant the industry was “*far behind*” with its approach towards digital marketing.



**Figure 5.4:** Digital marketing before recession

#### 5.1.3.4. Digital Marketing during the Recession

Interviewees reported that things started to change, and organisations started to become interested in DMC due to the major downturn in the industry, which started in 2014 and deepened through 2015 and 2016. Managers suggested that the shift towards digital marketing in the oil and gas industry occurred because of the recession, which resulted in smaller marketing budgets and more accountability, as displayed in Table 5.10.

**Table 5.10:** Quotations illustrating the changes in oil and gas industry

Quote – Evidence from Interviews
<i>“Up until recently nobody needed to know much about digital, because they [oil and gas companies] were just carrying on doing what they always have done, and nobody was asking any questions. It is only now, that they had to be more accountable, they have to fight for every penny, they have to justify, what they got for that spend, because in the past it was just a given and it just happened.” (Manager_D)</i>
<i>“It is caused, of course, because there are lower budgets, smarter people saying ‘we have to be smarter’, but it is slow.” (Manager_E)</i>
<i>“Especially at the moment, we are seeing a lot of changes in marketing in companies.” (Manager_B)</i>

Managers suggested that the changes occurred because of smaller marketing budgets, with Manager\_B highlighting *“that old B2B way of working is dying”*. Similarly, Manager\_D added: *“A lot of people were riding on the good wave and, in fact, for a long time and it’s only now, when they changed. You can’t just sign off retainers and just sit back and wait. You need to be able to say what you have got for your money, you need to prove, what you spent and what you got for that spend.”* Manager\_B argued that there was more interest in digital within the industry: *“e-mail marketing, we are starting to get a bit more enquiries, how can we be cleverer, how can we get leads going directly to the website, automating content, automating inbound marketing, and content marketing”*. Managers noted that while oil and gas B2B companies have just started to consider digital marketing, B2C companies have already been actively engaged with digital marketing practices. However, Manager\_D felt that the pace of change was very slow. He suggested that the *“we have always done it this way”* approach existed in the industry, which resulted in slow adoption. It was suggested that there was more interest in digital because it was seen as a more cost-effective option. Manager\_E further argued about the changes in the industry:

*“These old boys club, traditional businesses, they have done really well over the years, and now have to work a lot harder. I have been in a room of intelligent, confident people, and they have just no idea what to do, and they are looking at these other ways that are successful elsewhere and thinking we need a bit of that.”*

Manager\_C also noted that digital platforms became of interest during the recession. However, he also advocated for the more traditional marketing approaches: *“it would be a mistake to hang your hat on it and just focus on digital”*. Interviewees also discussed how oil and gas companies were using DMC and which channels they were employing. Again, due to the nature of the industry, it was suggested that websites should be used for lead generation or supporting tenders. While Manager\_E suggested the supporting role of websites: *“They see their website and digital marketing as backing-up. It is ensuring that if people, who know them, are interested in what they do, everything is there, and that they are kept up to the forefront of people’s minds”*, Manager\_A2 explained how oil and gas companies should be using their websites in supporting tenders:

*“In your tender you might mention that your organisation in oil and gas has a specifically robust health and safety programme, [...] you are only given 250 words to write that, but you can write please visit our website for more information. On the website you have an*

*animation, which can then show just how smart you are and just how safety conscious you are. Instantly, being compared to your competitor, you have far more real estate”.*

However, Manager\_D argued that websites should be used as the main channels of communication in the industry and “*website needs to work as hard for you as it possibly can*” because it can generate leads for the sales department.

The topic of social media for oil and gas industry seemed to be of high importance as all managers commented to some degree on social media use within the industry. As discussed previously, due to the differences within the oil and gas industry, interviewees suggested that the main goals for companies to be involved with social media in oil and gas was visibility and brand building, presumably due to the recession companies wanted to show that they were still operating, as seen in Table 5.11. While Managers B and D suggested that DMC channels could potentially generate leads.

**Table 5.11:** Quotations illustrating the use of social media in oil and gas industry

Quote – Evidence from Interviews
“ <i>They [oil and gas companies] want to be on the list of people who are contacted when there is project around, they want to be projected as the best in their field, they want to do that and they do that with brand building and educating the audience rather than saying we have product x and we have product y, it’s more to do with that.</i> ” (Manager_B)
“ <i>Those [oil and gas companies] see social media as just a way of keeping their name out there and showing people, we are doing these things. I don’t think they see it as driving direct sales, because I do think we are still very much in the economy, certainly in oil and gas, it’s a little bit old boys club, they all know each other.</i> ” (Manager_E)
“ <i>It is all about brand building, brand profile. Definitely, at times of recession digital it would be seen as an option to just keep your profile up there, to keep you in front of the mind.</i> ” (Manager_C)

While it was acknowledged that the oil and gas industry used social media platforms to some extent, they were not used to their full potential. Various barriers were identified as to why oil and gas companies were not involved with social media. It was suggested that social media was not used a lot among oil and gas companies, because “*they don’t see the importance of it, because it doesn’t drive anything to their business*”. As a result, companies simply used social media as a tactical manner when they had a job opening or to circulate a press release. Manager\_C suggested an additional challenge with digital and the oil and gas industry: “*it has to work on remote locations*”, because oil and gas companies were based both onshore and offshore. Another challenge was that companies did not have flexible structures and approvals for everything were required. Manager\_B suggested that the nature of industry was “*a valid reason not to engage with social media*” by giving the example:

*“Some aspects of what gets done in the North Sea is not easy and clean and lovely and nice. There is a company that disposes of radioactive material, if you don’t understand the process and you don’t understand all the legislation, having a Twitter account can be completely misconstrued, and you are actually giving yourself a headache.”*

Several interviewees discussed LinkedIn and how it was not used by the oil and gas industry. It was suggested that managers from older generations were not supporting LinkedIn use and it was seen as a channel for HR departments, thus acting as a barrier for successful use, as shown in Table 5.12. Manager\_C gave an example of an occasion when, during a training session for the oil and gas industry, one of the attendees stated that LinkedIn was simply not the right channel and not a way that top-level executives and CEOs communicated and “*it is a waste of time*” and “*that’s not how you communicate with these people*”.

**Table 5.12:** Quotations illustrating the barriers for LinkedIn use in oil and gas industry

Quote – Evidence from Interviews
“ <i>In the most cases you have got an elderly gentleman sitting at the top, who sees LinkedIn as something that people go on to look for jobs, and they don’t have time to understand what it does.</i> ” (Manager_D)
“ <i>A lot of that is forgotten about and using a network like LinkedIn, people say, ‘oh it’s only for HR people’, but it is not, it is for business development, it is for networking, you can identify new contacts through LinkedIn.</i> ” (Manager_C)

Manager\_D further suggested that LinkedIn was ignored in the B2B industry and its power was underestimated: “*If there was any one channel that I would suggest you invest in, in B2B space, regardless of the size of your company, that would be LinkedIn*”. The main reasons given for this included the fact that there were six million professionals in oil and gas who had profiles on LinkedIn, and they were visiting LinkedIn daily. Such people would not visit a company website on a daily basis, but they visited LinkedIn up to seven or eight times a day. It was, therefore, important for oil and gas companies to have a presence on LinkedIn. In addition, there were various cost-effective, highly targeted advertising options. He also added that the benefits of LinkedIn have been proven with numerous clients, which included “*nominal spend*” with “*fantastic phenomenal results*”.

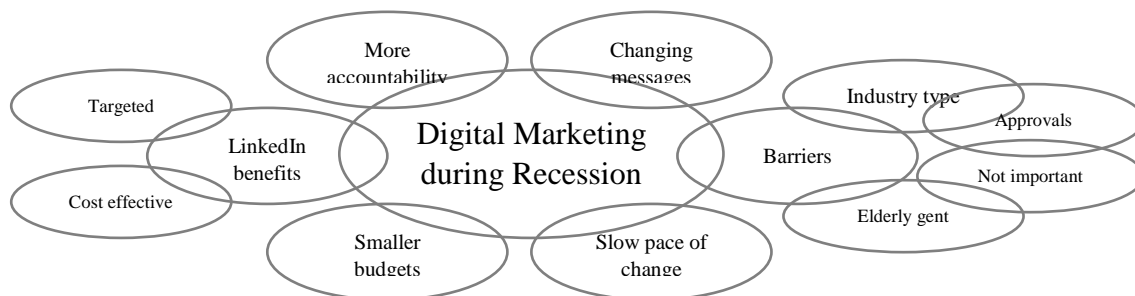
It was suggested that some oil and gas clients required only strategy consultancy services, while other companies asked agencies to plan and manage the channels, plan and publish all the content. However, the managers suggested that usually these are “*bigger oil and service companies, because they got the budget*”. Managers also highlighted that an increased interest in active social media and website use revolved around major oil and gas industry events: the oil and gas exhibitions, which take place every two years in Aberdeen (*Offshore Europe*) and Houston (*Offshore Technology Conference (OTC)*). Manager\_D gave an example of how different channels of trade shows and social media needed to be coordinated:

“*That tends to get quite active around about Offshore Europe or OTC, where we will actively be managing 4 or 5 social media channels for a given client and updating that with content every single day across OTC or across Offshore Europe based on events that they have been at or what’s happening on their booth or what talks they have been looking at.*”



However, even with the changing attitudes towards DMC, interviewees still identified a number of barriers to adoption including suspicion about digital marketing, a lack of understanding and older management hindering the process. An example used by Manager\_D was that conversations with clients when talking about Pay-Per-Click advertising included questions such as: *“How do you know that somebody [...] is a real person, it might just be a robot. I read something that Google have these robots that just knock up clicks automatically”*. Again, in his opinion, this could be explained by age: *“People with that suspicion and lack of understanding, because they have gone 30 years through their career without needing to bother about social media or online PR, or anything like that, so why should they suddenly change now”*. The *“elderly gentleman at the top”* was against DMC practices because *“they have come from the world of doing golf days, brochures, exhibitions stand”*. Manager\_B agreed there was a conservatism in the oil and gas industry that hindered the adoption of DMC.

When interviewees were prompted to share examples of companies that were doing well with digital marketing, they agreed that the industry was behind and could not think of any good examples. Only Manager\_D mentioned two clients who had a fully integrated approach, but he suggested *“they are the exception to the rule”*. In contrast, Manager\_B said, *“there is an awful lot of great examples in retail and consumer and there is people, individuals that get it”*, but could give no examples from the oil and gas industry. Figure 5.5. illustrates the main themes related to the topic of how approaches towards digital marketing started to change as a result of the industry downturn.



**Figure 5.5:** Digital marketing during recession

#### 5.1.4. Marketing Agencies

The final category of analysis relates to the marketing agencies themselves. Interviewees suggested that marketing agencies should play a role in educating the oil and gas industry about DMC as limited knowledge existed. In addition, it was suggested that industry language and jargon acted as another barrier.

##### 5.1.4.1. Marketing Agency Role

During the interviews, an unexpected theme emerged: the opinion that agencies should play an important role in educating the oil and gas industry about digital marketing. All five managers suggested that their

role was more important than only providing services, as shown in Table 5.13. Manager\_A2 also highlighted that it was very important to educate the oil and gas industry because the industry did not see marketing as being important.

**Table 5.13:** Quotations illustrating the role of marketing agencies

Quote – Evidence from Interviews
<i>“As an industry we have a role to a) help to educate businesses who want to do differently, and b) also to demystify where possible, because it can be very scary, and so much we do with digital, its options are so open that you can overwhelm people really easily.” (Manager_E)</i>
<i>“This is the one gripe I have about oil and gas because [...] I tried to explain this community together to change our branding, to change our perception of what marketing is, having an understanding of that.” (Manager_A2)</i>

Manager\_E held strong views that marketing agencies should engage with the industry and explain the opportunities DMC could bring to companies, however, it was important not to overpromise. According to him, it was particularly important to educate the industry during the recession, because the oil and gas industry *“aren’t used to having to work so hard to get a sale”*. Because of the recession, companies were becoming more interested in digital marketing, and thus three agencies (B, C and D) had organised seminars for oil and gas companies. As Manager\_D explained, the purpose of these free seminars was *“we will just tell you all about the way things are going, because if you need to be more accountable with your budget, or your budgets got smaller, there is a much smarter way of spending that”*. During these seminars, held in two oil and gas hubs, Aberdeen and Stavanger, the agency concentrated on introducing digital marketing and explaining how it was possible to be more targeted and accountable while using social media, content marketing and marketing automation. Manager\_B concluded *“the attendance for that, the appetite for that was huge”*.

#### 5.1.4.2. Issues and Challenges

To some extent, all interviewees mentioned existing challenges related to digital marketing. One frequently mentioned issue related to language and digital marketing industry jargon. Manager\_B was very sceptical about the language used in the industry: *“There is an awful lot of language used by companies [...] who try and take very simple concepts and make them more complicated, so they can charge a lot for it. [...] We are coming up with acronyms and terminologies for really simple kind of things.”* Manager\_E noted that his agency tried not to use these complicated terms but instead help clients to fully understand the talk.

Manager\_A2 also gave an example suggesting that language and jargon was a barrier for DMC: *“I could have talked for a day about digital marketing, attribution models, multi-channel attribution models, nobody had a clue what I was talking about, most people were terrified”*. Therefore, with the help of her managing director the language used has changed, since it was important *“to bring it down to the*

*language that the business owner will understand.*” Thus, a solution proposed by Manager\_E was simply using “*plainer language*”, in particular “*when you have somebody with an old traditional business, who might be intimidated*”.

### **5.1.5. Summary of Interviews**

Managers emphasised that companies needed to have a strategy with clear goals for DMC. It was suggested that DMC required online and offline marketing integration to reach its full potential. The differences between B2B and B2C companies were stressed, suggesting that different DMC strategies would be required. Managers also argued that internal and external factors influenced the use of DMC. Websites and social media sites were suggested as being the main DMC channels for oil and gas industry. LinkedIn was suggested as being the most suitable social channel for B2B organisations, while the use of Facebook or Twitter was more questionable.

Interviewees explained that the oil and gas industry operated differently in comparison to other industries and therefore its marketing required different approaches. It was suggested that the industry was very localised and based on strong local networks, where the “*old boys club*” dominated selling highly technical products. Therefore, business development activities were perceived to be more important and marketing was deemed to be below business development, described as “*box ticking exercise*”. Though, due to the major recession in the industry, resulting in smaller marketing budgets and a requirement for more accountability, companies had started to focus more on DMC.

## **5.2. OBSERVATION OF B2B SMES**

### **5.2.1. Introduction**

Observations were undertaken six times between November 2014 and September 2017. The first observation was undertaken in November 2014, before the major recession started in the oil and gas industry. The later observations were completed during the period of recession, which started in 2015, with a major decline in 2016, and the downturn still affecting the industry in 2017. Thus, the recession dimension became an important factor, which could explain the changes into how observed companies used DMC. The observation findings are structured by different DMC channel, with each channel presented by analysing all four companies together since they were selected as illustrations of the whole industry rather than as comparisons. This also allows the better identification of how the use of each DMC channel has changed and evolved over time. These observations provide the context for DMC use. Table 5.14. provides a summary of the observation dates. Observations 1, 2 and 5 were undertaken during a typical month and 2, 4 and 6 during major industry trade shows.

**Table 5.14:** Summary of observations

Observation	Date
Observation 1	November 2014 (Typical month)
Observation 2	September 2015 (Offshore Europe)
Observation 3	November 2015 (Typical month)
Observation 4	September 2016 (Northern Offshore)
Observation 5	November 2016 (Typical month)
Observation 6	September 2017 (Offshore Europe)

Observed companies are referred to as Company\_1, Company\_2, Company\_3 and Company\_4. Company\_2, which was acquired by a large multinational corporation in 2016, merged with that company before the final observation. Thus, during the sixth observation, no presence for the company's website was identified. The company's brand pages on social media were now used by the new company. However, the new company did not change any corporate information, such as logo, company name or contact details, just used Twitter and LinkedIn to share their latest updates. Therefore, the final observation for Company\_2 was not completed.

## 5.2.2. Website

### 5.2.2.1. Introduction

As discussed in the literature review, a company's website plays a major role in its DMC strategy. The website is the core channel with all other remaining channels supporting the website and bringing traffic back to it. Thus, this section deals with the website as one of the CSFs for a DMC strategy. The findings on the websites are structured by each observation. Results on SEO, which is very closely related to websites, are also presented. For full summaries refer to Appendix 9 (p.273) for websites and to Appendix 10 (p.281) for SEO.

### 5.2.2.2. Website Observations

The *first observation* revealed that digital marketing stages and associated tactics were implemented to different degree. In the *attract* and *engage/retain* stages, companies used various tactics, such as listing the company in industry directories and social media sites. Some of them also had a responsive website design. The companies offered some interactive functions, such as e-mail forms and word office maps, with only Company\_4 having e-commerce functionality. In order to communicate security and reduce privacy concerns, companies used various accreditations and associations' logos, FAQs and T&Cs sections. However, the *learn* and *relate* stages were less used within companies. Only two companies

offered the ability to sign-up for e-mails news and updates to communicate with potential and existing clients.

In the first stage *attract*, all four companies seemed to perform quite similarly. The companies were registered with various industry websites and directories, and therefore had a large number of related sites referring traffic to their corporate websites. In addition, their social media sites included the website address, referring traffic back to the website. However, Company\_1 did not offer any information about the company on its YouTube channel, not even a website address. Two organisations' website addresses were different from their company name, and only one company had a mobile-optimised website.

For the *engage/retain* stages quite similar activities were also identified within the four organisations: all companies had relatively good website loading speeds between 1.34 and 3.67 seconds, while Google (2018) recommends that a loading speed should be less than 2 seconds. The companies also utilised various interactive website functions (global office map, e-mail enquiry forms, lunch-and-learn booking form), to varying degrees, and used various membership and accreditation logos to communicate security and privacy. To keep current and potential customers interested in the company, links were provided to related social media sites. Two companies also offered some downloadable resources (datasheets, brochures and presentations) and three had news sections to inform users about the news from the company, with Company\_3 having a live Twitter feed instead of a news section on its homepage. Instead of the news section, Company\_1 offered a quarterly online magazine in PDF and ISSU format.

The *learning* stage includes capturing information from potential customers via online feedback forms or signing-up for e-mail news. Only one organisation offered an online feedback form, although two gathered information about potential clients by inviting them to join a mailing list and to attend lunch-and-learn sessions. Company\_1 offered a sign-up for its quarterly magazine instead. The *relate* stage, which includes personalisation/customisation, real-time interactions and e-mails to update about new products/services, was the least utilised within the organisations as only two companies used mailing that could serve this purpose. With regards to measurement, only two companies had Google Analytics, a free tool to analyse website traffic, installed.

Search engines are a major referrer of traffic to company websites. Analysis of how each company's website was optimised for search engines showed similar performance amongst companies. The SEO scores given for each company revealed that three out of the four companies had a similar rating of 53-58 and only one organisation had 71. The test gives a relative SEO score based on a 100-point scale and a higher score indicates that the organisation is performing well. The test focuses on on-page website elements. All companies passed 23-33 tests, failed 11-16 and had 3-9 warnings. This rating thus revealed that there was some scope for improvement and the websites could be better optimised for search

engines. While some of the SEO elements are quite technical, they are still important and are necessary for a successful website.

The user experience when browsing the websites was different. Company\_1 had the most complicated navigation, as there was no homepage button on the website and different categories did not have root pages, thus the overall browsing experience through the website was confusing. Company\_2's website was small and easy to use, while Company\_3's website was even smaller – only one page – which was also easy to use. One-page website consisted of single page, meaning that when a user used navigation links, it scrolled the user to that particular page section instead of opening a new page. Company\_4 had the largest website, with the biggest number of pages, but the overall navigation was quite easy to follow, and the use of breadcrumbs assisted in the navigation process. All four companies used agencies to design their websites. The homepage footers included the logos of the agencies that had designed the websites.

*Observation 2* was undertaken during one of the largest oil and gas industry events, *Offshore Europe* (September 2015). There were no major changes identified within the company websites or how they used the digital marketing stages. With the main elements for *attracting* and *engaging/retaining* stages well established, the next two stages of *learning* and *relating* with current and potential customers still lacked attention.

Since the first observation, Company\_1 had redesigned its website: there were some changes with the layout, navigation and pages, but the overall structure to the website, imagery, sections, and categories remained very similar. Navigation remained quite difficult as there were still no root pages for the website for the main types of products and services provided. However, after the website redesign, the company website was not registered in other industry directories and websites and thus did not have any links with other websites. In order to *engage* and *retain* potential customers, tools such as downloadable literature, presentations, and case studies were now more prominent on Company\_1's website and visible on every website page. In addition, various accreditations and memberships were added as part of the security and privacy statements. The website became mobile-optimised, and in the news section an additional "*news in the community*" section was added.

Observation 2 found that there were no major changes in how the other three companies used websites as their DMC channel. The focus remained on the first two stages of digital marketing. The *attract* and *relate/retain* stage included a larger number of tactics, while the next stages of *learn* and *relate* remained the same, with only one company offering an online feedback form, two companies offering lunch-and-learn sessions booking and two companies offering e-mail news and updates. This focus represents an approach where the website merely represents the business and the focus is on what the company offers rather than being customer-focused and focusing on features important to them.

Quite similar results were identified for SEO tests. However, the SEO scores were generally slightly lower than in the first stage. The same three companies' SEO scores were 51, 52, 53 and only one company had a slightly higher score of 69. Companies passed 25-33 tests, failed 12-20 tests and had warnings regarding 2-5 elements on their websites. While Company\_1 had redesigned its website, its SEO score remained the same.

In addition, domain authority (DA) test was added during observation two, which revealed that the DA score was between 28 and 36, with Company\_3 having a much lower DA of 18. The score is a relative score which predicts how well an entire website will rank on search engines. There are no clear benchmarks and the scores are very relative and dependant on the context. However, according to Allen (2017), the average MOZ DA for business industry would be 67. In this thesis, the context is SMEs and thus much lower scores were expected.

*Observation 3* was completed one year after the first observation (November 2015). There were no major changes in how the companies use their websites as a DMC channel. The same elements of successful digital marketing were used within the four organisations. However, one difference was identified: Company\_4 started using a real-time interactions function on its website, with real-time chat available on the website section related to training courses. It was, however, evident that some companies had stopped updating their websites and at the same time had stopped using social media for their marketing communications. Company\_1's last news update was in August 2015, Company\_2 – June 2015, and Company\_3's last news update was its Twitter feed dating back to April 2015. 2015 was the year of the major downturn in the industry. SEO score remained between 52 and 71 for the observed organisations. There were also no changes identified within DA scores.

The *fourth observation* was completed in September 2016 during the *Northern Offshore*. Some changes were identified within the organisations and their use of their websites. Company\_2 had been acquired by another company and therefore slightly changed the company name and logo, but no other changes were identified. In addition, Company\_4 had redesigned its website completely, though the company branding and use of colours remained. The website was much clearer and communicated the company's core offerings to site visitors well. The website was clean and clear with straightforward navigation. While it was a newly created website, the information and content remained similar to the company's previous website, just more user-friendly. The other elements of successful marketing had not changed.

For the *attract stage*, the same techniques were used. In addition, three companies had responsive websites optimised for mobile devices. In order to *engage and retain* visitors, all websites' loading speed was less than 1.7 seconds, and included various interactive functions. Companies placed importance on security and privacy statements. There were a large number of prominent accreditations and membership logos on websites. Company\_1 even had a "18 years in business" badge, while Company\_3 added a

new section on its website for accreditations and offered testimonials on its website. It seemed that the importance of these membership and accreditation logos was growing with each observation. However, the news sections remained neglected. For downloadable resources, Company\_1 expanded this section and more literature and images had been added. Company\_4, which redesigned the website, now offered cases studies, a glossary, various whitepapers and webinars, although registration was required to access them. The company added a new social media site Google+, but the hyperlink to a YouTube channel on the homepage did not work. There were no changes on the companies' websites in reference to the *learn stage*. Three companies offered the ability to sign-up for company news, and Company\_4 had stopped offering lunch-and-learn booking forms on its website. Only one company included online surveys on its website, and two organisations used Google Analytics to learn about their website visitors. For *relating*, only Company\_4 offered real-time interactions.

There was more focus on various accreditation and membership logos and the downloadable resources sections were also expanded. It seemed that companies started to see websites as more important channels for their business. While 2016 was the most challenging year for the industry, this might have played a role in encouraging companies to start to change as the industry was becoming more competitive, thus companies needed to remain competitive and attract new clients. Company\_4's website redesign had a positive impact on SEO as the score slightly increased. Overall, the SEO scores remained between 51-78, with 3-6 warnings, where elements could be improved. There was also a small increase in companies' DA scores.

*Observation 5* was completed in November 2016. There were no major changes in how companies used their websites since the last observation, apart from a redesigned website from Company\_3. The one-page website was changed to a more typical website with a homepage and other pages. The overall branding and feel of the website remained the same, although new pages were added. Previously, a section about the company had included profiles of all the main people and their contact details, but this information was now deleted. This could be linked to recession, when companies were downsizing, and instead of companies showing only a few remaining people working for the organisation, the whole section about individuals working in the companies was deleted. Information on the website became much more generic than the previous website version.

After the redesign, as a part of *engage and retain* tactics, the Company\_3's website loading speed increased to nearly 5 seconds. However, more interactive functions were added, such as a Google map for the location of the offices, and photo and video galleries, including only one video. More focus was placed on accreditations and membership logos, which became prominent on all pages. A new section was also added on QHSE to communicate security and privacy better. News section was created but did not include any news items. In addition, links from the website to social media profiles had been deleted



and these profiles had not been updated. As a part of *learn* stage, Google Analytics were not used by this company anymore, with only Company\_4 having this.

Some smaller changes included Company\_1, which had the largest number of downloadable resources, adding some new resources, such as the company brochure in seven different languages, some new literature downloads, and more photographs added to the gallery. While all the companies had a news section on their website, which might seem to be an important element for them, Company\_1's quarterly magazine was last published in April 2016 and the section with community news had its last update in August 2015. Company\_2's last news story was in May 2016. No other changes identified for the remaining three companies.

With regards to SEO tests, after Company\_3's website redesign, its SEO score dropped significantly from 64 to 50. The test revealed that important SEO elements, such as keywords use in meta-titles and alt-images optimisation, failed and the overall size of the website increased significantly, which also increased website loading time, even though the website itself became smaller with less information and content. As a result, DA for this website dropped from 20 to 16, while other companies' DA remained around 30-35. The other three companies had no major changes in their websites and their SEO scores. A new logo on the website home footer made it evident that Company\_3 had changed its marketing agency, and it seems that this agency had limited knowledge of website design.

The final *observation 6* was completed in September 2017, during *Offshore Europe*. There were a few changes identified. Company\_2, which had been acquired by a large multinational corporation in 2016, merged with that company and no presence for a company website was identified while its social media profiles were used by the new company. Thus, the final observation was not completed for this organisation.

Interestingly, Company\_3 has redesigned its website again since the last observation. This time the website was created by yet another agency, as evidenced by the logo on the homepage footer. The same agency had been used by Company\_1 throughout all observations. As a result, both websites of Companies 1 and 3 were now very similar in terms of functionality and layout. The new Company\_3 website was small and easy to navigate. The content on the website had become even more generic than previously. This website was a more traditional website, which included more pages and kept consistent branding with the same company colours and value proposition clearly stating the services and products.

The final observation revealed that, for *attracting* visitors to the website, companies used the same tactics as at the beginning of the observations. The website address was still not included on Company\_1's YouTube channel. After website redesigns, all three organisations now had websites optimised for mobile devices. In order to *engage* and *retain*, Companies 1 and 4's website speed remained between 1.15 and 3.29 seconds and, after a website redesign, Company\_3's speed decreased

from 5 to 0.567 seconds. Companies also used various interactive features to engage visitors, with prominent and well-populated accreditations and membership sections, together with T&Cs, testimonials and FAQs.

Regarding news sections, Company\_1 added a live Twitter feed to its website as a part of news sharing. However, its “*news in the community*” section had only been updated in August 2015 and October 2016. The company’s online quarterly magazine in 2016 had only two issues and by September 2017 no issues at all. Company\_3 has recently introduced a news section to its website. It included one news item each month starting January 2017 but stopped in June. Only Company\_4 utilised its news section more, however, it was also decreasing as in 2017 it published only one news item in comparison to nine news items in 2016 and 21 in 2015. Company\_1 offered most downloadable resources, although Company\_4 also offered webinars, which required registration, and Company\_3 added five downloadable datasheets. Companies also made links to their social media sites very prominent across all website pages. The links to social media for Company\_3 were added, but Company\_4’s link to YouTube was still broken. However, while these links were made prominent on the websites, social media was not used much by the companies and some even stopped using these social sites.

For *learning* about the website visitors, Company\_1 offered the opportunity to sign-up for its quarterly magazine, while Company\_3 had recently added a sign-up option to its website. However, this also offered information about the total number of sign-ups, which was only five visitors. Company\_4 also had the opportunity to sign-up for e-mail news. Only Company\_1 offered a feedback form on its website and only Company\_4 used Google Analytics. The *relate stage* again included the same three companies offering the opportunity to receive news, with only Company\_4 implementing real-time interactions function on its website.

During the final observation, changes to SEO were also identified. Company\_3 redesigned its website again, which had positive implications for the SEO test as it increased from 50 to 68. The previous mistakes and errors were solved and the main elements for SEO were included as a part of new website development. The other two companies’ SEO test scores were 61 and 79. DA scores for organisations were 18–32 with the lowest score for Company\_3.

#### 5.2.2.3. Summary of Observations

Overall, websites seemed to be considered quite important for the observed organisations as three out of four organisations redesigned their websites over the period of observations. Company\_3 redesigned its website twice, which shows that companies understood the importance of websites. With regards to the elements of digital marketing for the websites, the companies placed most emphasis on the first stages or in *attracting* and *engaging* with *retaining* website visitors. *Learning* and *relating* tactics were

utilised to a much lesser degree. This could be due to the fact that companies saw websites more as a business- rather than customer-focused channel as it was mostly used to represent the business. However, from observation 3 onwards, websites started to slowly change. Companies were making small changes while trying to get more use of this channel. This coincided with the recession in the oil and gas industry.

With reference to *attract*, the companies did not fully utilise all options to build traffic to their own websites as they did not always use their social media sites to refer traffic back to the website: some did not include a company website address on their social media or the links on their websites to social media were broken. However, all three companies did offer mobile-optimised websites and had responsive website designs by the end of observations.

In order to *engage* and *retain*, companies used various interactive functions, and placed a strong focus on accreditations and membership logos to communicate the reputation and trustworthiness of the company. Over the duration of the observations, companies made these sections more prominent and added more logos. This could be either related to increased competition during the recession – by showing membership and accreditation logos, companies could present themselves as better than competitors. On the other hand, it could also be related to a need to reduce concerns about the impact of the recession, with each company wishing to present itself as reliable and credible. In line with this, downloadable resources were also offered by the companies. All companies expanded these sections and added more resources throughout observations. However, while the companies appeared to understand the need for a news section on their websites, it was not used strategically and included irregular news postings rather than evidencing any strategic use. Some periods were associated with more frequent posting of news items, while at other times the frequency dropped. Some companies even left this section empty with no news. It is interesting that the companies offered hyperlinks to their social media presence very prominently on their websites, but no emphasis was placed on actually using these social media channels.

The companies' use of *learning* and *relating* to website users was very limited. All companies offered e-mail news sign-up options, a facility for which the researcher signed up at the beginning of observations (December 2014). However, during the whole three-year observation, the researcher did not receive any e-mail news from the organisations. There was no personalisation or customisation efforts from organisations, and only one company used real-time interactions. Overall, even with redesigned websites, the same approach was taken for the different stages of engaging website visitors and no changes were identified, even when companies were constantly changing and up-dating their websites.

The above examples of website tactics used and the slow changes occurring, suggest that companies started to see websites as a more useful channel during the recession. Companies were searching for ways to remain competitive and placing more focus on the credibility and trustworthiness of their business by adding features to communicate it. They also tried to become more customer-friendly by expanding interactive functions, such as adding office maps, contact forms and galleries to their websites. In particular, contact forms seemed to be popular, which encouraged prospects to e-mail. Office maps was another widespread tactic as typically these companies had more than one office and were based in key locations for the industry, thus communicating this global aspect seemed to be important. However, most of the times only one or two employees were based in these other locations, with the main offices being in Aberdeen. More downloadable resources were added to keep prospective visitors longer on the websites and more engaged. However, limited knowledge hindered the process: the companies that offered e-mail sign-up did not communicate with interested visitors, and only one company used Google Analytics to learn about its website visitors.

Regarding SEO, on-page SEO tactics were not fully implemented within the observed companies. Many factors relating to SEO success include small improvements on the actual website, do not require large resources and most of the time are free. However, SEO tests revealed that scores were unstable rather than slowly increasing, what would be typically expected, indicating there was a lack of knowledge and SEO appeared not to be considered as an important channel. In addition, the example of Company\_3 shows that marketing agencies played a role in how the concept of the website as a DMC channel was approached. Throughout the observations, this company had three significantly different websites as a result of three different agencies. The failure of the first redesign shows that the success of website and SEO depends on the knowledge of the agency, in this case showing very limited knowledge of strategic use of websites.

### **5.2.3. Facebook**

#### **5.2.3.1. Introduction**

For the observation of the companies' use of Facebook, information was captured on how many total likes company profiles had, whether the company description was provided and if it included the company website address and contact information. Company branding was also analysed, to establish whether companies used corporate logo and colours, tagline, with company vision, mission statements and value proposition. In addition, to understand how the companies used Facebook as a DMC channel, the type and frequency of postings on Facebook during the observed month was recorded, and how company followers interacted with these posts, including the number of likes, shares and comments. For full observation details refer to Appendix 11 (p.288).

### 5.2.3.2. Facebook Observations

The *first observation* showed that three companies out of four had Facebook brand pages. The number of total likes for company pages, indicating awareness of the company, differed significantly from 153 to 827 and 1543 likes accordingly. When analysing company profiles, it was noted that not all had fully completed them. Only one organisation had the company description as a part of its online profile together with its value proposition, detailing what services and products company offered. However, all three organisations consistently used their branding and corporate logo and colours on Facebook. Companies also had their website addresses included as part of their profiles.

The companies were not very active on Facebook and posted only 2, 15 and 22 posts in the observed month, which received quite poor interaction: 6, 9 and 289 likes, with 23 shares and 1 and 22 comments. The nature of the posts could explain the low interaction levels. The majority of posts were promotional posts with links to the corporate website – either the news section or course booking pages. For example, post “*Last chance to book Advanced design including HP/HT and deepwater pipelines www.company.com/training/course/advanced-design*” received no interaction. Only one company’s posts were of an entertaining nature and included various images and photographs. The post “*All set for a great night at the Courier Business Awards, we are up for Growth Business of the Year, fingers crossed!!!*” with a photograph from the event received 11 likes and 1 share. This type of posts received much higher interaction levels.

*Observation 2* revealed that companies had stopped or significantly decreased their activities on Facebook, even if it was not used intensively in the first place. While there was a natural increase of total likes for these organisations, there was no posting on Facebook before, during or after *Offshore Europe 2015* (September). The last post for Company\_2 was in May 2015, for Company\_3 was in April 2015, and for Company\_4 was in July 2015. This timing coincides with the beginning of the downturn in the oil and gas industry, when all organisations started making redundancies within their organisations, with marketing staff usually being the first department to face cuts.

*Observation 3* revealed that Facebook pages for the same three companies still existed; however, none of them undertook any activity during the month of November 2015. The observation results showed the same results as the second observation, although the number of total brand page likes decreased slightly.

During *observation 4*, again, none of the companies undertook any activity on Facebook. However, the number of total brand page likes started to decrease more: for Company\_2 it reduced by one like and for Company\_4 by 11 likes. Companies might have stopped using Facebook because they realised this social platform was not suitable for their companies in oil and gas industry, or it might have happened

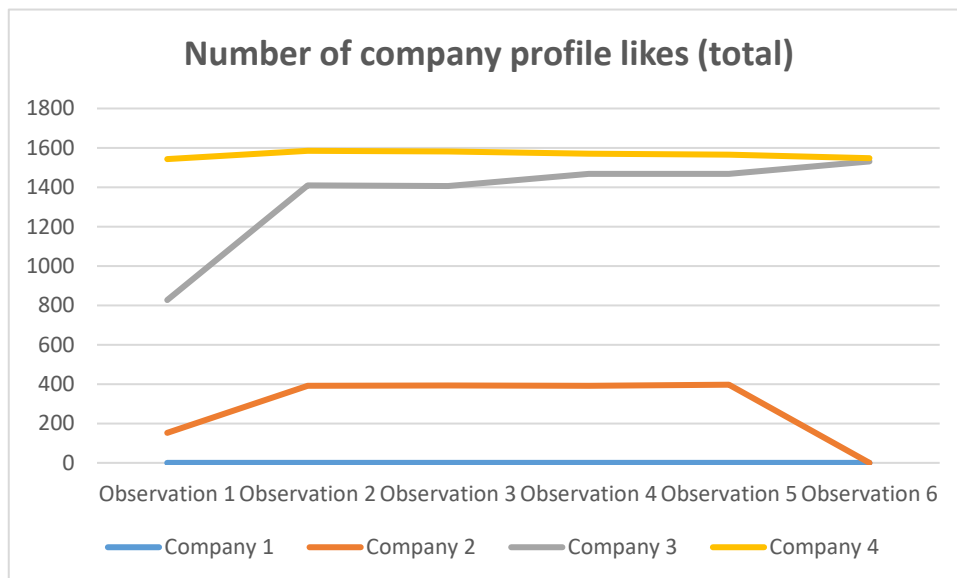
due to the recession, when companies started significant saving and reduced their marketing activities to the minimum. Since the companies were not active on these platforms, there was no benefit for current and potential customers to like and follow these companies.

During *observation 5*, companies again did not use Facebook and there were small fluctuations in total company likes. For Company\_2 the total number of likes slightly increased by five likes and for Company\_4 it decreased by five likes.

*Observation 6* was the final observation for the study. Again, it showed that companies did not use Facebook actively in any way and just had company profiles. Only Company\_3 posted once on Facebook during the last observation. The post received some interaction, including 7 likes, 24 shares, 11 comments, as it was a job opening within the company. Company\_4 had evidently stopped using Facebook since the last post was in February 2016 and the one before in July 2015. Company\_3 also had a very sporadic posting on Facebook as in 2017 they posted once every one or two months and all posts related to job openings.

### 5.2.3.3. Summary of Observations

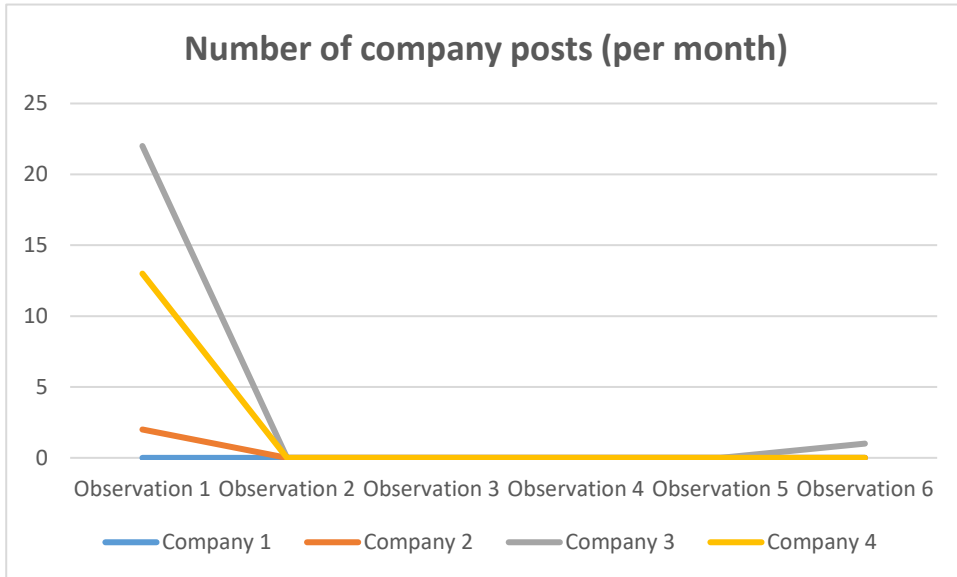
Overall, Facebook was not used actively by the observed companies and therefore the overall number of total likes over the course of six observations did not increase significantly. There was a small organic growth of total likes for Companies 2 and 3 during the period from observation 1 to observation 2, as shown in Figure 5.6.



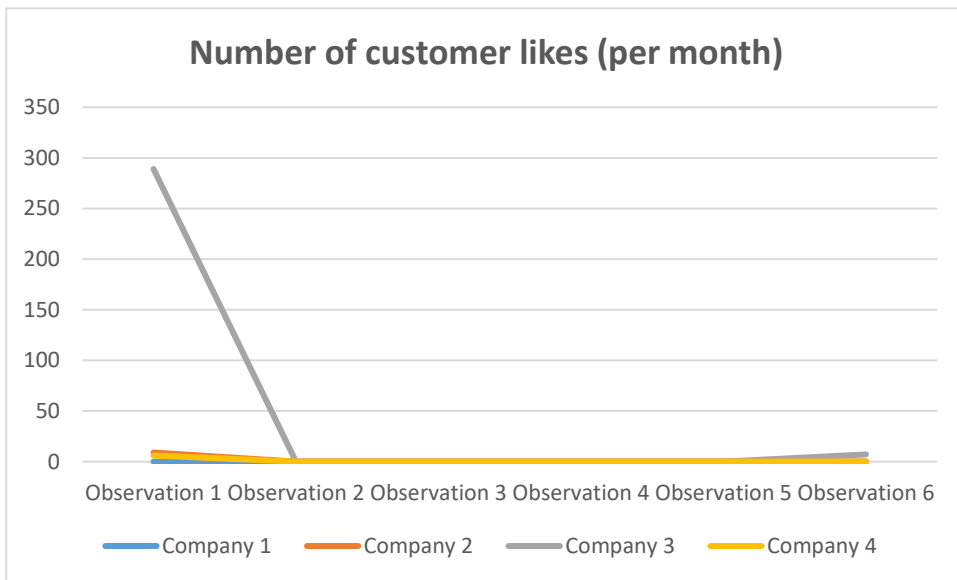
**Figure 5.6:** The total number of company profile likes

Figure 5.7. summarises the changes in observed company activities on Facebook during the six observations, which captures the fact that, at some stage before observation 2, all three companies

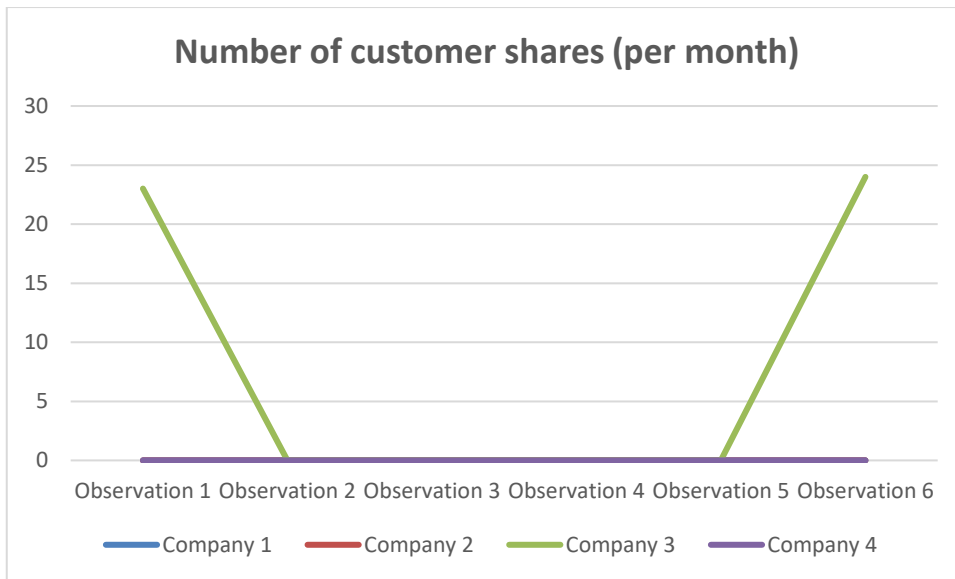
stopped posting on Facebook actively and did not share updates during the observed months. Some companies posted a few times during the four-year period, but with no consistency and some just stopped posting completely. Since companies did not post, there was no interaction achieved as shown in Figures 5.8., 5.9. and 5.10.



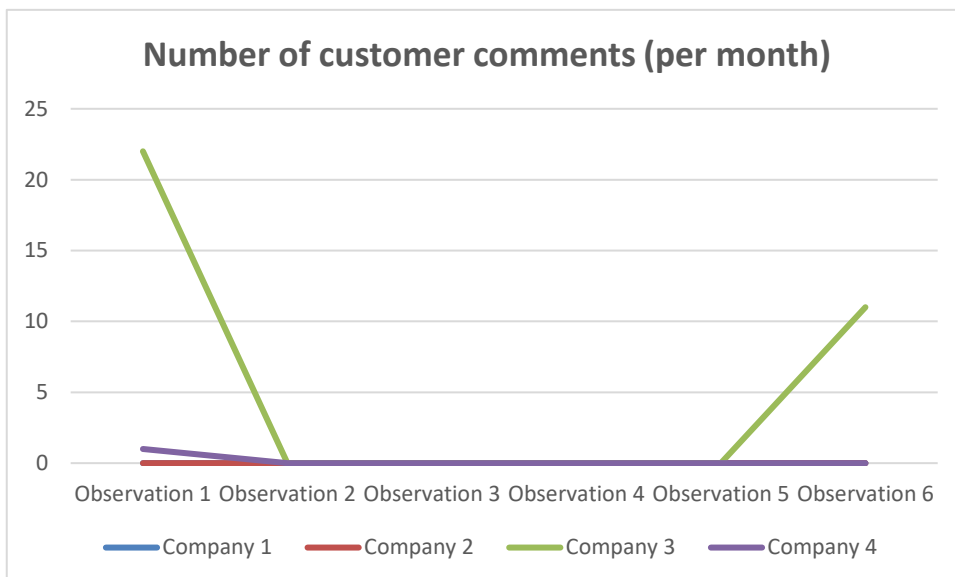
**Figure 5.7:** The number of company posts per observed month



**Figure 5.8:** The total number of customer likes per observed month



**Figure 5.9:** The total number of customer shares per observed month



**Figure 5.10:** The total number of customer comments per observed month

Only Company\_3 posted during the last observation, and the post achieved some interaction as shares, likes and comments, as it was the job opening post. Facebook appeared to be completely disregarded as a DMC channel for oil and gas SMEs. Prior to the recession, it had been used to communicate with current and potential customers, but during the recession this use stopped as potentially it was seen as being irrelevant for oil and gas industry. The situation is the complete opposite to the websites, which received more investment and interest from these companies and was clearly perceived as a useful channel for the organisation.



## 5.2.4. Twitter

### 5.2.4.1. Introduction

This section focuses on Twitter and how companies used it as a DMC channel to communicate with current and potential customers. For the Twitter analysis, information was captured on how many total followers company profiles had, whether the company description was provided and if it included the company website address and contact information. Company branding was also analysed. In addition, the total number of company tweets was recorded, together with company tweets per observed month, and whether it achieved any interaction, including retweets or shares. For full observation details refer to Appendix 12 (p.292).

### 5.2.4.2. Twitter Observations

Again, during the *first observation* only three companies out of four had profiles on Twitter. As with Facebook, a quite low total number of followers were identified. One company had only 29 followers, while the two other companies had just slightly less than 400 followers. Companies included descriptions on their profiles with their website address, but only one organisation had its tagline. All three companies' Twitter branding was aligned to corporate colours and included the logo. Companies tweeted from 2 to 15 and 16 tweets during the month; Company\_2 posted the same two messages on Facebook and Twitter, just shorter versions adapted to the number of characters available for a tweet. "*Company X staff raised over £700 for Breast Cancer Campaign [www.company.com/new/wear-it-pink](http://www.company.com/new/wear-it-pink)*" on Facebook received 5 likes, while a slightly adapted tweet with *#wearitpink* received no interaction.

Twitter was used occasionally to broadcast news messages. Company\_3 gained the largest amount of interaction with its tweets as half of these tweets were participations in wider conversations with replies and mentions. Such as "*Good luck to everyone at the Courier Business Awards tonight! @companyX are looking forward to a great night #CourierBizAwards!*" received 2 retweets. The remaining were tweets with content other than corporate promotions or corporate news and included links to YouTube videos or photographs with promotional messages. Company\_4 adopted a similar approach for tweets and Facebook posts, so the majority of its tweets included promotional messages and hyperlinks to a website course or course booking pages. An example being "*Interested in a free seminar? We are running a series of seminars in Norway 8-12 Dec 2014. Info e: [marketing@company.com](mailto:marketing@company.com)*" No interaction was achieved with this type of tweets. The use of Twitter seemed to be news broadcasting from the companies, when they had any news, rather than a way to engage in two-way dialogue.

*Observation 2* revealed that all four organisations now had Twitter profiles. Company\_1 created a profile a few weeks before *Offshore Europe 2015*, but Company\_2 stopped using Twitter after April 2015. It should be noted that since observation one Company\_2 had been acquired by another company

and the parent company name was added to its name. Thus, the Twitter account was updated with the new company title. However, the buttons from the website still linked to the old Twitter account, which no longer existed. It was therefore necessary to find the company profile manually as it is not linked from the website any more. In addition, the new Twitter profile did not include any company branding.

Company\_3, which had been quite active on Twitter during observation 1 and received the most interaction and engagement, had also stopped using Twitter as the last post was made in April 2015, the same as Facebook. On the other hand, Company\_4 had adopted a different approach and became much more active during the period of *Offshore Europe 2015*. The company tweeted 28 times during this period, with only a few links to its corporate website. The company tried to participate in wider conversations as most of the tweets were related to *Offshore Europe*, and these were mainly replies and mentions, together with the use of #OE15 and @SPE\_15. An example tweet being “Are you at #OE15? Come take part in our 30 second challenge on stand 3E201 to win a FitBit”. However, this received only 1 retweet. On the other hand, Company\_1 had a completely different approach to tweeting. The majority of its tweets (13 out of 16) were tweets with the latest news from the oil and gas industry and included external links to other websites, such as “North Sea gas rigs given go-ahead: The Culzean field off Scotland: <http://buff.ly/1fXn1zg>”. However, no interaction was gained with these tweets.

Observation 3, undertaken for November 2015, revealed similar trends to the previous observation. Company\_1 had the same approach to Twitter: it posted in total 8 tweets per month, which were all oil and gas industry news posts with links to these news sites, like “Statoil awards jack-up accommodation rig contract for Johan Sverdrup: [buff.ly/1NfDgBH](http://buff.ly/1NfDgBH)”, but again none of these received any interaction. Company\_4 used a similar approach as in previous observation and tweeted 14 times. Six tweets included #decomconf2015, which was related to an industry conference. “Simplification by innovation in decommissioning subsea structures by X, on now at #decomconf2015” was the tweet, which received the largest number of three retweets.

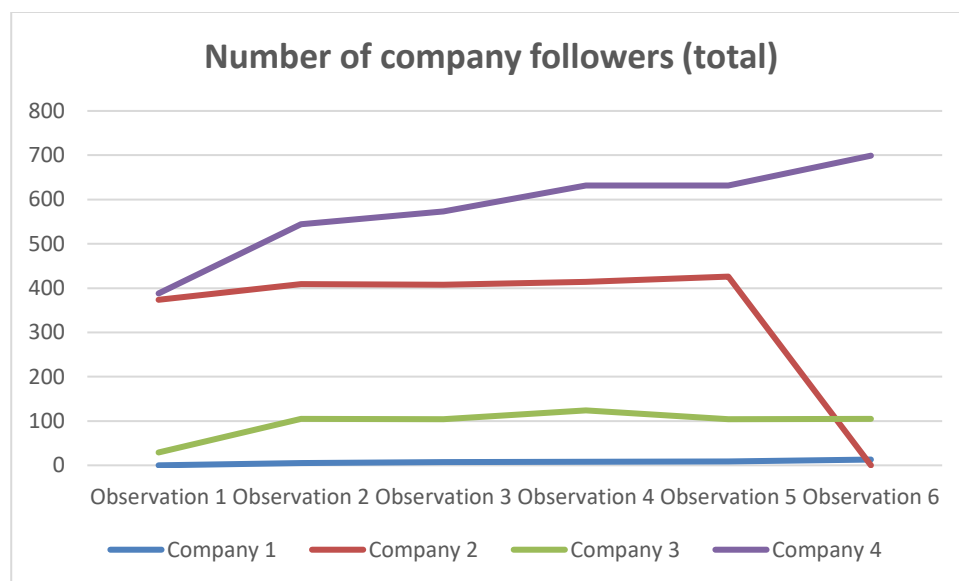
The fourth observation, undertaken in September 2016, again showed that companies did not use Twitter as a part of their marketing communications. Only Company\_4 posted one post with a link to its website, which received two retweets. There was a small increase for the total number of followers, with Company\_1 having 8 followers, Company\_2 – 124, and Company\_4 had the largest number of followers of 632.

Observation 5 was undertaken two months after observation 4. Again, no major changes were identified in how the companies used their Twitter accounts. Company\_2, after a break, tweeted twice during November. The tweets were posts about company news and included hyperlinks to the company website. “Case Study - see how we can build custom systems for specific applications... [www.company.com](http://www.company.com)”. Company\_4 retweeted three times with no interaction gained, while Company\_3 lost 20 followers.

The *sixth observation* was undertaken during *Offshore Europe 2017*. Only Company\_4 posted seven times. This company had slightly changed its approach to using Twitter and started posting the same messages on LinkedIn and Twitter, just in a different format. The tweets offered information about company training courses or cases studies, typically with a link to the corporate website, an example being “*Our #pipelineintegrity course teaches you how to run #subseapipelines in optimum conditions. Book now and save £200 www.company.com*”. However, the tweets show that the company did not participate in the major trade show. While these posts were of a promotional nature, they received minimal interaction from followers. In contrast, Company\_3 stopped using Twitter in April 2017 and had not posted since, and Company\_1 had not tweeted since May 2016, made a few tweets in June 2017 and then stopped again.

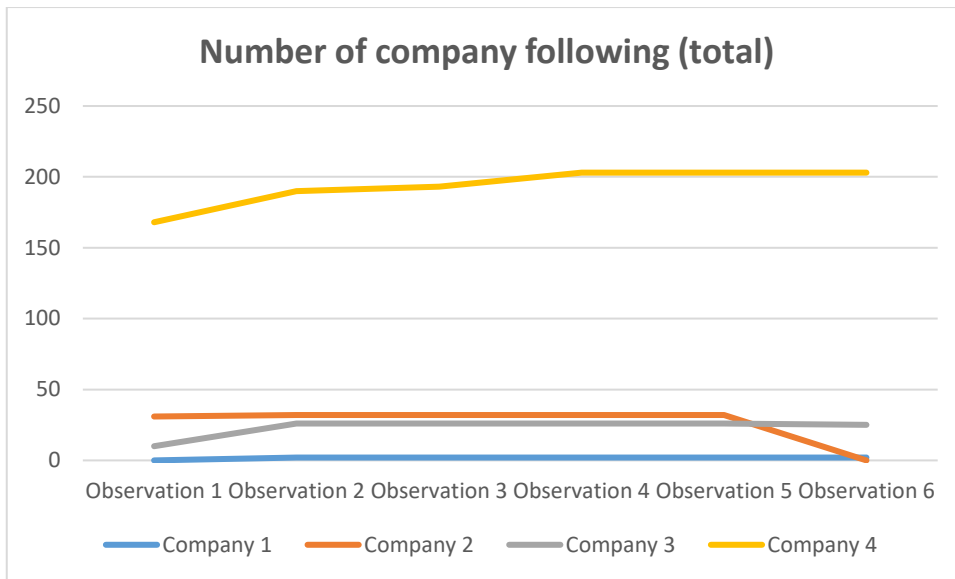
#### 5.2.4.3. Summary of Observations

The figures below reveal that, during the six observations, the overall number of followers for each company increased minimally. Only Company\_4 had a major increase in its overall number of followers and Company\_1, which created a Twitter profile just before observation 2, managed to grow only up to 13 followers as seen in Figure 5.11.



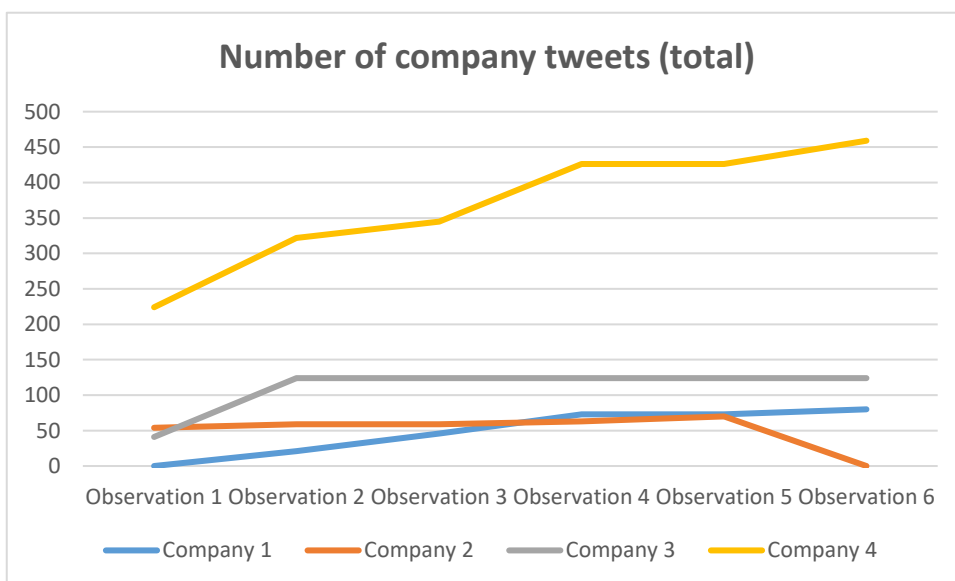
**Figure 5.11:** The total number of company profile followers

Companies 1, 2 and 3 followed back only a few other companies or people profiles, and only Company\_4 tried to follow others on Twitter and participate in wider networks, as shown in the Figure 5.12. The company followed back nearly 200 other Twitter accounts, while the other three organisations followed less than 40.



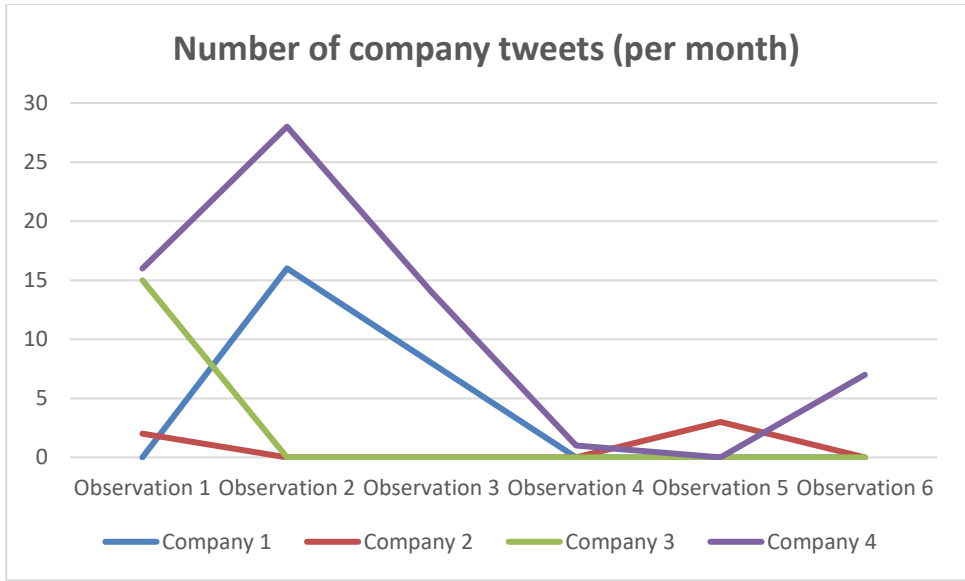
**Figure 5.12:** The total number of company following

However, the companies were not active on Twitter. During the observations, only Company\_4 significantly increased the total number of its tweets. Company\_1 posted only 80 times from September 2015 to September 2017 and Company\_3 has not tweeted since observation 2, as shown in Figure 5.13.



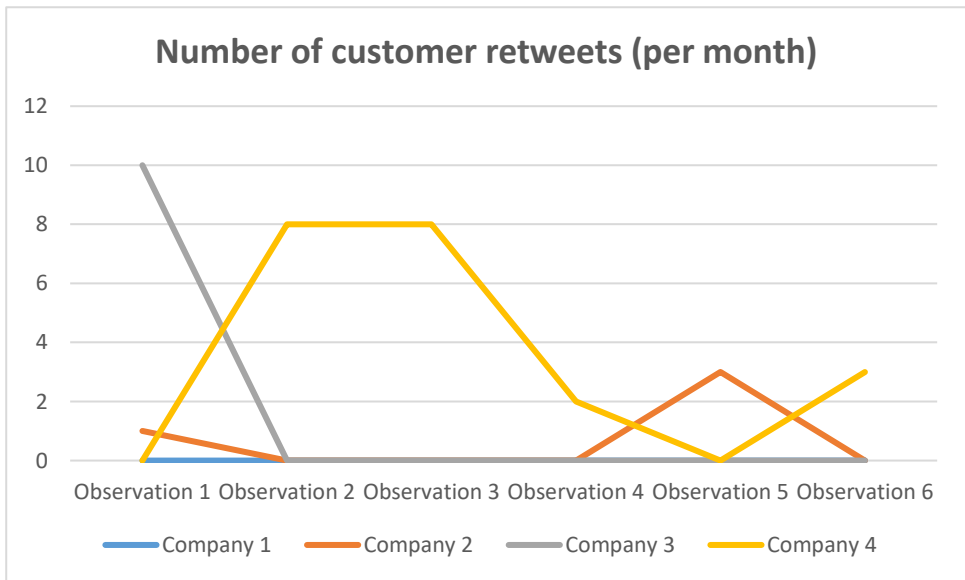
**Figure 5.13:** The total number of company tweets

Figure 5.14. shows that the companies tweeted most during observations 1 and 2. Afterwards, their use of Twitter decreased significantly. Since there was minimal use of Twitter, the interaction from followers was minimal as well.

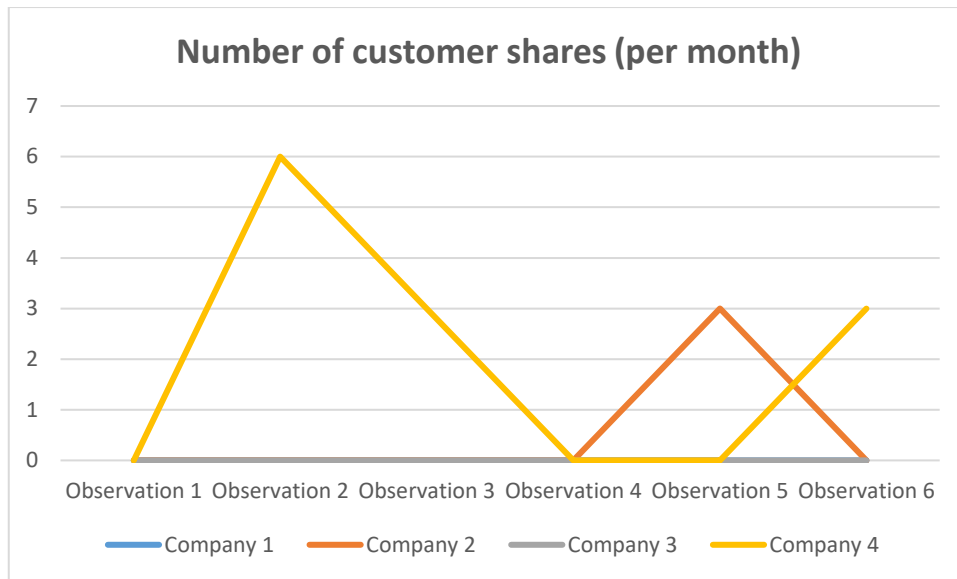


**Figure 5.14:** The total number of company tweets per observed month

Figures 5.15. and 5.16. below show that customer retweets and shares were minimal with no comments, because companies tweeted irregularly, mostly with news items and links to their websites or retweeted industry news. The retweets of their posts never exceeded 10 times and shares 6 times per observed month.



**Figure 5.15:** The total number of customer retweets per observed month



**Figure 5.16:** The total number of customer shares per observed month

Overall, it is a strong indication that Twitter appeared to have little value for oil and gas SMEs. While companies tried to tweet, no interaction was achieved. Twitter seemed to be perceived as a channel for news sharing with promotional messages rather than a two-way dialogue. However, more efforts were dedicated to Twitter than Facebook as companies were more active on this channel.

### 5.2.5. LinkedIn

#### 5.2.5.1. Introduction

Observation of LinkedIn as a DMC channel revealed that most efforts were dedicated to it. For LinkedIn analysis, similar information was captured on how many total followers each company had, and whether the full company description was provided. Company branding was also analysed. In addition, the total number of company posts per observed month were recorded and the interaction these achieved, including the numbers of customer likes and comments. Company\_3 was not observed for the final sixth observation. For full observation details refer to Appendix 13 (p.296).

#### 5.2.5.2. LinkedIn Observations

During the *first observation*, all four companies had LinkedIn profiles, but they used this platform to different degrees. The companies had very different numbers of total followers. Generally, the profiles were more in-depth than on Facebook and Twitter, with all companies giving their website address, contact details, using corporate branding, and providing their value proposition. In addition, Company\_3 also detailed its vision and mission. However, only one organisation posted through the observed month. Company\_4 posted 6 posts per month but received only 6 likes as the nature of posts were links to

corporate website, either to course booking or news section. Such as “*Last chance to book! www.company.com*”. It appears again that LinkedIn was also used as a content distribution platform.

During the *second observation*, there was a growth in the total number of followers identified across all four organisations. However, only two of the companies used LinkedIn to share news and updates. Company\_1 announced the creation of its Twitter account and shared a news article about the oil and gas industry. Company\_4 took a similar approach to LinkedIn as to its Twitter account and shared news about its participation in *Offshore Europe 2015*; two posts were again of a promotional nature with links to the website course pages.

*Observation 3* revealed that there was a further growth in the total numbers of followers. Company\_4 was the only company that posted six times during the observed month, receiving 18 likes in total from its followers. Five out of six of these posts were promotional-type messages with information about the company attending industry conferences or promoting its training courses, two of the posts had hyperlinks back to their company websites. Only one post was of an entertaining nature about Thanksgiving celebration wishes.

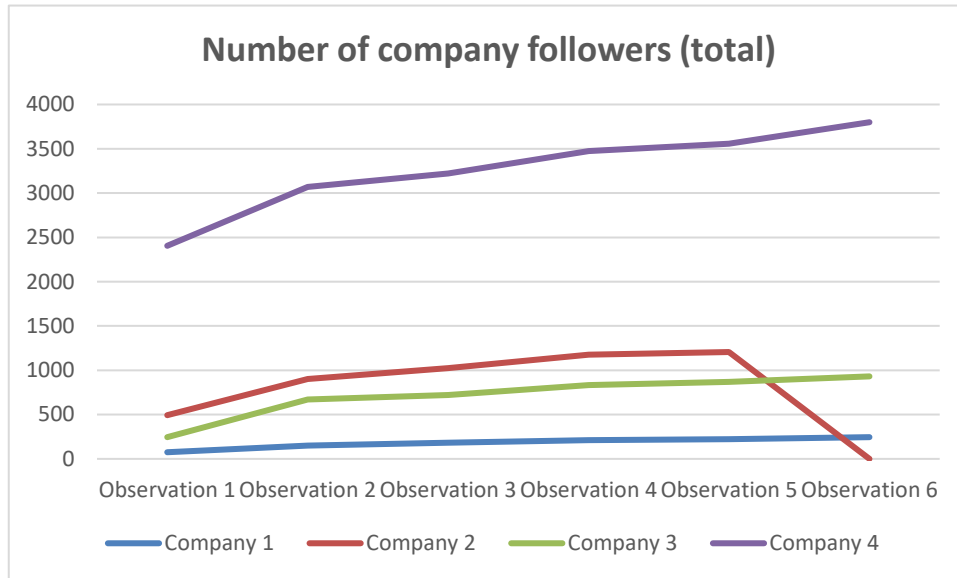
*Observation 4*, undertaken in September 2015, reveals similar results again. Company\_4 posted five times during the observed month, receiving eight likes. All posts were promotional posts about company training courses with a link to the website, for example “*OFFER EXTENDED FOR A LIMITED TIME ONLY! Book now to join our Pigging and Plugging course and receive an early bird discount! Click here for further details: www.company.com*”.

The *fifth observation*, completed two months after the last observation, revealed that the numbers of total followers had slightly increased. This time, only Company\_2 posted twice during the observed month with minimal interaction. This company posted the same two posts on Twitter, just longer versions more applicable to LinkedIn.

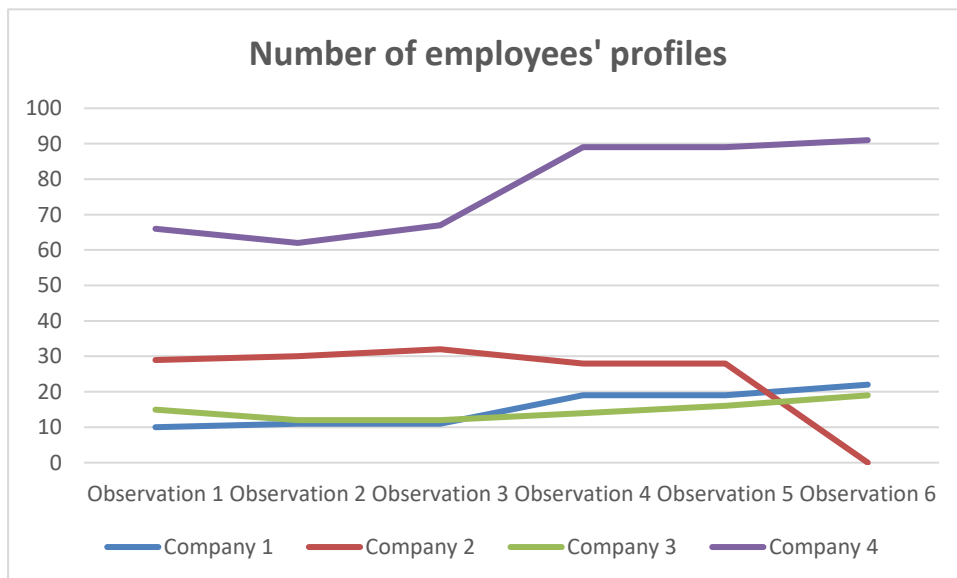
*Observation 6* again found no major changes in how the companies utilised LinkedIn. The total numbers of followers remained quite low at 245, 931 and only company 4 performed much better with 3800 followers. The companies had not changed or updated their profiles during the duration of the observations. Only Company\_4 posted 7 times during the last observation, which in total received 43 likes and one customer comment. Its posts became more informative and longer, receiving more interaction from followers. For example, “*Read our case study on how we helped our client prepare for mothballing an oil production pipeline network in the North Sea www.company.com*” received 6 likes.

### 5.2.5.3. Summary of Observations

Overall, LinkedIn was the social media channel with the most activity recorded during the observation. Companies had the largest numbers of followers for their profiles, as seen in Figure 5.17., while Figure 5.18. shows that Company\_4 had the largest number of employees on LinkedIn.



**Figure 5.17:** The total number of company profile followers

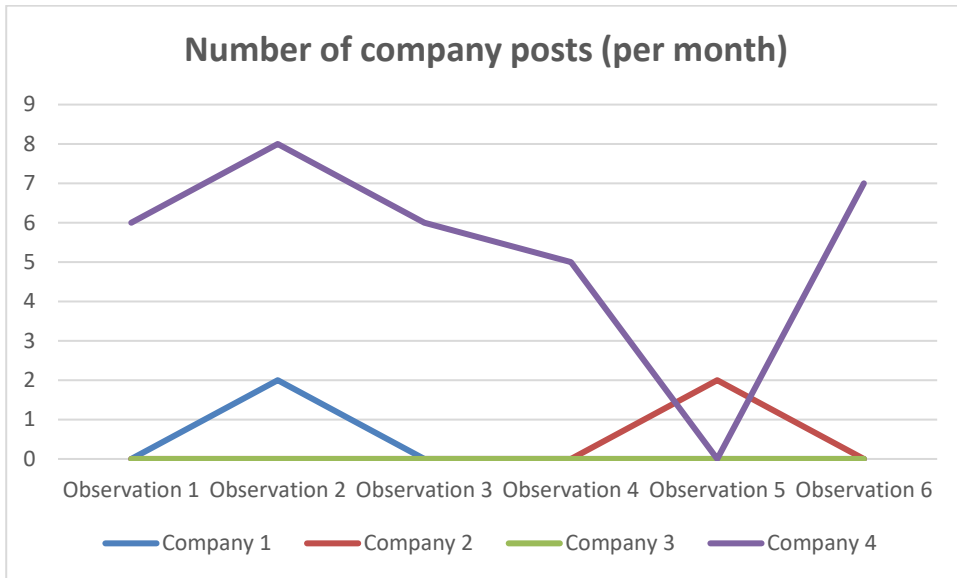


**Figure 5.18:** The total number of company employees' profiles

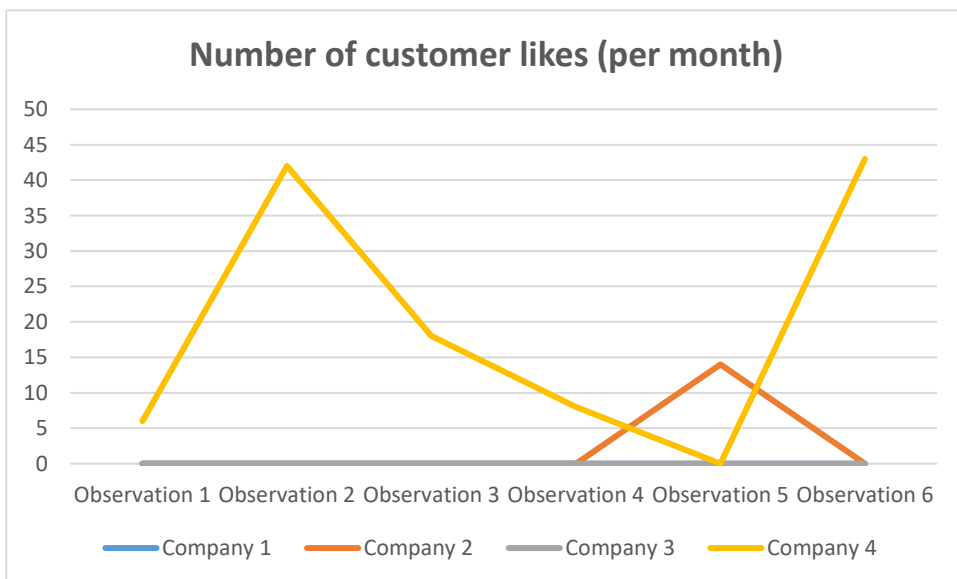
Again, Company\_4 was most active while using LinkedIn. It posted during five out of six observations and tried to integrate its posts and offered the same information in different formats on Twitter and



LinkedIn. Company\_3 was least active, and Companies 1 and 2 posted only once as shown in Figure 5.19.

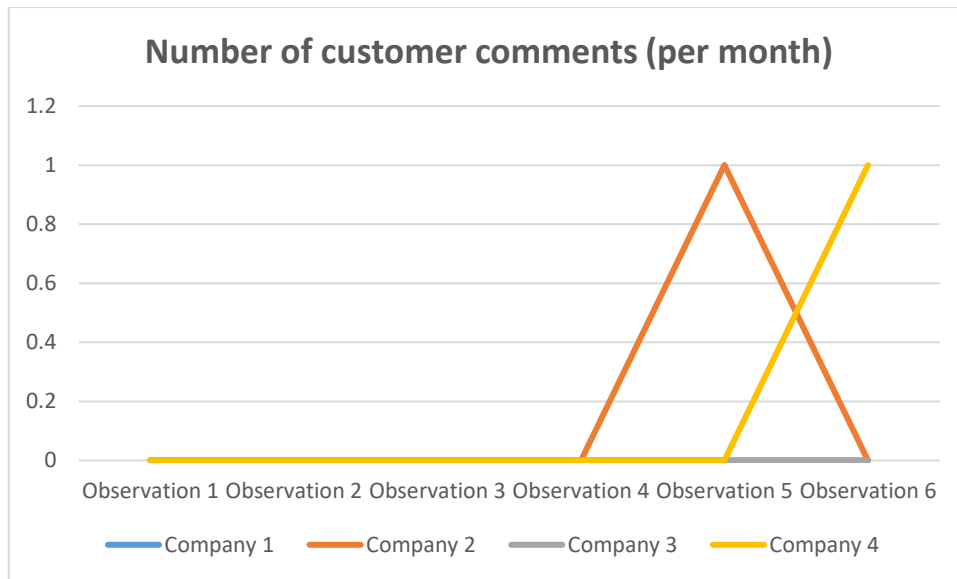


**Figure 5.19:** The total number of company posts per observed month



**Figure 5.20:** The total number of customer likes per observed month

The companies did not receive much interaction for their posts on LinkedIn, with most posts of a promotional nature. Only Companies 2 and 4 received some likes for their posts, as seen in Figure 5.20. Similarly, Figure 5.21. shows that, during the whole observation duration, Companies 2 and 4 received only one comment for all their posts and most of the time followers just liked their posts. It shows that companies used this channel as a news-distribution channel instead two-way communication between companies and their followers.



**Figure 5.21:** The total number of customer comments per observed month

The observation showed that the companies did not have clear strategies on what to do and how to post on LinkedIn. There was no consistency in posting strategy or messages. Even when companies posted, it was more likely to be promotional closed messages and therefore there was never more than one comment from customers per post. Company\_4 was performing much better than the remaining companies. The company had some strategy what to post on LinkedIn and it was also integrated with its Twitter messages. All posts followed the same style and included some type of information or news item with the link to corporate website, which received some engagement from the followers.

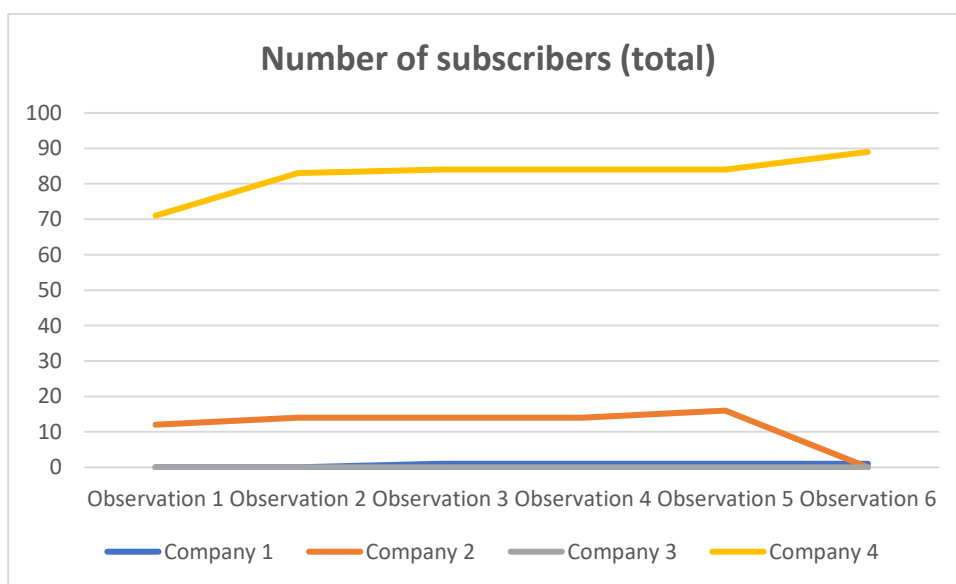
### 5.2.6. YouTube

YouTube was the DMC channel least utilised by the organisations. Similar information was recorded to understand how companies used YouTube, thus the total numbers of videos, comments, subscribes and views was recorded. Company branding with logo, corporate colours and company description was also analysed. The observation summary can be found in Appendix 14 (p.301).

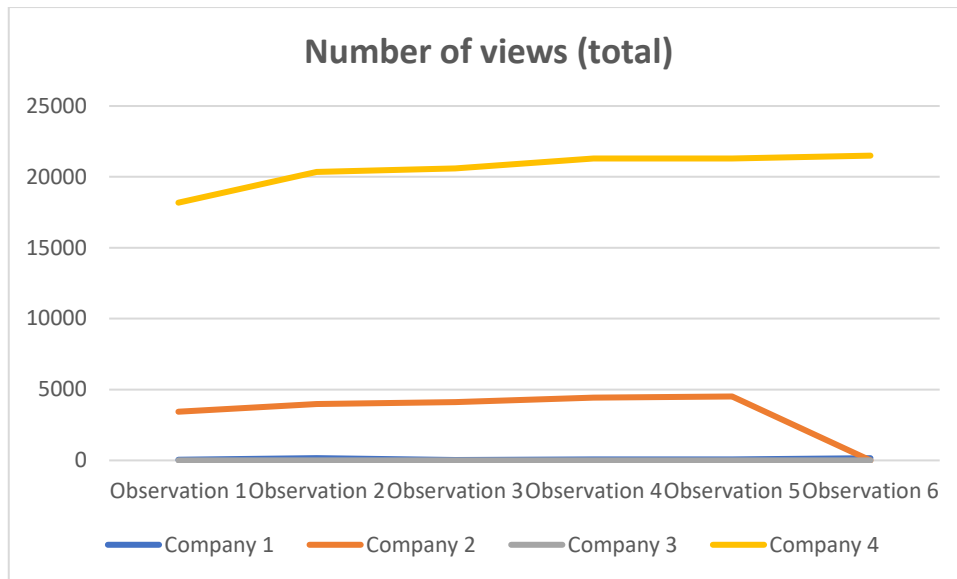
The *first observation* revealed that YouTube was not utilised appropriately within the companies as only three organisations had YouTube channels with a small number of videos. Two companies had only two videos each and one company offered 10 videos. These videos were either promotional corporate videos or videos showcasing products and services. However, two companies out of three did not have any company description on their profiles, did not use corporate branding and one of them had not even included its website address or corporate logo. All three companies' YouTube channels had different titles than actual company titles, which resulted in difficulties finding them manually. Company\_1 did not even have a link to YouTube from its website, while it was linked to other channels.

During the *second observation*, no major changes were identified as far as YouTube activity was concerned. Company\_1 added two more videos. However, Company\_2, which was bought by another company and had changed its company name in the interim, had not updated the information on YouTube and still used the old branding. Company\_4 had a small increase of total views. During the *third observation*, no significant changes were identified. Company\_1 took two videos down, which reduced the number of total views significantly from 155 to 27. The remaining three observations also showed that the companies had not changed their approach in how they utilised YouTube. After a website redesign, Company\_4 had a broken link on its website to YouTube, which was not fixed until the end of observations. Thus, YouTube channel needed to be searched manually, and since the channel name was slightly different to that of the company, was difficult to find.

Overall, YouTube was the least utilised communication channel by all the organisations. While three organisations had a YouTube presence, it was not integrated. YouTube channels did not have corporate branding, old logos were used, after website redesign, were not linked thoroughly and the links to YouTube were broken. Companies did not upload additional videos during the observation period. Company\_4 had four unanswered questions about the training on its channel.



**Figure 5.22:** The total number of subscribers



**Figure 5.23:** The total number of videos

Since companies had not made any changes to their YouTube presence, interaction was minimal, and the number of subscribers and total number of views increased minimally, as seen in Figure 5.22. and 5.23. above. The most growth was recorded for Company\_4, which had the largest number of videos. It seemed that YouTube was used more as a channel to store videos.

### 5.2.7. Mobile Marketing

For the purpose of this study, mobile marketing was defined as offering mobile applications and having corporate websites that were fully optimised for mobile and other portable devices. Observation 1 revealed that only one organisation, which provided training courses for the oil and gas industry, had developed a mobile application, which was part of the training courses and allowed access to all course information for 12 months after the course was completed. However, before the fourth observation, this company redesigned its website and the mobile application was not available any more.

During the first observation, only Company\_3 passed the responsive design test, meaning its website was optimised for mobile devices as well. Before observation 2, Company\_1 redesigned its website, and now had a mobile-optimised website. No changes were recorded for third observation. During observation 4, Company\_3's website redesign led to it losing its mobile optimisation. However, before the final observation, this company had redesigned the website again, and by the end of the observation all three organisations had mobile-optimised websites.

Overall, the observations revealed that companies did not see the need of mobile applications as part of their DMC communications. In addition, the website optimisation for mobile devices, gained in importance and was slowly adopted by the companies, as during final observation all companies had mobile-optimised websites.

### **5.2.8. E-mail Marketing**

For the purpose of this study, e-mail marketing was defined as having the option to register interest with the company by entering an e-mail address on a form on the website. During the first observation, the researcher signed up to receive e-mail news and newsletters from all observed organisations that offered this function (Companies 1, 2 and 4) However, no e-news or newsletters were received from the companies during the observation period.

Observation 1 revealed that only Companies 2 and 4 gathered potential customers' e-mails to update and share company news. During observation 2, the situation remained the same. Only two organisations gathered potential customers' e-mails to update and share company news with interested people, and Company\_1 started to gather e-mails for sending its quarterly online magazine. During the other three observations no changes were identified. Last observation revealed that Company\_3 also implemented the functionality on its website to leave an e-mail address, though it showed that the total number of sign-ups was five.

Overall, it seems that organisations felt that e-mail marketing was important and an option to leave an e-mail should be included as a part of the website. However, none of the organisations used these e-mails for leads generation, to communicate with their potential customers, as no e-mail news were received from observed organisations throughout the observation period.

## **5.3. INTERVIEWS WITH OIL AND GAS B2B SMES**

### **5.3.1. Introduction**

Face-to-face interviews were carried out with 10 interviewees from nine Aberdeen-based oil and gas SMEs in May-June 2016. The interviews lasted from 25 minutes up to 1 hour and 17 minutes. The interview participants from the oil and gas SMEs varied in their roles and included business development managers, directors, operations managers and sales engineers, who all were involved in their organisations' marketing activities to a greater or lesser degree, as seen in Table 5.15. below. One company was represented by two respondents: a sales engineer and a managing director. While Manager\_PH represented two companies as he was working part-time in two different roles: business development manager and customer solutions and support director. Due to the limited resources within the interviewed companies, the marketing role seemed to be scattered between various employees and in none of the participating companies was there the specific role of marketing manager.

There were nine male respondents and only one woman (Manager\_AG). The interviewees included mostly older men, above 51 years old, with only Managers PH, PD, GS and AG representing a younger generation, falling into the 31-40 and 41-50 age groups. It was noted that the responses of these younger interviewees about DMC channels use differed significantly from those of the older generation. Some interviewees, like Managers AM, RK, TM were typical older oil and gas industry professionals, who

had been working for years in the industry and they had a much stronger negative opinion about DMC use. They were used to and advocated for traditional sales face-to-face selling techniques, which had dominated the industry for a long time.

**Table 5.15:** Interviewees from B2B SMEs

Manager	Position	Interview Date	Interview Length	Age Group
Manager_DR	Business Development Manager	05/05/2016	45.48	51-60
Manager_IS	Director	24/05/2016	30.29	51-60
Manager_TM	Operations Manager	26/05/2016	25.21	51-60
Manager_RK	Sales Engineer	31/05/2016	43.17	61-70
Manager_PD	Director	01/06/2016	59.04	41-50
Manager_PH	Business Development Manager and Customer Solutions & Support Director	03/06/2016	38:16	31-40
Manager_JL and Manager_AM	Sales Engineer and Managing Director	02/06/2016	01:10:37	51-60
Manager_AG	Operations Manager	06/06/2016	26:39	61-70
Manager_GS	Director	30/06/2016	01:17:16	31-40
				41-50

In total, 48 codes were identified as separate nodes in NVivo, which were later grouped into 10 major categories for analysis, as displayed in Table 5.16. The findings regarding each category are presented in subsequent sections.

**Table 5.16:** Categories and sub-categories for B2B SMEs interview analysis

Category	Sub-category
Marketing Communication Channels	Marketing communication channels
Sales Focus	Networking and relationships
	Traditional sales techniques
Industry Features	Company size
	Resources
	Commercially sensitive information
	Oil and gas industry
	Generation and age
	Industry news
Website	Good website
	Attract stage
	Engage and Retain stage
	Learn stage
	Relate stage
Search Engine Marketing	Search engines
	Search engine optimisation
	Google AdWords

<b>Social Media</b>	Social media
<b>LinkedIn</b>	LinkedIn
<b>E-mail Marketing</b>	E-mail marketing
<b>Mobile Applications</b>	Mobile applications
<b>Marketing Agency Role</b>	Marketing agency role

### 5.3.2. Marketing Communications Channels

At the beginning of the interviews, interviewees were prompted to identify the most popular marketing communication channels in the oil and gas industry, which resulted in various responses. While in general it was suggested that the industry did not use DMC channels intensively, there was a growth in digital channels use, as noted by Manager\_AM: *“there’s not much offline communication now, the phones ring much less now than they used to”*. Manager\_AG also agreed that online communication methods were now used more than *“the old traditional ways of picking up a phone”*. She commented further *“the old-school guys that used to pick up a telephone have gone”*.

In contrast, while acknowledging the growth of DMC channels use in the industry, Manager\_PD was quite sceptical about the effectiveness of these channels:

*“The problem is that so far, I have seen no benefit of it, so we’ve tried Google AdWords, we’ve tried our website, these are all new formats which we have never had. The business has been going for 27 years and the old-fashioned sales techniques of phoning someone up or getting someone’s name, phoning them up, going to see them, take them out for lunch or a game of golf. The old-fashioned way still seems to work, and nothing has made me change my mind from that.”*

Manager\_IS also advocated for traditional channels: *“I rely the majority on traditional, but I guess there is a place [for digital], if you were to put a figure on it maybe 60/40, 70/30, somewhere round about there, that says traditional communication is the key”*. The interviewee further added that digital channels would be potentially useful *“if people have heard your name but want to find out a bit more about you, then they can use the social media or the digital marketing in order to find out whether it is the services that they’re looking for before they even speak to you.”* Although not knowing the term, Manager\_IS was talking here about brand searches for his business, when potential clients undertake a specific search on search engines already knowing the company name and being aware of its products and services.

It was suggested that old-fashioned traditional sales techniques were still deeply rooted in the industry and the adoption of DMC was slow and with accompanying scepticism. Manager\_PD questioned these digital channels further: *“I’d like to think digital media could be better for our business, but at the moment I’ve got nothing concrete to say it has been. The Google AdWords hasn’t given us any extra sales and the website hasn’t given us extra sales”*. Again, companies seemed to be expecting immediate results from DMC use rather than seeing that all combined communication efforts lead to a sale. Only Manager\_PH, from the youngest age group, was an only advocate of using digital channels for his company, noting that the company would not be using DMC if it did not work. He highlighted that

“*marketing in the media*” was very important for his company. Similarly, Manager\_AG also admitted that she did not like the traditional “*picking up the phone*” approach and preferred using websites and LinkedIn.

In general, the managers from the older generation were against DMC in the oil and gas industry and questioned their applicability to the industry, while younger managers were more positive about their use. However, it was evident that limited knowledge existed about marketing in general and thus managers struggled to see the full potential of DMC.

### **5.3.2. Sales Focus**

When asked to identify the most frequently used communication channels, the majority of interviewees mentioned more traditional sales techniques. It was often highlighted that, due to the nature of the industry, traditional sales techniques were highly popular. The networking aspect was frequently mentioned, and the importance of building personal one-to-one relationships stressed. To build these personal relationships, calling via telephone, visiting current and potential clients with lunch-and-learn sessions, together with industry exhibitions and client entertainment was seen as very important. All interviewees, excluding Managers AG and PH, were strong supporters of traditional sales techniques.

#### **5.3.2.1. Networking and Relationships**

Managers mentioned that networking and building industry relationships remained a key activity in the B2B oil and gas industry. Even the use of the social media channel LinkedIn was mostly for identifying potential contacts within organisations before approaching these people directly.

Managers suggested that existing networks and word-of-mouth were the means of getting new clients, as Manager\_AM explained: “*a lot of the customers are ex-customers or people that we’ve dealt with [...] over the years, they just know we are here*”. Manager\_RK also argued that word-of-mouth was the way to get business going: “*a lot of it is through like getting our word out manually through word-of-mouth, lunch-and-learns and it’s people you know*”. Therefore, the focus was on using existing contacts and networks rather than the need for marketing to find new customers: in other words, the focus was on existing client retention rather than new client acquisition. As Manager\_JL concluded “*making relationships face-to-face is just as important as any digital marketing*”. Manager\_PD, explaining the importance of networks and relationships, used his company as an example: “*I took over the business in 2011. Prior to that we had been successful, the company has been going for some 26 years without any website or anything, so the only dialogue was face-to-face or on the phone, some e-mail, but basically face-to-face.*”



The approaches for doing business in the oil and gas industry were more traditional and the currently available technology seemed to be avoided. The focus remained on traditional sales and business development activities. In order to build these valuable networks and relationships, the role of business development manager was important. Manager\_DR explained the role of business development in the oil and gas industry, while Manager\_RK highlighted the importance of the business development manager, as shown in Table 5.17.

**Table 5.17:** Quotations illustrating the importance of business development

Quote – Evidence from Interviews
<i>“My role has always been about building relationships. If you meet someone that worked for a company, that moved on to another company, that you don’t have as a client, and that person is a decision-maker, then there is every chance that that person could bring more company on board, based on his or her personal experience.” (Manager_DR)</i>
<i>“We employ them, because they’ve got a network of people and they know people in the industry. So, like X has worked for years in it and so he knows people and he can go in and say ‘I know the drilling engineer, I’ll phone him up and say look I’ve moved companies, but this is what I do. Can I come in and speak to you’ and make a lunch-and- learn and chat to them. And that’s how it all seems to work.” (Manager_RK)</i>

Another interesting aspect was that people in the oil and gas industry moved around companies a lot, which was another way to develop and maintain business contacts. The quotations above show that business development managers could simply bring new business to companies by having a network. This again reduced the perceived need for marketing. Direct and indirect networking and relying upon personal relationships were perceived to be particularly important in the industry. Manager\_PH also agreed that marketing adoption in the industry was slow because it had traditionally always been about networks: *“Go back 20 years, it was all word-of-mouth, [...] marketing wasn’t a big thing back then, because everyone knew each other and that’s how they got their business”*. Similarly, Manager\_TM suggested that the approach used was *“who the managing director knows”* and noted that this approach was quite common in highly specialised industries. Because in oil and gas SMEs *“there aren’t a lot of different product lines, so therefore you’re not chasing an awful lot of different customers, you’re chasing a particular customer doing a particular type of job”*.

While the need of DMC was questioned for the local oil and gas industry, the moment companies wished to go internationally and expand outside the North Sea region, digital channels became more important. Manager\_TM suggested: *“if you go outside of the North Sea region, which is what the company was trying to do from about 2012, the concept of LinkedIn and other social media was probably more important because the initial contact or initial networking wasn’t really in place.”*

### 5.3.2.2. Traditional Sales Techniques

Due to the strong focus on sales, managers advocated for traditional sales techniques over DMC. The main techniques used included sales visits, telephone calls, lunch-and-learn sessions, client entertainment and trade shows.

Visiting existing and potential clients was a central activity and an important element of relationship building. Face-to-face interactions were seen to be very important by the interviewees as this was a way to fully get to know a client's requirements. While not explicitly acknowledged, the customer-orientation was very important for oil and gas industry. Most of the times the products and services were custom-made and bespoke or tailored for each client, and thus it meant that close relationships with the clients were even more important. Manager\_AM explained how visiting clients used to be *“you just went around all the different offices, putting your head in the door and that's how we built up a relationship.”* However, he acknowledged that there were changes: *“it's much more difficult to gain access to offices, to meet people, to find out their requirements”*.

Another important activity highlighted by interviewees was simply telephoning existing and potential clients. Again, managers mentioned that *“picking up the phone”* and calling was an important communication channel in the industry. *“Phoning them up”* was a common expression used by interviewees as they described how business was done. However, it was also becoming more challenging. Manager\_JL noted that people in oil and gas industry moved between various companies and therefore it was difficult to keep up-to-date with the contact details. Therefore, LinkedIn could be used to identify specific people in potential companies and then traditional communications via telephone could be employed. Another popular technique was lunch-and-learn sessions, which refers to a type of business lunch where companies introduce their products and services to potential clients. As part of his role, Manager\_RK, who was a sales engineer, participated in such sessions, where potential clients were invited to lunch, during which *“we go and present to people and that's how we get most of our information out to clients”*. While the term lunch-and-learn was not mentioned by other managers, inviting clients for lunch or dinner seemed to be quite an important activity for them as well.

These lunch-and-learn sessions can be placed within the wider sales and marketing technique of client entertainment, which typically included golfing or other sporting events and, to a lesser degree, company receptions or dinner events. Golfing events or *“a game of golf”* seemed to be quite popular within the industry and was mentioned by Managers RK, DR, PD and GS. Golf is a common business and pleasure activity, typical across male-dominated industries. However, the interviewees reported that, while customer entertainment used to be very important, new regulations within organisations to avoid corruption and bribery related to on-going tenders, meant that such entertainment was not supported anymore. Manager\_RK noted: *“ten years ago, we were out all the time, lunch every day and taking folk out for drinks at night [...], but it doesn't happen so much anymore in the industry”*. Again, this pointed

to recent changes within the industry’s marketing techniques as there was a move from traditional sales techniques. In addition, the question was raised of how relevant these activities were “*because we are not going to spend a couple of thousand pounds to take out people [...] when potentially there’s not even a sale at the end of it*” (Manager\_RK). It was explained that “*we’re quite a niche product here, so it’s not as if there’s a lot of work out there up for grabs just by having the right contacts and entertaining the right people*” which again highlighted the nature of oil and gas industry and associated complex products.

Several interviewees reported that oil and gas industry exhibitions and trade shows remained important industry events. While most pointed out that the exhibitions were quite expensive and offered questionable results, it was still an industry norm to participate in these events, as shown in Table 5.18.

**Table 5.18:** Quotations illustrating the questionable results of trade shows

<b>Quote – Evidence from Interviews</b>
<p><i>“I struggle to see the value in spending hundreds of thousands of pounds. It is very difficult often to tie specific [...] I spent £100,000 here and I made £1,000,000 of orders, it’s almost impossible to tie those two things together in a lot of cases.”</i> (Manager_PH)</p>
<p><i>“When you go to a show, [...] like oil and gas, you are spending a lot of money and it’s mostly just people coming around looking for jobs, or just looking for freebies you have got [...] you hardly get a good person from a show I must admit.”</i> (Manager_RK)</p>

Only Manager\_GS was a supporter of exhibitions and mentioned that the first exhibition for his company had been very successful. However, he was not sure if the company would exhibit any time soon again. During the exhibition, he had run a prize draw at the stand, through which he collected 150 business cards, and he noted that potential leads were coming from this exhibition and these business cards. Similarly, Manager\_PH mentioned that exhibitions were only important and relevant if they had specific goals and were at the right time. An example given was the *OTC* exhibition in Houston, which was relevant because the company aimed to grow in the USA. However, he added that attending an exhibition was not enough to be successful, it needed a “*coordinated effort*” with company websites and social media.

Manager\_PH concluded that exhibitions were very expensive events with questionable results, unless it was highly targeted, as Manager\_RK summarised “*no real business comes out of it*”, but “*it gets your name out there*”. Again, Manager\_AM explained that people who “*can give you an order*” simply do not attend these exhibitions anymore. Therefore, it was very difficult to monitor and justify the ROI. It was suggested that it was nearly impossible to get any sales from the exhibitions, but attendance could spread the word about company. Again, these changing views towards trade shows, client entertainment and sales visits could have been because of the recession and a more positive climate for DMC.

### 5.3.3. Industry Features

While explaining their company's marketing activities, managers emphasised the type and nature of the oil and gas industry as the major barrier for the use of digital marketing. Typically, the challenges outlined by interviewees included the size of the company, which resulted in limited resources for any marketing activities. Another argument was that the oil and gas industry involved commercially sensitive information, which is why it was not possible to share much on social media or company websites, due to the competition. Examples of such information were suggested to be an actual product or service, for example the consultancy services or a newly created product "*ball launcher*".

In addition, interviewees argued that the oil and gas industry in general was a different type of industry, which meant there were some traditional activities approved by the industry and newer approaches were simply not accepted due to age and generational differences. The age factor was seen as a very important barrier against the use of DMC because the industry was dominated by the older generations. It also became evident that gathering the latest industry news and keeping up-to-date was an important activity within the industry and the focus was on information gathering rather than information sharing. Manager\_PH noted "*the oil and gas industry is a small village, I can go to the Middle East and bump into a bunch of different people that I've worked with in Aberdeen, so there is a lot of word-of-mouth*", which is a good illustration explaining marketing approaches undertaken by local oil and gas companies.

#### 5.3.3.1. Company Size

The size of a company was mentioned often during the interviews to explain why things were done in a certain way. Most of the time company size was mentioned as a determining factor in how a company operated and what type of marketing activities they conducted. Manager\_TM used the phrases "*because of the size of the company*", "*within the size of the company I work for*", "*I have to emphasise in the position I was and the size of the company*", while Manager\_DR also mentioned "*for the type of business I work for*". In addition, Manager\_AM described his company as "*we're just a little small family service company*" and suggested that large multinational companies did things differently. He also added "*the small operating company has got a lot more difficulty in this global service industry than a large service company*". In the same vein, Manager\_PH suggested that "*it varies depending on the company size*", but "*a big company would do something different altogether*".

On the other hand, Manager\_AM suggested how a small company could be successful: "*keep on being an innovator and creating new products, something new, something innovative; if you have something and people want [...] to buy, if they think it is that good, they will buy it.*" Overall, company size seemed to be directly related to how organisations undertook their marketing activities. Most of the time the size of the company was mentioned as a barrier against DMC despite the fact that, typically, small companies tend to be more agile and are able to adapt better.

### 5.3.3.2. Resources

Another aspect closely related to company size was the lack of resources in companies, which resulted in minimal DMC activities. Several interviewees mentioned that their digital marketing, including websites, were done by themselves, family members or students to save money. Manager\_PD explained that his wife helped with the company’s LinkedIn page and he was using a student to help with website redesign explaining *“ultimately he doesn’t charge much for it, so it would save us some money and obviously [...] at the moment saving some money is good”*.

Similarly, to save money, Manager\_GS created a website himself as *“you don’t pay masses of money as a company to have that”*. However, he admitted that he had not updated his company LinkedIn page since the company’s inception, because of limited time. While these things were on his to-do-list, *“the top list is the existing clients”*, because they drive the business and bring money to the company. He also added *“right now I don’t have time to maintain LinkedIn”* and mentioned that his cousin’s wife designed websites, so he might use her in the future. Thus, it was evident that, due to limited time available, managers focused on the top operational activities, which did not include marketing.

Due to limited resources, these SMEs tended to focus on the operational aspects of their business rather than seeing DMC channels, such as websites, as being an important channel that could assist in generating leads for their businesses. In addition, marketing was seen as expenditure with no contribution to their business with the recession dimension also being noted, as shown in Table 5.19.

**Table 5.19:** Quotations illustrating the limited resources

Quote – Evidence from Interviews
<i>“Because right now we probably couldn’t afford to have many full-time members of a separate marketing department [...] and the income that’s coming in now wouldn’t be sustainable to pay these people.” (Manager_AM)</i>
<i>“We don’t have a marketing company to constantly update it or a marketing person working for the company, so it would be done by myself or my brother. Again, we’re too small.” (Manager_PD)</i>
<i>“In the current state of the market no. Again, investment wise there isn’t investment, I’m afraid, in additional staff, because there is just no need for it.” (Manager_IS)</i>

The above quotations demonstrate the limited time and financial resources available. Manager\_GS suggested that, if a company became too involved in digital marketing, *“you absolutely are in a place where all they can do is create a workload burden, maybe a cost burden, but a workload burden that right now [...] it’s not needed”*. He suggested that, for SMEs, any digital activities *“need to be fairly maintenance free”*, because there were very limited time resources available. Some managers did not see any immediate connection between marketing and revenue, as marketing was only seen as an expenditure. Manager\_AM explained: *“Because bottom line for me is the balance sheet, [...] the customer, how much money has come in from them. Never mind all the marketing and all that stuff,*

*bottom line is how much revenue. You can be super marketers, but it's not producing anything at the end of it."*

On the contrary, Manager\_PH suggested *"for any SMEs, it's definitely important to spend a bit of time and a bit of effort on these kinds of activities"*. He argued that, due to limited resources, it was much better to use digital media: *"because with us only being two people it's impossible to reach out to all these people one-on-one, it just takes too much time, it's really time consuming, so now we have them coming to us to find out information"*. This manager had more strategic views on DMC use since, by saving time, more time could be spent on other more high-value business activities. Again, his approach to limited resources was different to those of the older interviewees. While he did not have enough time and knowledge, this manager hired a marketing agency because it was important to have specialists doing DMC.

The majority of interviewees noted that limited financial and personnel resources restricted companies in their digital marketing options, as Manager\_GS summarised the work in SMEs: *"it's about scale, it's about resources and it's about workload"*. These limited resources seemed to play a very important role in how much marketing the organisations were doing. As a result, some managers even expressed positive results about participating in the interviews. Manager\_GS said *"from my side too as well it has been very useful. You have helped me with a number of things there to go away and add to my to-do-list"*. Similarly, Manager\_IS, during interview, realised he did not focus on company marketing and the interview made him realise it. Thus, it shows that, with limited marketing knowledge, managers required additional initiatives educating them.

#### 5.3.3.3. Commercially Sensitive Information

During the interviews, managers mentioned that there was a lot of commercially sensitive information in the industry and, therefore, it was not easy to adopt DMC channels. They demonstrated fear about DMC due to lack of knowledge. Some examples given included Manager\_GS raising concerns about commercially sensitive information: *"There are people who have just been made redundant, who think I can do what he's done and people who will [...] take your creativity and try and progress themselves from that, particularly when I'm not through my first year of business"*. To prevent this, he mentioned potentially having a section on the website to login for more information. Similarly, Manager\_PH noted that, due to the nature of commercially sensitive information, it was not possible to put everything on the website and was considering *"having areas that you log into to get more information"* rather than giving the information to everybody.

Managers AM and JL were highly concerned about revealing too much information online and how to protect it. Even when giving an example about their recent LinkedIn post: *"I thought very, very carefully about what text I put up there next to the picture and it was minimal"* and added *"I had to even be careful*

*about the background*” (Manager\_JL). Manager\_AM elaborated further by giving an example about how a competitor developed a product based on his idea. Similarly, Managers PD and RK mentioned that, because they provided custom-made products, it was impossible to put this information on a website, since it applied only to a specific client and not the whole clientele. Therefore, they questioned what type of information could be put on a website as they argued they had no information applicable to a general audience. In general, managers expressed concerns about sharing information with everybody. As a solution, managers considered sharing limited information with everyone and having restricted areas on the websites for potential clients with more information.

#### 5.3.3.4. Oil and Gas Industry

Another theme that recurred frequently during the interviews was the nature of the oil and gas industry and the question of whether DMC techniques were applicable at all. Nearly all managers commented on certain industry features, which were seen as barriers to DMC adoption, with some managers even suggesting that DMC was not relevant to the industry at all.

Manager\_IS explained that the oil and gas industry was different as companies providing products and services to major operators needed to be firstly assessed by *Achilles FPAL*<sup>19</sup>. As explained by Manager\_IS: *“if you’re on that register, it excludes the need for a marketing programme altogether, because people can find your services, because they look under a specific code and if your company is registered for that code, then you’re automatically going to get an invite to tender”*. He later added *“there is a place for marketing”*, but only during tender phases as *“if you have good marketing capability, you will get possibly more opportunity to get invited to tender”*, especially if the organisation provided very specific services and the potential supplier was not known, only then might marketing be relevant.

Correspondingly, Manager\_PD continued that *“our products generally are something that are custom built, and they are one-offs, so even the same customer, if they weren’t to use it on that particular job, they probably couldn’t use it on another job”*. He argued that, because of custom-made expansion joints, provided by the company, marketing applicability was highly questioned. Manager\_PH added that there were quite a lot of people in the industry with the mindset that *“marketing is waste of money”*, because *“everyone knew each other and that’s how they got their business”*. Some Managers (GS, IS) even admitted that they had not been focusing on DMC, because they did not see it as applicable, as shown in Table 5.20.

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<sup>19</sup> *Achilles FPAL* is an organisation which provides first-point assessment of oil and gas companies in Europe for tender opportunities on behalf of major oil and gas industry buyers

**Table 5.20:** Quotations illustrating the applicability of marketing in oil and gas industry

Quote – Evidence from Interviews
<i>“The web is great for some industries or some businesses, where they can get or they can increase their sales [...] by huge amounts just by being online, but [...] it’s a consumable type item, that you just buy off the shelf [...] more of a product that is mass manufactured and is just you buy one, you take it off a shelf, it gets posted out to you and you have it.” (Manager_PD)</i>
<i>“I’ve probably been focusing on delivery, on an operational delivery and not the front facing telling the world what I do. That’s also kind of deliberate, because at the minute I’m quite happy being under the radar.” (Manager_GS)</i>
<i>“I haven’t exploited that [DMC] probably to its full potential in my opinion. [...] For me it’s difficult to try and sell yourself in amongst the crowd through marketing.” (Manager_IS)</i>

Managers agreed that word-of-mouth was the main channel for acquiring new business. Manager\_IS stated all his work is through word-of-mouth and was convinced none of this could come via the internet. Manager\_RK also added *“90% probably 95% of our business is through word-of-mouth”* and Manager\_TM also agreed that direct networking was very important in the industry, simply because this was how things were done. Manager\_GS explained that in the industry: *“they’ll have heard my name, they’ll have heard about me”* and added *“in Aberdeen everyone thinks they know everyone, whether they do or not”*. Altogether, the products were very specific, with very few clients in the industry, which resulted in low product demands in general. Manager\_PD explained *“we are probably more a traditional oil and gas company”*, who *“don’t have very many competitors”* and *“in what we do it’s such a small niche market I don’t know who else does it”*. Therefore, he had strong views that *“ultimately no matter how good a salesman is, if they have no requirement to buy one of our products, they won’t buy”*. Similarly, it was noted that products were very specialised and cost a lot money and that people would never say *“oh expandable casing, do we need one?”* (Manager\_RK).

Only one manager strongly supported the use of DMC for the oil and gas industry. As Manager\_PH explained, his company was developing a new technology and had nothing to sell, *“so it was very much about selling ourselves, selling the idea of the company and what we could do”*. Therefore, DMC was very useful as it was about generating interest by building the brand and its awareness: *“everyone knows who we are and we’re quite popular”*. However, he highlighted that the oil and gas industry was now global, not only the North Sea region (which contradicted Managers IS, TM, AM):

*“The stuff we’re designing and the stuff that most people are designing in Aberdeen it’s not for the North Sea, it’s for the global oil and gas industry [...] you really have no choice, but to do marketing and have a website and all these things. If you want to get known in the Middle East, then you have to be in Middle East publications, you have to have a website, you maybe have to have an Arabic website or a Russian website.”*

In general, due to highly specialised companies within the oil and gas industry, the products and services tended to be niche, and often custom-made, and therefore the applicability and need of DMC was questioned. Networking and word-of-mouth seemed to be the way companies acquired new business. It



is not clear, however, whether the oil and gas industry was really so unique and different from all other industries, or whether the industry was simply resistant to contemporary marketing approaches.

#### 5.3.3.5. Generation and Age

Age and generational differences were an important factor in how DMC was used and acted as a barrier in the oil and gas industry. Managers mentioned the major differences between “younger” and “older” generations. Managers representing the older generation demonstrated fear and insecurity about the technology.

Manager\_IS, talking about himself, noted *“I haven’t quite made it into the 21st century yet on a lot of the technology side”*. Similarly, Manager\_RK used these phrases: *“shows you my IT skills”* and *“shows you how much I know”*. Manager\_AM mentioned quite a few times how things used to be in the oil and gas industry when he *“was younger”* and used expressions such as *“my generation”*, *“old-fashioned”*, *“too much old-school”*, *“old boy like me”*, which clearly implied that things in the industry were different now. He shared that *“some of the feedback we’ve had on our existing website, which is more or less the contents of this catalogue here, [...] a lot of the young generation or the young engineers feel it’s a bit old, a bit old-fashioned”*. Though Manager\_AM argued, he was more *“old-fashioned”* himself, he also agreed *“we have to market for everybody, not just a select old boy like me”*. Manager\_TM, when talking about small companies in highly specialised industries, also mentioned generational differences: *“these people tend to be older as well, and they’re not as switched-on or not as interested in social media as maybe younger ones can be”*. Similarly, it was explained by Manager\_GS that these older generations were simply not used to digital:

*“There’s an awful lot of people in Aberdeen, who are at a stage in their life, who don’t spend time in front of a computer, because that’s not what they’re good at. [...] I can think of a lot of guys who probably are in senior, if not owners of small businesses, sell equipment or they rent equipment, they’re not digitally focused.”*

Manager\_AG, on the other hand, representing the younger generations, explained there were different ways of working, which was *“a generational thing”*. The old-school way of doing sales by calling or *“turning up on a door”* was going away. It was further argued by Manager\_IS that there were major differences in how these generations worked, as younger generations could introduce entrepreneurial ways of working *“to bring on new ideas, fresh ways of doing things”* and move business forward, while older generations used a *“how I’ve done it for the last 15 years”* approach. Thus, LinkedIn and other DMC channels were used as a communication channel between these younger people. The differences between generations were evident during the interviews. Since DMC was associated with technology use, managers representing older generations were not in favour of its use and, as a result, questioned DMC use and applicability.

#### 5.3.3.6. Industry News

It became clear that information gathering was an important activity in the oil and gas industry and DMC channels were used to gather that information. It seemed that the focus of B2B SMEs was on information gathering rather than information sharing, with interviewees still using traditional print magazines. For example, Manager\_AG explained that she read all the traditional magazines to keep up to date, but also noted that “*mostly everything’s online now*”. While Manager\_GS mentioned he read the traditional news websites, he also mentioned “*the oil and gas industry is almost saturated with news*” and therefore it was important to identify the key information sources. However, it was agreed that websites and LinkedIn were useful channels to get the latest information about the industry. As Manager\_GS explained the importance of news and being up-to-date: “*when you’re in a big job in a big company, you know, information is everything*”. This focus on information search and gathering could be since the internet started as a channel for information search and provision. Thus, it could be the reason that these older generations saw it in the same way as it was when they started using the internet.

#### 5.3.4. Website

From all the DMC channels, websites were the most frequently discussed by interviewees, and they all agreed that it was necessary to have a website when operating in the oil and gas industry. While Manager\_GS argued that “*the website is probably the biggest*” channel, Manager\_PD defined digital marketing as having a company website: “*digital, well I call it marketing, it’s just through the website we have*”. Websites and LinkedIn seemed to be the most popular channels for oil and gas SMEs.

Websites were identified as being useful channels for several reasons:

- Global reach: “*My connections are international, and that’s the biggest potential market I could have is not in the UK, so how to get the company known overseas is beyond who knows who in Aberdeen*” (Manager\_GS)
- Reassurance and professionalism: “*The website needs to look as good as it can do. It will look professional, it will cover all the products that we do, it will have a list of companies, logos of the companies that we deal with [will be included], because we deal with a lot of blue-chip companies*” (Manager\_PD)
- Industry standard: “*I don’t expect it really to give us sales, I just see it being there as something nowadays in the 21st century you need a website, people won’t take you seriously if you don’t have a website*” (Manager\_IS)
- Generate leads: “*On our website, we had a thing [...] if you want to contact us, so an oil company in Denmark contacted us, so we get about ten people a year contacting us through the website in our region*” (Manager\_RK)

- Preference for digital formats: “*people don’t want printed stuff*” and they require only digital material (Manager\_RK)

Manager\_DR even went further and suggested that the website was a channel for reaching wide audiences:

*“Website is like your front shop window in a big wide world, so you need to be able to have a website that appeals, that gets a good hit rate and gets a lot of interest for people looking for your services. The website is a key factor in getting your product or your company recognition to a wider audience.”*

Two managers reported that their company websites were undergoing redesign and one company had just finished, with the main rationale being “*it’s there to [...] back up the fact that maybe we can’t get in to see a particular person, so in that way we’re making our presence look better and more appealing and hopefully starting something off from there*” (Manager\_AM). However, two managers admitted that their current websites were simply brochure-type sites with the same information. One company was redesigning the website internally, another had hired a graduate student to assist with the design in a joint effort, and only one organisation had a marketing agency responsible for website redesign. Manager\_PH was a strong advocate of using experts and specialists rather than doing things himself. However, the other two managers explained that they had limited financial resources and could not use a marketing agency. While websites seemed to be important, Manager\_PD highlighted the issue of limited search volumes for his company and website due to highly specific products and specific combination of keywords used:

*“It’s trying to target the people, so for the people who would be looking at our website, [...] if you had no interest in my business, you would never come across my website. If you did come across it, you would immediately leave it, because you would see that it was something you would have no interest in. So, the people that are looking at my website will basically have searched a certain number of words that will hopefully get them to our website.”*

Again, the quote demonstrates that some knowledge existed about how a website could be used to acquire new traffic by optimising websites for specific keywords. However, the main argument was that there was a very small number of people who would ever search for that highly specific product. Manager\_PD continued further and argued there would be a very small number of returning visitors to his website since there was limited information available there that would be useful for a client. However, he suggested that, when communicating with new contacts as a part of lead generation, websites “*will give you an idea of what we do, the services we offer*” and it could be followed later by a “*telephone call*”. Thus, websites were seen to be useful as a supporting channel of traditional sales activities.

#### 5.3.4.1. Good Website

All managers were asked to describe what a good website was for them. Quite different answers were received, with the two most important elements being information or content and easily accessible contact details. Other elements, such as website visuals, including colours, were not deemed important. Only one manager noted that videos and visual information were important. However, Manager\_PD's answer, "*that is to me, that's the six-million-dollar question, and what is good content on a website*", highlighted the complexity of the question.

Regarding the features of a good website, Manager\_GS offered quite a general explanation: a good website should be "*fit for purpose, depending on what that purpose is*". All managers commented on the importance of content and information on websites and Manager\_IS concluded "*in terms of how it works, how it looks, that side of things, it's content rather than functionality for me*". The other very important element for good websites was the ease of accessing specific people working in a specific company, including contact details. Managers noted that there was "*nothing worse*", "*nothing more annoying*" and "*most frustrating*" than not being able to access these contact details. Manager\_GS concluded: "*when it comes to business websites, you want to know about people.*" The importance of accessing the right information was also highlighted by Manager\_DR: "*closed shop, so there is certain information you all of a sudden cannot find, contact numbers of specific people, e-mails of specific people*", because, as mentioned previously, it was important to build one-to-one personal relationships in the oil and gas industry "*because you're looking for someone in particular you'd like to communicate with*". Thus, although not explicitly, the interviewees agreed that a website was a useful DMC channel, but that use needed to facilitate their need to build personal relationships. Contact numbers remained of high importance as "*picking the phone up*" was still the most popular mean of communication.

Other website elements and features, including not being cluttered, some imagery and navigation were also mentioned, but less emphasised than the importance of people's contact details. Manager\_AG nicely summarised the main features for a good website: "*it's the content and the ease of use*". On the other hand, only Manager\_PH strongly advocated for website visuals and aesthetics: "*It's a mix of all content, images and clear navigation. It has got to look good because there is that 10 second rule. If you come onto a website and it's like ugh, you're not that likely to stay.*" Other managers highlighted the importance of website homepages, because it was important first to attract people to a website and catch their attention, but then these people need to be able to find out about the company and their products in "*one or two clicks*". Finally, Manager\_PD raised a valuable point that the most important criterion was being findable by the target audience.

#### 5.3.4.2. Attract Stage

For a website, the *attract stage* included four website features: a company website address, website listing on other industry sites, a mobile and internet browsers optimised website and the website address

being visible on social media platforms. All interviewees agreed that the website address should be similar to the actual company name and that this factor was important. As Manager\_AG explained “*just being able to have some correlation, because if it didn’t have a correlation to the company, it might be harder to search and to find*”. However, Manager\_PD, while acknowledging that the website name was important, also noted that his business name and website address was different because the name was already taken and they additional word “*offshore*” was added for the website address.

Another issue discussed was whether it was necessary to have the website listed or registered on other industry websites. In general, the managers agreed that it was not important to have a website registered on online directories or websites. Again, this was due to the highly specific nature of their products. Manager\_PD explained: “*Because maybe it’s just the kind of business we are, the niche type of business we are, people wouldn’t happen across our website in a journal or in a magazine and think oh hallelujah, there’s Company X, I need to go and phone them.*” Others suggested that they already knew the name of company they would be looking for, and thus would either type the company address directly into the browser or undertake a brand search on Google. It was suggested that company listings in directories used to be very important before the internet. Manager\_IS gave the example: “*The old Pegasus book that we used to get, which had all the companies within the oil and gas industry, was like gold dust back in the day. If you got one of those it was very easy to contact people, but we don’t really do a similar equivalent to that online anymore*”.

On the other hand, Manager\_DR felt that such listings were important, because it added a sense of credibility and trustworthiness to the company. Manager\_GS was also a strong supporter of having a website listed in various outlets as he explained the only reason he “*exhibited in Subsea Expo [was] to get into their catalogue*” and gave other examples of organisations to which his company belonged purely to have entries in their listings. All managers strongly agreed that having a website optimised for mobile devices was very important, together with websites optimised for different internet browsers. Manager\_AG explained: “*there’s nothing worse than if you go onto something on your mobile phone and you can’t see half the website, it’s usually the bit that you’re looking for that you can’t get to*”. Even though some managers suggested they only used desktops for work purposes, they agreed that different people use different devices and thus websites needed to be “*multiuser capable*”.

Managers were asked whether including a website address on social media brand pages was important to send traffic to the website. In response, managers raised the same questions about social media and how applicable it was for the oil and gas industry in general. While Manager\_TM argued it was “*not particularly important*”, Manager\_PD mentioned “*if you are updating them and you’ve got something worthwhile to say, then I suppose it’s important*”. Only Manager\_PH, who was also a strong supporter of using social media for his organisation, rated this as being a highly important factor because “*we spend a lot of time trying to leverage different channels, [...] putting a story in one place and making*

*sure that it gets a hit everywhere else*". Regarding attract stage elements, importance was placed on website addresses and websites being mobile-optimised. Other features, such as having links on social media pages or entries in industry listings, were noted to be important only by a few managers.

#### 5.3.4.3. Engage and Retain Stage

The *engage and retain* stage included nine factors: contests and games, forums and discussion groups, website loading time, hyperlinks to related industry websites, interactive functions, security features and privacy statements, hyperlinks to social media, news section and downloadable resources. All interviewees were asked how important it was to have some type of lucky draw or contest on the websites. In general, managers were quite sceptical about these initiatives for the industry, which was described as *"the gimmick side of things"*. It was suggested that it was applicable more to other industries: *"holiday, a travel industry or something like that then I think that would set you apart from others"* (Manager\_IS). On the contrary, Manager\_PH advocated for having *"fun stuff"* and described how his company had recently run a game on social media, *"name the mascot"*, which received some interest. Furthermore, some interviewees even admitted to participating in these initiatives. An offline lucky draw type of initiative that is quite popular during oil and gas exhibitions is to leave a business card at an exhibitor's stall to participate in a prize draw. This seemed to work for the companies as they received new leads and the participants might win a prize.

The idea of offering forums or discussion groups was also questioned by interviewees. They were again not sure how applicable these were for the oil and gas industry. Manager\_PH explained that, based on his previous experience, the challenge with such discussion groups were *"to keep it going"* because *"you have to really keep on top of it and be putting out lots of questions and lots of discussions, if you put some interesting thing out today and you get a bit of discussion and if you don't do it next week, [...] then it's pointless."* He also suggested that, instead of having open discussions, companies should be having direct communications with their clients.

In general, managers agreed that website loading time was an important factor, and if websites took a long time to load, people could simply leave the site and not come back. However, Managers AG and IS noted that website loading speed was related to the overall internet speed, because they were based in the countryside. Therefore, those respondents with lower internet speed tended to be slightly less focused on website loading speeds. Managers tended to agree that it was not of high importance to have other associated websites listed on the company website. Only Manager\_GS advocated for including other websites. The responses regarding interactive function importance were similar as interviewees agreed that having some interactivity, such as an interactive office map or a photo gallery, was not important, but it could be an advantage.

It was suggested that security and privacy features and statements were of high importance. Nearly all interviewees agreed that these features and statements, such as accreditation and membership logos,

T&Cs and FAQs, added more credibility to the company and saved time. Manager\_DR explained that *“it paints a picture as to what their organisation is about, how seriously they take looking after their staff or how seriously they want to demonstrate they have processes in place which have been audited”*. There was also a question regarding the importance of having links to social media sites from a company website. Similar responses were gathered, focusing on the idea that social media was not that important for the oil and gas industry. According to the managers, the industry did not use these channels and therefore it was not seen as an important.

Quite unified responses were gathered about the importance of a website news section. According to interviewees, it was important to have an up-to-date news section on the website, specifically to see success stories and previous case studies. Manager\_JL noted that *“if you see some success stories, then it just gets them even closer to making a purchase or committing”* and Manager\_DR added: *“news sections are always useful, because you get a chronological picture of how the company is growing, developing, interacting”*. However, Managers PD and TM noted that they had no interest in reading news sections. It was suggested that news sections were important, but only if they were up-to-date and relevant: *“It’s important to have it or not have it. Like having it and having a bit of news from a year ago, as your last update is, not a good idea, but it’s definitely important to have it as long as you have it updated regularly”* (Manager\_PH). Other managers, while agreeing news sections were important, raised the issue of the need for resources to constantly update and maintain these sections. It was also suggested that, for small organisations, it was not easy to constantly produce news, especially during a recession. Regarding downloadable resources and information on a company website, managers agreed that having in-depth datasheets was very useful. However, it was argued that *“it’s got to be meaningful stuff like data sheets and infographics”*.

In general, managers agreed that security features and privacy statements, news sections and downloadable resources were important features for websites, which other features in the retain and engage stage were not important for the oil and gas industry. However, barriers were also identified relating to the fact that SMEs might have a lack of resources or limited news to keep updating the websites.

#### 5.3.4.4. Learn Stage

This stage included only two website elements: e-mail sign up in order to receive relevant information for potential customers and leaving feedback via online surveys. Overall, interviewees were quite neutral about the option to sign-up for a company e-mail news. Managers RK and TM noted that personally they were not interested in receiving e-mail news, while Manager\_PH suggested it might be useful if companies had something to say. The issues associated with e-mails were the potential of receiving too much information, which might not be relevant. Again, the focus was more on receiving information

rather than sending it to their clients. The attitudes towards this element were in line with managers' opinions of e-mail marketing, presented below.

On the issue of feedback via online surveys, the managers agreed that, instead of having feedback on a website or online, it should be directly addressed to the company. Receiving feedback from clients was important and managers were encouraged to get feedback personally rather than as anonymous online feedback. Manager\_PD used free online software to assist in gathering feedback with a simple 10-question survey. Manager\_RK explained “*we always get told to chase up the client after you have done a job*”.

#### 5.3.4.5. Relate Stage

The *relate* stage included three website features: customisation and personalisation, e-mail news and real-time interactions. These tactics seemed not be important for the managers. As previously discussed, e-mails did not play a significant role. Though personalised attention and products were required, it needed to be offline and not for communications. While they were fully aware about real-time interaction function on the website, it was questioned how applicable and useful this function would be for the oil and gas industry.

### 5.3.5. Search Engine Marketing

Interviewees were asked about search engine marketing, specifically about SEO, advertising on the Google search engine and the personal use of search engines, in order to understand how important these search activities were for the oil and gas industry.

#### 5.3.5.1. Search Engines

Managers were asked if they used search engines as a part of their role. They agreed that search engines were used quite a lot as noted: “*the search engines are important*”. Again, finding and confirming information was rated as very important, as explained by Manager\_DR:

*“In my role, it was always something that was key to establishing facts about what you heard in the news about a particular company or about a particular contact person that you have met and dealt with, so it [search engine] is a good way of actually clarifying the information that you have been given.”*

Similarly, Manager\_RK gave an example about clarifying information through the use of a search engine when an enquiry from an unknown company came in: “*I would want to know if it is an offshore rig or a field*” and simply “*find out more information on the field and where it is*”. However, it seemed that managers were undertaking quite specific and targeted searches while using search engines rather than browsing in general. Manager\_PH explained “*I don't do that many general searches*” as it was more to confirm existing information he already knew. He added “*I usually know what I'm looking for*”.



Manager\_DR noted the same: *“in a business-to-business perspective, so generally I’m looking for a specific company”*. Again, the managers, while not using the term, were talking about brand searches.

It is therefore evident that managers used search engines but did not undertake broad searches. Rather they searched for specific things in relation to companies they were already aware of, thus undertaking brand searches. This also shows how large generic search volumes did not exist and, thus, SEO was of limited importance in attracting new customers.

#### 5.3.5.2. Search Engine Optimisation

The term SEO was quite unfamiliar for the vast majority of interviewees as they had no understanding what the term meant and how it related to their company websites. Only two Managers (PD and GS) were slightly aware of the concept. Manager\_PD used Google Analytics reports to see traffic growth for his company website, but the focus was more on measuring Google AdWords results rather than optimising the website. He also mentioned the use of key terms to measure how his company website ranked on Google search engine. Similarly, Manager\_GS, just before interview, had received a SEO report for the first time, but admitted that he was not aware what to do with it and even what the term search engine optimisation meant. Thus, none of the managers understood the concept of ranking factors and how search worked.

As Manager\_PD explained *“Google works with looking at how much, how fresh the content is, the amount of content”*. Based on this, the company was trying to redesign the website and include more content. This demonstrates that the interviewee had some limited knowledge and relied on marketing agencies to deal with this part of marketing. He also raised a question: *“I suppose the only thing it would be interesting to know is how many people revisit our website”*, which could easily be seen from Google Analytics reports he had. However, he quickly answered his question and related back to limited search volumes: *“people will not go into our website regularly to have a look at what’s there”*. Similarly, while Manager\_IS was not aware what SEO and search visibility meant, he noted that it was *“important that you can feature on the radar”*.

#### 5.3.5.3. Google AdWords

Interviewees were also asked if they clicked Google AdWords ads on SERPs and if their companies were involved with this form of advertising. Some managers did not know what search ads were, and therefore the researcher had to give an example of what paid advertisement looked like (Appendix 6, p.270). The majority of the managers were not able to distinguish paid adverts on SERPs, while Managers DR and TM felt that something was not right with the first few results, and therefore scrolled down. Managers could not fully explain why they were suspicious about these ads and provided the following explanations *“it’s maybe not what it is you have googled for”* (Manager\_PD), *“now you ask*

me, that has got me thinking” (Manager\_AG), “because I don’t trust them” (Manager\_RK). While Manager\_PH simply clicked them “if they’re relevant”.

Only Manager\_PD knew what Google AdWords were and had tried it for his company. He mentioned that the idea was to help grow business through digital means as “the website doesn’t attract an awful lot of clicks or anything like that” so the marketing agency suggested using Google AdWords to “advertise, get further up in Google and, therefore, with that potentially get more business”. He concluded “that has proved unsuccessful; the number of clicks was less than 70”. He demonstrated a strong understanding of how Google AdWords were set up and how it should have worked. However, he concluded “we’re getting very little visitors now, because it obviously isn’t something that’s searched for in a great detail, in any great sort of numbers”. Then he admitted “I would never click on any of the adverts, I would always go to the first free one”, realising “that almost goes against what we’ve tried to do by having a Google AdWords account and where we are expecting other people to do what I don’t do, which is click on an advert at the top of a webpage, but it clearly proves not to work anyway”. He also strongly suggested that Google AdWords would be more relevant to other industries rather than oil and gas as “people wouldn’t be searching for my type of product, unless they specifically wanted it”.

### **5.3.6. Social Media**

Social media channels were discussed by all managers. However, the majority questioned the use and need of Facebook and Twitter for the oil and gas industry, although they were advocates for LinkedIn and some saw the value of YouTube. Managers argued that social media was not used much in the oil and gas industry and the industry itself was identified as a major barrier. It was suggested that, when it comes to social media for the oil and gas industry, “it’s definitely not Snapchat, it’s definitely not Facebook”. While Manager\_GS was very firm that “Facebook is not applicable, YouTube is not applicable [...] as the services which this company provides and will provide is company to company”, Manager\_PD was more unsure whether Facebook and Twitter could be used for oil and gas companies as “we’re still investigating that, I don’t know whether we’ll do anything with it”. “Age thing” and “size of the company” were identified as additional barriers for social media use.

However, some advantages of social media for the oil and gas industry were proposed. Manager\_IS gave an example of how social media was more important to younger generations as it created trust and credibility for the company: “I was working with one of the people that came for interview and they said ‘I wasn’t really sure I wanted to come for interview, because you didn’t have a Twitter site and you didn’t have a Facebook site, so I wasn’t sure you were a legitimate company’.” Manager\_TM also suggested that social media could become more relevant when companies started to consider becoming global and building networks outside the local North Sea region. Manager\_PH again was the only strong supporter of social media for the industry. The reason for this could be that this company was new and

needed to build awareness about the product they were developing. He again contradicted the rest of the interviewees with his strong focus on various DMC channels:

*“We spend a lot of time trying to leverage different channels, putting a story in one place and making sure that it gets a hit everywhere else, so if we had a video, we’d put that on YouTube, as opposed to putting it straight onto LinkedIn. We’d put it on YouTube and share it online, so that you get that double hit and then put that maybe on the website, so every time someone goes on there’s a link.”*

Use of Facebook for the oil and gas industry was intensively questioned by managers. Manager\_AG noted that it was not usual in the oil and gas industry to go on Facebook or Twitter and search for work-related information: *“In oil and gas, not so much, it wouldn’t be our first port of call to go and find, to go to Facebook to find that or Twitter to find that”*. Manager\_GS also stated, *“Facebook is not applicable”*. He further elaborated that, because the oil and gas industry was *“company to company, so Facebook is probably not the right mechanism”*, while also adding that a B2C company *“just cries out for Facebook”*. A few managers mentioned that Facebook was used solely for personal and not for corporate use. Manager\_IS had a company profile page on Facebook, but *“I must confess I’m really bad, I don’t generally post stuff on there particularly, which is maybe a missed opportunity from my side”*. Manager\_AG similarly commented that Twitter was not suitable or applicable to the oil and gas industry. However, Manager\_IS, after *“discussing Twitter with some younger pals,”* said he might have to sign-up for it *“in the near future”*. However, he also noted that Twitter required significant resources. The issue with commercially sensitive information was raised again. Contrary, Manager\_PH, who was a strong advocate of social media, had recently started using Twitter for his company and the main reason was because *“we found just by accident that other people were sharing things about us on Twitter”*.

In addition, interviewees were quite sceptical about the use of YouTube in the oil and gas industry. Just two managers mentioned that YouTube was a useful channel for getting video information on various oil and gas industry topics. Manager\_RK mentioned that his company had a YouTube channel, but that even the employees did not know the corporate video was there. He also added that YouTube was used for storing videos and sharing the link by e-mails to others *“because it’s too big to send”*. Manager\_PH also explained *“we have YouTube channel, but that’s just to post videos really”*. Similarly, Manager\_JL explained how he used YouTube for the company:

*“Where I’ve not been able to get in to see someone, I’ve just got a Word document opened and I’ve pasted in a link to the video and a short description and I’ve sent it and then I can go into analytics and look and see who’s viewed it and how long they’ve viewed it for and where they turned off. But then I can always, once I’ve sent that e-mail, I can follow up with a conversation and say ‘Did you look at the video? What do you think?’”*

However, he noted that the channel was not popular, and the two videos were not seen by a lot of viewers. It is therefore evident that the use of YouTube as a DMC channel was very limited. Managers used it more for storing company videos rather than strategically integrating this channel. In general,

social media channels were not perceived to be relevant to the oil and gas industry. The industry type, size of the company, and generational differences were identified as barriers. The only exception was the use of LinkedIn.

### **5.3.7. LinkedIn**

LinkedIn was the most popular social media channel among interviewees and the second most important DMC channel together with websites. While LinkedIn offered two options: either connecting with people and expanding the network or connecting with organisations by following them, the networking option seemed to be more important for interviewees. Managers advocated for using LinkedIn in the oil and gas industry as it was a professional social media platform. Manager\_PH even mentioned that he did not receive any e-mail news, but only used LinkedIn.

It was suggested that LinkedIn was the only professional social platform and was useful in establishing working relationships with specific person within a particular company. Manager\_TM explained *“LinkedIn gives the opportunity to (a) promote what you’re looking for, but (b) also through the connections, gathering information from the contacts that you have”*. The importance of people and their contact details was highlighted several times. As Manager\_GS explained, *“one of the first things I did was I downloaded my connections into an Excel spreadsheet”*. Even when discussing the use of LinkedIn, managers focused on traditional ways of doing business by building relationships and suggested that LinkedIn could be used to support this relationship building.

Due to the focus on relationship building, the preferred focus on LinkedIn was on personal profiles rather than company pages, with only a few interviewees following company pages for the latest news about organisations. Manager\_PD suggested that LinkedIn was used more for personal profiles for *“finding the names of people in specific jobs that would be people that we would want to speak to”*. Similarly, Manager\_GS noted *“I look for people on LinkedIn, I don’t go to company pages”*. He also highlighted that this was the main *“reason why I’ve not been too concerned about my company page, because people will look for me”*. He explained that LinkedIn is *“a database of people”*. Manager\_AG was the only interviewee who preferred following actual companies *“I follow the companies more, to get a better idea of what’s happening, as opposed to people”*, Manager\_PH focused on both the company and personal profiles. He was the only proactive user of LinkedIn for business: *“big thing we do is LinkedIn”*. His company posted on LinkedIn a good deal and had active profiles for both employees and the company, the key was to ensure integration that messages on all these profiles were liked and shared.

Another major advantage of LinkedIn was information gathering. Manager\_IS explained that it allowed him to *“get a good grounding and understanding of what’s happening out there”*. Manager\_DR added that LinkedIn was useful to research people: *“LinkedIn is ideal for that, you can know their past history,*

*what work experience they've got, what knowledge they have, and it confirms a lot of things about people*". Other managers suggested that LinkedIn was also useful for awareness building. Manager\_GS concluded *"in terms of exposure, if you put things onto LinkedIn, you find that people look at them"* and added *"it is about visibility, it is about people knowing you exist, it is about the brand"*. It was acknowledged that direct sales from LinkedIn were not possible, but it was useful in lead generation. An example given by Manager\_JL was *"I built up a network of key people that I want to speak to and I was wondering when sales would actually materialise from it."* Additionally, Manager\_GS mentioned that he gained a new client via LinkedIn, though he was still not sure about how valuable and useful LinkedIn was: *"one of the clients, the general manager, sent me a connection request, I accepted it and then I got a message straightaway saying could we have a call and here's my number and I got work, so 25% of my clients have come from LinkedIn."* Manager\_PH also offered evidence of LinkedIn benefits since, when people contacted him, he always asked how they identified him, and the answers were: *"I read about you in an article or I saw a thing on LinkedIn"*.

In terms of awareness building, companies used LinkedIn in a very simple way by creating posts. It was used more during trade shows and exhibitions. If companies attended trade shows and were planning to launch new products, this information was always shared on LinkedIn. Manager\_GS gave an example of uploading a photograph from a trade show, and he was able to see how quickly this picture received a significant number of views. Similarly, Manager\_JL uploaded a photograph with a truck full of equipment for others to see what they were capable of in terms of equipment and facilities *"every day there was more people looking at it and making a comment"*. While these LinkedIn posts were only one-offs, managers seemed to be very positive and excited about how LinkedIn could be used in the oil and gas industry. Manager\_PD also explained how he would ideally like to utilise LinkedIn:

*"To use it more to find new contacts. We would still then almost use traditional means of contacting them, so we would use LinkedIn to find the name of a person that maybe looks after a platform in Nigeria. Now I wouldn't know where to look for that, but if I go to LinkedIn and name it there, specific job roles, [...]and it would hopefully give me a list of those names. Then, as I say, we'll just contact them in the same way as we do traditionally and back it up with an e-mail with the website and then leave it to see what happens."*

While interviewees agreed that LinkedIn was beneficial for oil and gas companies, they also identified some challenges associated with LinkedIn. It was suggested that LinkedIn was becoming more like Facebook and losing its professionalism. Other challenges included usability aspects and lack of or too much information and too much advertising. *"LinkedIn was originally meant to be a contact database, for people within industries, and now it's become a little bit more of an advertising or marketing site"* (Manager\_TM). While some managers were against advertising on LinkedIn, Manager\_AG said it did not annoy her because LinkedIn needed to generate money some way. However, the same challenge of the oil and gas industry was highlighted again by Manager\_PH, who explained that the use of LinkedIn for the industry was more complicated due to the nature of industry and that one-to-one conversations

were still more suitable: *“those sorts of discussions you should be having directly with your clients rather than general stuff, because a lot of the times you often don’t want to say too much.”* In addition, Manager\_GS raised issues related to connecting with people as he thinks *“80% of them haven’t updated their profile”*.

It is evident that the majority of managers did not use LinkedIn strategically, either for the companies they worked for or for themselves. It was mainly used for networking and relationship building with potential clients by identifying names and contacts from specific companies. Only one interviewee took a more strategic approach.

### **5.3.8. E-mail Marketing**

The majority of managers used e-mails as a communication channel to replace traditional telephone conversations. When interviewees were prompted to think about e-mail as a marketing communication channel for sending or receiving company news or e-mail newsletters, this did not receive much interest from them. The majority commented that their companies did not create any e-mail campaigns, and only Manager\_RK mentioned that the way they used e-mails was simply *“we have a database of all our clients, [...] we made some nice case history or so and we sent all that, it was a flyer saying, what we have is some specialist equipment here”*. But he also added *“the trouble with that sometimes is people have moved on and it [database] is not kept up to date”*. Similarly, Manager\_GS mentioned how he used a *“marketing e-mail with a very short and auto run PowerPoint which is the brochure, differently formatted, [...] it doesn’t talk about me, it doesn’t talk about things that are entirely on the website, it talks about why they might be interested in talking to this company”*.

On the other hand, Manager\_DR was quite positive about e-mail newsletters which, according to him, was a great way to get the latest industry and company news. However, he also noted that *“information overload”* can occur if too many newsletters were coming through. Manager\_IS explained *“it’s really gathering of information more than me putting information out”*. Again, the focus on information gathering rather than sharing was evident. However, Managers GS and PH noted they would consider the use of e-mail news and newsletters for their companies in the future, when they have enough news.

As an example, Manager\_GS showed a marketing/sales e-mail he was planning to send. It was a very simple marketing e-mail, more like a personal e-mail. He mentioned that he got an advice from one senior oil and gas manager about what an e-mail should be *“because it was this kind of brevity they were willing to respond to”*. Again, the interviews revealed that participants were not using e-mail marketing intensively with the focus being on information gathering. However, e-mails were used for personal one-to-one communications and it was agreed that, for e-mail campaigns to be successful, this was the approach to follow.

### 5.3.9. Mobile Applications

The use of mobile applications in the industry was not considered to be important. As Manager\_IS explained: *“you can get most of the information you need off the web these days”*. The only mobile applications that seemed to be used by managers were the oil and gas industry news websites, which had an application format. Some managers suggested that large companies with large budgets might have mobile applications, but not smaller companies. Manager\_GS also suggested there was a related technical challenge of poor connectivity while using mobile applications in the oil and gas industry because *“they send people to places in the world where connectivity is not great and the simplest is the middle of the ocean”*. Overall, managers highly questioned the need and applicability of mobile applications for the industry.

### 5.3.10. Marketing Agency Role

Managers GS, PD and PH highlighted the idea that marketing agencies played an important role in a company's DMC strategies. These were the three companies that used external agencies to some degree, while the remaining six did not use marketing agencies. Some issues with marketing agencies were highlighted as Manager\_PD explained:

*“My issue for web companies is that they might be good at setting up a website, but they don't know your specific customers, your products. They don't have an in-depth knowledge of your customers, your products, who it is you're dealing with and, therefore, it's difficult for them to align the website that they're trying to design with the people that will be looking at them, because ultimately they will probably look at any website and say well that is a website.”*

He added that sometimes he felt like he was doing all the work instead of the agency and suggested that agencies should take on more responsibilities. On the other hand, Manager\_PH mentioned that, from the start of the company, he realised it was important to have specialists in order to be successful and therefore hired a marketing agency. He explained that they formed a strong collaboration and that the agency managed their social media presence, were in charge of PR: *“our PR people, a lot of this stuff we don't even know it's necessarily happening, they just do it on our behalf.”* Manager\_PH advocated for using marketing agencies and suggested *“if you want to do good marketing, then hire people that know about it, [...] you go to them rather than trying to do it yourself”*.

### 5.3.11. Summary of Interviews

Managers suggested that marketing and digital marketing had limited use and applicability for the oil and gas industry. They strongly relied on traditional sales techniques and were slow to adopt DMC. Managers did not have strategies for their company marketing and were rather focusing on tactical aspects as low levels of marketing knowledge existed. Interviewees were strong advocates and

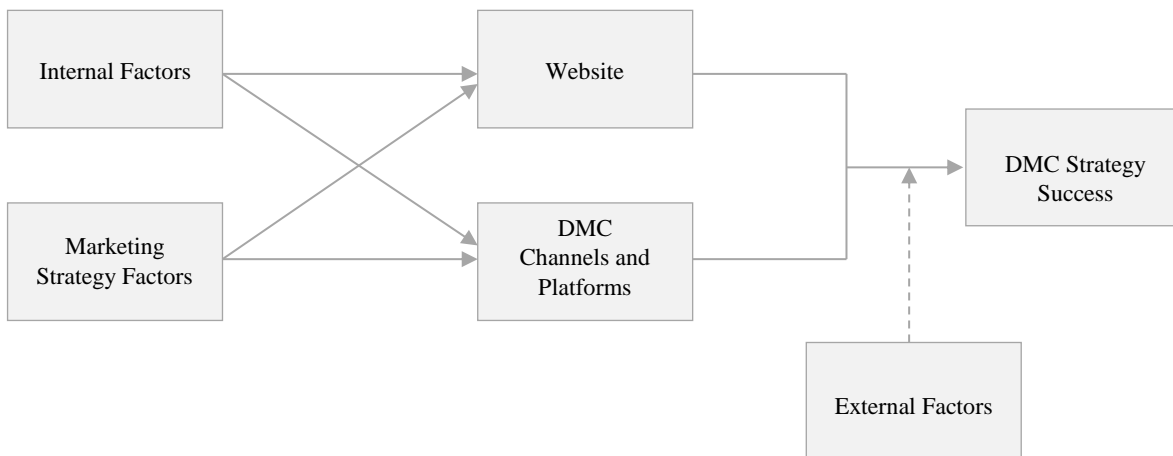
supporters for using traditional communication channels with focus on sales techniques. The main barriers for DMC was identified: oil and gas industry did not use DMC and the size of the company meant companies had limited resources. Interviewees agreed that websites were the most applicable DMC communication channel. Though, they had “brochure-type” websites instead of a channel to generate leads. Social media applicability to the oil and gas industry was highly questioned. Instead of e-mail marketing, personal one-to-one e-mails were preferred.



## 6. DISCUSSION

### 6.0. CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter discusses the findings in light of the conceptual CSFs framework, as shown in Figure 6.1. and detailed in Table 6.1. below. The conceptual framework was developed based on the literature review, which takes a holistic approach towards DMC strategy and suggests that it is influenced by a number of factors, both internal and external to the company. This chapter therefore evaluates each group of CSFs and their applicability and relevance for B2B SMEs DMC strategy success. These five groups of factors are also assessed to propose best practice recommendations for B2B SMEs ensuring successful DMC strategy in terms of customer acquisition and retention. While in total 24 factors were initially determined to play a role in DMC strategy, three new dimensions emerged from the empirical data within the external factors' category. In addition, some factors, within internal, external and marketing strategy factors categories, were found to be more significant than others in influencing DMC strategy success. Different types of relationships between variables also emerged.



**Figure 6.1:** Conceptual digital marketing communications critical success factors framework

**Table 6.1:** Digital marketing communications strategy critical success factors

Category	Factors
Internal factors	Technological infrastructure; Internal culture; Relationship between marketing and IT departments; The role of sales force; Training programmes; Access to resources.
Marketing strategy factors	Setting the strategic goal; Having top management support; Integrating internet marketing with marketing strategy; Deciding the strategic partners; Deciding the potential audience.
Website factors	Attract; Engage and Retain;

	Learn; Relate.
Digital marketing channels and platforms factors	Attract; Engage and Retain; Learn; Relate.
External factors	Trust; Security and privacy; Successful relationship; Easy and affordable access to the internet; Customer acceptance.

## 6.1. INTERNAL FACTORS

In the conceptual framework, six main factors are included in the internal factors' category. Based on the empirical data, five factors are to a lesser or greater degree confirmed: technological infrastructure, internal culture, the role of sales, training programmes and access to resources. However, the factor relating to a relationship between marketing and IT departments is not found to be significant as typically B2B SMEs do not have a separate role of marketing manager due to limited resources. Instead, the role is shared between various personnel within the company. The most important factors influencing DMC seemed to be the internal culture, especially the owner-manager's attitude towards marketing, the focus on sales-orientation and limited resources within SMEs.

### 6.1.1. Technological Infrastructure

The technological infrastructure dimension is explained as computer literacy and internet-related software by Eid, Elbeltagi and Zairi (2006) and the empirical data agrees that computer literacy plays a role in DMC strategy. Especially, owner-manager's skills related to technology use is evidenced as a lack of technical skills and knowledge acted as a barrier for DMC use. Technological infrastructure is also found to be important in Chong, Shafaghi and Tan's (2011) study on B2B SMEs CSFs for e-commerce.

In line with Taiminen and Karjaluoto (2015), the technological knowledge of an owner-manager played an important role. Managers from B2B SMEs noted that they had limited knowledge relating to technology. These managers, mainly representing the older generations, used the following expressions to describe themselves: "*I haven't quite made it into the 21st century yet on a lot of the technology side*", "*my generation*", "*old-fashioned*", "*too much old-school*", "*old boy like me*", "*shows you my IT skills*" and "*shows you how much I know*", which suggests that modern technology was a challenge for these managers. Consistent with Taiminen and Karjaluoto (2015), the managers were aware of their limited IT competencies. A limited knowledge of technology and shortage of technological skills is identified as a barrier for DMC (Karjaluoto and Huhtamäki, 2010; Taiminen and Karjaluoto, 2015). It was also suggested that there are a lot of senior managers and owners of small oil and gas companies, who simply do not spend time in front of and do not use computers, as it was not the way they did business. Such generational differences were also highlighted by the marketing agencies. It was argued that the

“*gentleman at the top*” in oil and gas companies was typically from an older generation, with limited digital knowledge, and often acted as a barrier for DMC, thus DMC use being a “*generation thing*”. It should be noted that, instead of discussing technical skills in general, because the context of this thesis is SMEs, the technical skills are those of the owner-manager, who is the key player and decision-maker in SMEs (Hill 2001a; Gilmore, Carson and Grant, 2001; Karjaluoto and Huhtamäki, 2010, Centeno and Hart, 2012).

On the other hand, the empirical data does not support Alford and Page (2015, p.663) who indicate that “small business owners-managers have a positive attitude and a real appetite for adopting technology for marketing, associating it with an opportunity to engage with customers at a deeper and more interactive level”, though technology adoption within SMEs is hindered by limited competency. In this study, limited positive attitude towards using DMC for marketing was found. Instead a large number of barriers for DMC adoption were highlighted.

### **6.1.2. Internal Culture**

Internal culture is another highly influential factor. The key person and decision-maker in a SME is the owner-manager and thus their influence is significant. During the interviews with B2B SMEs, some interviewees simply referred to themselves rather than the business as a separate entity. Investigating the adoption of DMC channels within SMEs, Karjaluoto and Huhtamäki (2010) argue that, for SMEs, firm-specific and owner-manager factors merge together, as the owner-manager has a very strong influence on the whole firm. Thus, owner-manager’s personal factors are intertwined with the firm’s. Taiminen and Karjaluoto (2015) further suggest management resistance acts as a barrier for DMC use within SMEs, as managers have fears and assumptions caused by unfamiliarity and limited knowledge of how each channel worked, which is strongly evidenced in this study as well.

In general, the interviewed managers from B2B SMEs had very strong views regarding marketing and digital marketing practices within the oil and gas industry. They argued that marketing had limited applicability to the industry due to a lack of perceived benefits and instead were heavily sales-focused (Karjaluoto and Huhtamäki, 2010; Taiminen and Karjaluoto, 2015). As a result, these companies were minimally involved in DMC activities. The managers from marketing agencies agreed that the oil and gas industry was used to a specific way of doing business, with a limited focus on marketing and a focus on sales. This finding agrees with Karjaluoto and Huhtamäki (2010) as they identify lack of awareness of the benefits as a significant barrier for DMC adoption in SMEs. In addition, Karjaluoto and Huhtamäki’s (2010) study suggests other important factors such as know-how and skills, motivation, attitude and background, together with a lack of awareness of the benefits together with negative mindset, fear of technology and unwillingness to change. This study also found that some interviewees from B2B SMEs demonstrated fears in relation to DMC and commercially-sensitive information and lack of awareness: they expressed concerns about sharing information with everyone and instead

considered sharing information with only certain potential clients on restricted areas of their websites. When discussing social media, they also noted that it was very important not to give too much information away and that caution is always required. At the same time, these managers also demonstrated limited knowledge of marketing and thus it is not surprising that their perception of the usefulness of DMC was limited. The agency managers also added that there was a problem with the digital marketing jargon used as companies did not understand it due to their limited knowledge.

This thesis shows that, typically, managers in oil and gas industry were from older generations and were strongly against DMC. It was explained by both interviewees from B2B SMEs and marketing agencies that DMC was a “*generational thing*”. Empirical data shows that younger generations were more positive about DMC use, whilst older generations were reluctant. For example, one owner-manager stated, “*the company has been going for some 26 years without any website or anything, so the only dialogue was face-to-face or on the phone*”. Karjaluoto and Huhtamäki (2010, p.29) explain that owner-managers who have been working in the industry for years “had traditional ways of doing business and manifested a certain unwillingness to change and deviate from these familiar processes”. This would explain why managers from the older generations were so against DMC practices and advocated for traditional ways of doing business. At the same time, interviewees representing younger generations were much more positive towards DMC and advocated for its benefits and used social media, such as LinkedIn, for their business.

In addition, Karjaluoto and Huhtamäki (2010) suggest that “experience or the age of firm” was an important factor in DMC adoption. They suggested that, for younger companies, the changes were easier. This is supported by this thesis since Manager\_PH, who worked for a relatively new company, was a very strong advocate for the use of DMC channels as he needed to build awareness of his new company, while the rest of interviewees from B2B SMEs did not see value in the use of DMC channels and argued that it has always been the case that they get new business from word-of-mouth communications.

### **6.1.3. Relationship between Marketing and IT Departments**

The factor relating to the relationship between marketing and IT departments was not found to be applicable to this study because the studied B2B SMEs did not have separate marketing departments or even a separate role for a marketing manager. The responsibilities were shared between different people in the organisation (Taiminen and Karjaluoto, 2015). In addition, there was no IT department. Eid, Elbeltagi and Zairi’s (2006) original study is for large industrial companies, and this study focuses on SMEs, which is the reason why separate departments were not found.

However, it was suggested that, even when there was a role of marketing manager, in reality they did not have many powers within the organisation in the oil and gas industry. Marketing agency managers explained that, due to the fact that marketing was not considered as important as other operational

functions within oil and gas companies, even if companies had marketing managers, these people were not invited into important company meetings, and thus had limited power. Similarly, a B2B SME manager explained that “*marketing girl*” was a common expression used to define the role of marketing in oil and gas organisations, though many SMEs did not have anyone responsible for marketing at all (Keogh and Evans, 1998; Taiminen and Karjaluoto, 2015).

#### **6.1.4. Role of Sales Force**

Another dimension in the internal factors’ category is the role of the sales force. Given that the thesis focuses on SMEs, it should be noted that there is not always a separate sales department, but rather the whole company in this sector is heavily sales-oriented. Strong support is evidenced in the primary data to support the idea that sales are the focus of SMEs (Hill, 2001a; Reijonen, 2010). However, rather than having a role in the successful implementation of DMC within industrial companies (Eid, Elbeltagi and Zairi, 2006), the focus on sales becomes a barrier for DMC with marketing communications playing only a supporting role within these B2B SMEs.

This idea of SMEs being heavily sales-oriented is strongly supported in the existing literature (Hill, 2001a, 2001b; Gilmore, Gallagher and Henry, 2007; Taiminen and Karjaluoto, 2015). Because of this sales orientation, there is also an emphasis on personal selling as “personal contact networks and the way in which these were used were an important aspect of the way in which SMEs do business” (Hill, 2001a, p.188). The term suggested by interviewees from marketing agencies was “*old boys club*” to refer to how business was done in the industry, with a heavy reliance on existing networks (MacKinnon, Chapman and Cumbers, 2004). This focus on sales and personal selling is widely explored within B2B marketing research with researchers arguing that marketing in B2B and B2C organisations is significantly different (Gilliland and Johnston, 1997, Coviello and Brodie, 2001; LaPlaca and Katrichis, 2009).

During the interviews, the reliance on traditional sales techniques, such as sales calls and sales visits, trade shows and client entertainment with lunch-and-learn sessions, was highly evidenced, as suggested in literature (Biemans, Brečić and Malshe, 2010; Charlesworth, 2014; Wang *et al.*, 2017). The observation revealed that one company even had a form placed prominently on its website for booking lunch-and-learn session. Thus, even the website was used to support a traditional way of doing business in the industry. In addition, all observed companies had prominent “contact us” forms with e-mails and phone numbers to encourage direct one-to-one dialogue rather than using any DMC channel. It is argued that personal selling and dealing directly with clients are the main marketing activities for SMEs (García, Díaz and Durán, 2012).

The managers from B2B SMEs were quite sceptical about marketing communications spend and did not see any immediate connection between marketing and revenue, as marketing was seen only as expenditure. Manager\_AM explained: “*Bottom line for me is the balance sheet [...], the customer, how*

*much money has come in from them [...]. Never mind all the marketing and all that stuff, bottom line is how much revenue, because people need revenue to come into the company. You can be super marketers, but it's not producing anything at the end of it."* Thus, the sales-orientation within the oil and gas industry SMEs is identified as one of the barriers for wider DMC use within the oil and gas industry.

#### **6.1.5. Training Programmes**

Education was also identified as an important factor. Due to the major role played by owner-managers within SMEs, their limited knowledge about marketing and digital marketing acted as a major barrier to the successful implementation of a DMC strategy. Therefore, external training programmes could be a useful way to educate these companies about DMC and its potential benefits. Some interviewees even revealed positive results about participating in this research study: *"from my side too as well it has been very useful, you have helped me with a number of things there to go away and add to my to-do list"*. Another manager realised during the interview that he did not focus on company marketing and only the interview made him realise it. Similar results were found by Karjaluoto and Huhtamäki (2010, p.31), that SMEs participation in the research study, when they were provided with more information, "acted as a kind of a mental support and encouragement for the firms" to engage with DMC.

An unexpected theme emerged from the interviews with the marketing agencies: the expectation that agencies should educate the oil and gas industry about the use and role of DMC. Two agencies even organised training events for managers from the industry and *"the appetite for that was huge"* as Manager\_D explained. In relation to this theme of education, interviewees from the marketing agencies suggested that a major issue related to the language and jargon used in the digital marketing industry and that agencies should be involved in the education process and help these companies to better understand the benefits of DMC. Likewise, the literature suggests that external bodies should be involved in the education of SMEs on this subject as they have limited marketing knowledge (Reijonen, 2010; Taiminen and Karjaluoto, 2015). The limited research on Aberdeen oil and gas industry SMEs explain that typically these companies are founded by engineers and scientists, who have limited management knowledge, and thus outside training and education is required (Keogh and Evans, 1999; MacKinnon, Chapman and Cumbers, 2004), which is also supported by this thesis.

#### **6.1.6. Access to Resources**

The final dimension is related to the limited resources within SMEs, which is a determining factor on how the companies operate. The size of the B2B SMEs and, as a result, their limited resources are of high importance. This finding is in line with Karjaluoto and Huhtamäki (2010), who suggest that resource-related factors are one of the main groups of factors influencing the adoption of DMC channels within SMEs. From the internal factors, company size and limited resources were mentioned as the key barriers for B2B SMEs in regard to employing DMC. In general, company size seemed to be directly related to how organisations approach to marketing activities. The size of the company was frequently

mentioned in interviews as a barrier for DMC by B2B SMEs. The managers from B2B SMEs used the following phrases: *“because of the size of the company”*, *“within the size of the company I work for”*, *“I have to emphasise in the position I was and the size of the company”*, *“for the type of business I work for”*, *“we’re just a little small family service company”* to explain and sometimes even justify why things were done in a specific way. It was also suggested that size influenced DMC use and large companies were more successful in this area due to more available resources, congruent with Taiminen and Karjaluoto (2015).

Due to their size, SMEs have limited financial and human resources. Based on the literature, the main resource-related factors for SMEs include limited resources (finance, time and marketing knowledge), lack of specialist expertise (owner-managers tend to be generalists rather than specialist) and limited impact in the marketplace (Gilmore, Carson and Grant 2001); limited time, expertise and financial resources (Gilmore, Gallagher and Henry 2007); limited human, financial and technical resources (Karjaluoto and Huhtamäki, 2010); and limited financial resources and time (García, Díaz and Durán, 2012). In line with previous studies, this study’s findings demonstrate that oil and gas SMEs face significant challenge of dealing with limited resources.

Due to limited financial resources the companies did not have a separate marketing manager and owner-managers had limited knowledge of this role (Reijonen, 2010; Taiminen and Karjaluoto, 2015). Some examples given included Manager\_AM who explained, *“Because right now we probably couldn’t afford to have many full-time members of a separate marketing department”*. In the same vein, Manager\_PD noted, *“We don’t have a marketing company to constantly update it or a marketing person working for the company, so it would be done by myself or my brother. Again, we’re too small.”* For B2B SMEs, DMC was managed either by family members who had some DMC knowledge, by students or simply themselves due to limited financial resources. Manager\_PD mentioned that his wife, who was a digital marketer, helped with the company’s LinkedIn page, and he also used a student to help with website redesign explaining *“ultimately he doesn’t charge much for it, so it would save us some money”*. Similarly, to save money, Manager\_GS had created a website himself. Thus, it is evident that SMEs were dealing with limited resources and it resulted in a basic use of DMC.

It is also suggested that the owner-manager is preoccupied with every routine activity and does not have time for other things (Karjaluoto and Huhtamäki, 2010). The lack of time for marketing was identified by the interviewees from B2B SMEs, because *“on the top of the list is the existing clients”* as they drive the business and bring money to the company. Thus, it was suggested that for SMEs any digital activities *“need to be fairly maintenance free”* because of the very limited time resources available. SMEs, when dealing with DMC, are affected by practical and maintenance issues, such as the focus on day-to-day operational practicalities and the existing in-house vs external expertise (Gilmore, Gallagher and Henry, 2007). In line with Karjaluoto and Huhtamäki (2010), limited human and financial resources seemed to

play a very important role in how much marketing the organisations were doing. Thus, it was the opinion of the majority of interviewees that limited financial and personnel resources restricted companies in their digital marketing options, Manager\_GS summarised the work in SMEs: “*it’s about scale, it’s about resources and it’s about workload*”. The limited available resources for marketing led to more limited DMC approaches within SMEs (Gilmore, Gallagher and Henry, 2007). Due to limited knowledge and limited experience, SMEs were not familiar with the real benefits of DMC for marketing purposes, thus the limited perceived usefulness acted as a barrier for DMC use and adoption (Taiminen and Karjaluoto, 2015).

The size of the company was identified as a major barrier for DMC usage within oil and gas SMEs, and this goes against existing literature, which suggests that small companies are more flexible and able to adapt to changes easier. Some researchers claim that the size of SMEs is their competitive advantage, which gives them flexibility. O’Dwyer, Gilmore and Carson (2009a, p.505) argue that SMEs have a competitive advantage due to their size as these organisations have a “distinctive marketing style”, where there is “little or no adherence to formal structures and models”. Together with limited resources, SMEs marketing is often “simplistic, haphazard, often responsive and reactive competitor activity” (O’Dwyer, Gilmore and Carson, 2009a, p.505). Hill (2001a) further explains that the small size allows companies to be creative and flexible, which is the key requirement for on-going success. However, none of the interviewees from B2B SMEs in this thesis felt that their size could be an advantage and it was instead seen as a major limitation and constraint for DMC.

## **6.2. MARKETING STRATEGY FACTORS**

In the conceptual framework, five factors are included in the marketing strategy group. The empirical data from this thesis agrees that all these factors are important for DMC. A good amount of the data regarding marketing strategy within companies came from the interviewees at marketing agencies. They argued that internal factors, such as people, resources and managing directors, were key influencers in how a digital marketing strategy was managed in the company. This was also evident from the interviews with the managers of B2B SMEs. If digital marketing drivers came from the top, there were no issues. However, if the top management was against DMC it was a major barrier. The most important factors in this group seemed to be having the strategic goal and top management support for DMC. It also seems that marketing strategy factors are influenced by the internal factors’ category. While Eid, Elbeltagi and Zairi (2006) argue that internal factors are of secondary importance, since the companies using digital technologies for marketing should be prepared internally, this was not the case with this study. The empirical data suggest there is a direct relationship between internal factors and marketing practices within the company.



### 6.2.1. Setting the Strategic Goal

Setting the strategic goal was somehow complicated for B2B SMEs companies as the managers interviewed had limited (digital) marketing knowledge, and thus were not sure what they could get out of digital. Most of the B2B SMEs were highly sales-orientated, and thus achieving sales and acquiring new business was their ultimate goal. While the existing literature advocates for a large number of DMC objectives (Rowley, 2001; Keller, 2009; Charlesworth, 2014), and, for example, Chaffey and Smith (2008) argue that DMC can assist with the 5Ss objectives, this was not supported by the empirical data in this thesis. Chong *et al.* (2009) suggest that the main use of the internet should be for managing business relationships, but again none of the interviewees from B2B SMEs saw that DMC channels could be used in relationship facilitation, which, according to study participants, needed to happen offline.

While Karjaluoto, Mustonen and Ulkuniemi (2015) argue that B2B companies use DMC for communication in customer relationships, sales support and brand building objectives, these objectives were not even considered by SME managers, as the “*bottom line*” seemed to be their main focus. In line with SMEs sales-orientation, Gilmore, Gallagher and Henry (2007) explain that, while SMEs receive a number of online enquiries, very few, if any, turn into actual orders, and thus companies then question the need for DMC channels. It is suggested that DMC could be useful in supporting sales by utilising these channels for external communications with potential leads and for internal communication between sales and marketing departments (Karjaluoto, Mustonen and Ulkuniemi, 2015). However, the SMEs in this thesis expected direct sales from DMC channels rather than playing a supportive role. While building awareness through DMC channels is advocated in the literature (Karjaluoto, Mustonen and Ulkuniemi, 2015), the B2B SME managers again could not fully articulate that this could be their main goal for DMC use, although some acknowledged that it was somewhat important to be online to explain what the company does in case it was not possible to meet specific people (potential leads) face-to-face. However, building awareness in the wider industry and stakeholders was not seen as important. Karjaluoto, Mustonen and Ulkuniemi (2015) suggest that using DMC channels for communication in customer relationships was the least utilised objective for B2B companies, which is also supported by the thesis: none of the interviewees saw DMC as a way to communicate with existing customers.

Some marketing agency interviewees explained that lead generation for B2B SMEs should be the main goal for DMC within the oil and gas industry, which is also suggested by Rowley (2001). Further, other studies (Järvinen *et al.*, 2012; Karjaluoto, Mustonen and Ulkuniemi, 2015) propose that DMC should only play a supporting role for B2B organisations, with the main goals being creating brand awareness and enhancing brand image, which would then lead to sales. The marketing agency interviewees agreed that that brand building and brand awareness goals could be achieved through the use of DMC by B2B SMEs. However, the potential supporting role of DMC was not understood and acknowledged by B2B

SMEs. In general, SME managers were quite sceptical about DMC's applicability to the oil and gas industry and were not sure how it contributed to their overall business goals. Thus, there was a lack of strategic marketing planning within these companies as the focus was on operational day-to-day issues with no defined marketing objectives for these digital channels in SMEs (Karjaluo and Huhtamäki, 2010). As Gilmore, Carson and Grant (2001, p.6) further explain: "SME marketing is haphazard and informal because of the way an owner-manager does business; they make most decisions on their own, respond to current opportunities and circumstances and so decision making occurs in a haphazard and apparently chaotic way, according to personal and business priorities at any given point at time". Thus, it is not surprising that no strategic goals were found for marketing and digital marketing within B2B SMEs, meaning that DMC was implemented in an *ad hoc* rather than strategically planned way (Taiminen and Karjaluo, 2015).

Reijonen (2010) suggests that SMEs understand the importance of marketing, which should be an integral part of business. This is only partly supported by this study's findings. One SME manager did agree that "*there is a place for marketing*" within the oil and gas industry and suggested it could play a supporting role, during tender phases. The supporting role of DMC during tender phases was also advocated by interviewees from the marketing agencies. However, Reijonen concludes (2010, p.291) "marketing was not always used sufficiently", as SMEs do not have enough knowledge, which is again strongly supported by this study's interviews with B2B SME managers. These managers simply lacked knowledge of what DMC was, and thus they did not know how it could contribute to their business, meaning no clear strategic objectives were set.

### **6.2.2. Having Top Management Support**

The second factor in the marketing strategy category is top management support. Having top management support was highly evident in the empirical data as an important factor determining the use of DMC within the oil and gas industry. However, it is again identified as a barrier for DMC. As previously detailed, the owner-manager is the main decision-maker within SME (Hill 2001a, Gilmore, Carson and Grant, 2001; Karjaluo and Huhtamäki, 2010, Centeno and Hart, 2012) and in the oil and gas industry they typically had limited marketing knowledge and were reluctant to use DMC. As Chong, Shafaghi and Tan (2011) conclude in their study on CSFs, having top management support is key in successful implementation of e-commerce.

According to the interviewees from the marketing agencies, the "*elderly gentleman at the top*" was a barrier for wider DMC use within the oil and gas industry. This is also supported by Shaltoni's (2017) study, which argues that decision-makers' attitudes towards DMC within the industrial sector acts as a main inhibitor. The managers from marketing agencies explained that senior managers in the oil and gas industry were from the older generations and have spent years in the industry without DMC, traditionally relying on sales techniques, and that, coupled with a lack of DMC knowledge, resulted in major

resistance towards DMC. In addition, in the case of SMEs, owner-managers had the major decision-making role. Typically, these owner-managers had limited knowledge of marketing and therefore their personal views were represented in how their companies undertook DMC. Interviews with B2B SME managers revealed that they were very suspicious of DMC and, with no clear strategic goals, it was challenging to find support for DMC. However, managers who had knowledge about DMC were more positive towards the use of DMC in the oil and gas industry. Manager\_PH was knowledgeable and excited about DMC and was a strong advocate for the use of digital channels. Keinänen and Kuivalainen (2015) suggest that user characteristics such as age, gender and job level affect social media use within B2B companies, which is supported by the findings of this thesis. The senior managers in the oil and gas industry did not use DMC channels. Keinänen and Kuivalainen (2015) further explain that personal and psychological factors influence the use of social media: these owner-managers had limited IT knowledge and skills and thus it is not surprising that the use of DMC channels was so limited, and they were against these newer channels.

Karjaluoto, Mustonen and Ulkuniemi (2015) argue that in order to have successful DMC use within an industrial marketing setting, it is important to have innovative and open-minded marketers, who will personally drive the DMC use among B2B companies. However, this thesis found that the majority of the companies did not have a marketing person. It is suggested that if people within SMEs have the required skills and knowledge about how to utilise DMC channels, they can act as enablers for DMC (Taiminen and Karjaluoto, 2015). It seems that the key influencing factor in DMC use is whether the owner-manager is knowledgeable enough and personally uses DMC: then the company will also be active on DMC channels, which is a typical situation in SMEs (Karjaluoto and Huhtamäki, 2010; Gabrielli and Balboni, 2010; Taiminen and Karjaluoto, 2015).

### **6.2.3. Integrating Internet Marketing with Marketing Strategy**

Integrating internet marketing with marketing strategy is another important factor in the conceptual framework. While B2B SMEs were not sure about DMC channels, they did use some channels. However, they tended to transfer their more traditional ways of working to the online environment, which is far away from an integrated approach. The literature suggests an integrated marketing communications concept will achieve synergy effect while ensuring all channels are integrated (Shimp, 2010; Keller, 2009; Kotler and Keller, 2012). The marketing agency managers agreed that, although DMC had more advantages compared to traditional channels, an integrated approach would yield the largest success and advocated that, by integrating online and offline channels, companies would be able to deliver the same message.

However, the B2B SME interviewees focused on a different type of integration. For example, they still participated in oil and gas trade shows, despite the high costs involved, but two managers suggested that it was important to make use of LinkedIn at the same time in order to achieve any benefits from such

shows. A similar example was given by Manager\_D, who revealed that their marketing agency managed clients' social media accounts during major exhibitions. This use of social media accounts during trade shows was also supported by the observation data. Company\_1 created a Twitter account just before *Offshore Europe 2015* and Company\_4, which attended the exhibition, was very active on LinkedIn and Twitter during the exhibition. Therefore, some tactical use of DMC channels did exist, as trade shows were used for branding purposes and LinkedIn for personal networking and information dissemination, but not in a fully integrated way.

In line with previous factors, despite unclear strategic goals and no support from top management, there was a limited overall integration of traditional and digital marketing. This agrees with Gabrielli and Balboni (2009), who argue there is a significant gap between theory and integrated marketing communications practices in SMEs. They argue that SMEs focus on the single use of channels, such as personal communication or trade shows and conclude that, within communications, "they do not adopt a true strategic approach aimed at increasing the relationship value for the customer within the target market" (Gabrielli and Balboni, 2009, p.285).

#### **6.2.4. Deciding the Strategic Partners**

In their framework, Eid, Elbeltagi and Trueman (2006) suggest that network communities with partners, suppliers, internal personnel and customers are important factors. During the interviews with B2B SME managers, none of them suggested that partners or suppliers were important parts of their business, even when probed, which may be because they provide very specific and niche products and services. In contrast, relationships with their customers were noted as being very important.

It was found that the relationship between marketing agencies and their clients influenced how DMC was approached within B2B SMEs. Due to limited resources, some companies worked with students or family members who had DMC knowledge, which impacted on how sophisticated their DMC strategies were. The observation of Company\_3 illustrates this situation: when changing agency, the website redesign was unsuccessful, and the website performed worse in search engines. In addition, before the final observation, the company changed its marketing agency again and the website was redesigned again. The agency used was the same as Company\_1, and thus both websites were very similar, which again shows that the choice of marketing agency influenced significantly what B2B SMEs did with regard to their DMC channels. It is suggested that SMEs require outside support due to their limited marketing knowledge (Wagner, Fillis and Johansson, 2003).

The use of an external marketing agency by some of the studied B2B SMEs suggests that marketing agencies played an important role in these companies' DMC. However, most of the companies in this study did not have a marketing department or agency which constantly worked with the company. This again shows how marketing was not valued in oil and gas SMEs as it was deemed to be a supporting activity. Only Manager\_PH mentioned that, from the start of the company, he realised that it was

important to have specialists in order to be successful and therefore hired a marketing agency. Karjaluoto and Huhtamäki (2010, p.31) explain that, within SMEs, “the need for outside support was evident, even if it was not always articulated”. This agrees with this thesis’ findings: even if the B2B SMEs had limited resources, they collaborated with students or family members or freelancers as they realised they did not have enough knowledge about DMC. Similarly, Salo (2017) suggests that B2B companies might consider outsourcing of DMC to external companies, if they feel that DMC is an important aspect to the company. Bringing in outside knowledge was seen as an enabler for DMC within oil and gas SMEs (Karjaluoto and Huhtamäki, 2010; Järvinen *et al.*, 2012; Taiminen and Karjaluoto, 2015).

### **6.2.5. Deciding the Potential Audience**

The final factor in the marketing strategy category is potential audience, which is also evidenced throughout the empirical data. However, for a B2B SME company in the oil and gas industry, the potential audience was small. As Crabtree, Bower and Keogh (1997) with Green and Keogh (2000) detail, the industry consists of 20-30 operators, which are supported by approximately 50 contractors, which are then supported by other small companies providing specialist products and services, meaning there is a small number of potential customers in the whole industry. The B2B SME managers therefore explained that their potential clientele was very small as they provided highly specific and custom-made products. It was also suggested they knew each other from previous jobs and contacts within the years of working in the oil and gas industry and Aberdeen’s oil and gas industry was described as an “industrial village”, highlighting that key decision-makers knew each other (MacKinnon, Chapman and Cumbers, 2004).

Managers from oil and gas SMEs emphasised that their products were highly specialised and quite often custom-made for a specific client. Therefore, relationships needed to be developed to fully understand client requirements in order to offer solutions to their problems. Manager\_A1 explained that, due to the highly lucrative market, SMEs in the oil and gas industry needed to have only a few clients as the contracts were of high value, again supporting the notion that there was a very small number of potential clients. While B2B SMEs had a small number of clients, customer-orientation is key to the oil and gas industry. It is the reason why sales calls, sales visits, lunch-and-learn sessions or client entertainment, such as golf, are highly important, because it is about understanding the clients’ needs and requirements. Thus, it was important to have a visible presence in Aberdeen by attending key events, such as trade shows or golfing events (MacKinnon, Chapman and Cumbers, 2004). It was suggested that getting feedback from clients on how products and services worked was of high importance to B2B SMEs. Thus, if a client was satisfied with their products and services, it meant more opportunities existed in the future. The main approach of gaining new businesses was simply through word-of-mouth through connections that were in place. Manager\_IS explained how important it was to look after clients and ensure the highest-quality products and services were provided:

*“Ultimately the oil and gas industry is a strange industry. It’s a fickle industry whereby if you have success you are well-known for success and everybody [wants] a piece of the action, but if you have any issues then I don’t think it matters what marketing you’ve got, the reputational damage is already done and your company is struggling anyway.”*

Crabtree, Bower and Keogh (1997) further explain that the decision to choose a supplier typically depends on whether key people in the organisation are known, respected and trusted, and the overall reputation of the company is good. Therefore, instead of choosing and identifying potential customers, the niche and highly specific products of these B2B SMEs determined their potential clients. Thus, identifying customers and satisfying their needs was not a part of marketing strategy, but it was already decided by the SME depending on the products and services (Rowley, 2001; Kärkkäinen, Jussila and Väisänen, 2010; Järvinen *et al.*, 2012; Habibi *et al.*, 2017) they were supplying to the industry.

### **6.3. WEBSITE**

Website factors is another category influenced by internal and marketing strategy factors, affecting DMC strategy. In the conceptual framework it was suggested that a successful website needed to follow Kierzkowski *et al.*'s (1996) digital marketing framework. The website as a DMC channel received the most attention and discussion in the interviews with both managers from marketing agencies and B2B SMEs. In line with Chaffey and Smith (2017), who highlight that the website should be seen as a channel that glues all the other DMC channels together, Manager\_D advocated that the website should be the key channel with other channels building traffic to it.

In line with Taiminen and Karjaluoto's (2015) study, websites were perceived to be the most important DMC channel for B2B SMEs. However, the use of websites was very simple. In agreement with Chaffey and Smith (2017), the agency managers proposed the steps that companies should follow to build a good website, as Manager\_D explained: *“making sure that website caters for all of your customers at all different levels of the buyer journey”*. While the agency managers suggested that oil and gas companies would typically blame websites for not bringing any business in, it was further explained that the big issue in the industry was with *“brochure-type”* websites. This finding is supported by Shaltoni's (2017) study, which suggests that more than half the companies in emerging industrial markets use *“brochureware”* websites for simple communications. The oil and gas companies did not see websites as a lead-generation tool, which should mainly assist in moving potential leads down the sales funnel. This finding is also supported by Shaltoni (2017), who argues that decision-makers in the industrial sector do not see websites as a valuable tool for their businesses. Instead, industrial companies thought it was enough to set up a website and did not consider that websites require constant investment and resources, as suggested by the marketing agency managers: *“website never finishes, it just evolves”*. In general, interviewees from the B2B SMEs felt that websites were important, and even identified some benefits: global reach, reassurance and professionalism, assistance with business growth, and lead generation. However, in line with the agencies' views, B2B SME managers also admitted that their

current websites were more “*brochure-type*” websites offering the same information from their offline brochures, and thus minimal investment and resources were dedicated to this channel (Shaltoni, 2017). These findings agree with Hänninen and Karjaluoto (2017) that company websites are not perceived to be effective as the websites are only a hygiene factor in communications, if it does not exist it might cause dissatisfaction, though its presence would not lead to any satisfaction.

Interviews with oil and gas SMEs revealed somewhat conflicting views: on one hand, companies were redesigning their websites as they felt it was an important DMC channel, but, on the other hand, they lacked marketing knowledge and thus had very basic brochure-type websites. Three out of nine of the interviewed SME websites were undergoing or just finished redesign during the time of the interviews. The longitudinal observation also found that three out of four companies redesigned their websites: one company did it twice. In agreement with Charlesworth (2014) and Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2016), Manager\_DR understood a website’s importance: “*The website is like your front shop window in a big wide world [...]. The website is a key factor in getting your product or your company recognition to a wider audience.*” The need for websites was highlighted by B2B SMEs managers when companies wanted to go outside the North Sea region and become international. It was also observed that websites included highly prominent interactive maps for their office presence, highlighting the international presence. However, only Company\_1 offered a corporate brochure in eight different languages at the top of their website homepage to cater for international clients.

However, when managers from B2B SMEs were asked to describe what makes a good website, one manager answered, “*That is to me, that’s the six-million-dollar question*”. Some of the interviewees had a vague idea that the website should play a supporting role: “*It’s there to [...] back up the fact that maybe we can’t get in to see a particular person*”. This supporting role idea was further articulated by Manager\_A2, who explained that, in the oil and gas industry, websites should be used as part of the tender process, adding additional information. Interviewees from B2B SMEs were asked to describe what a good website was for them and, while quite different answers were received, the two most important elements were identified as being information or content and easily accessible contact details. Content as the main aspect of a website is advocated by Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2017) and supported by the interviews with agency managers. Other important website aspects such as usability and visuals (Chaffey and Smith, 2008; Charlesworth, 2014) were not seen as important by the managers from B2B SMEs.

While content seems to be naturally important as a part of good websites, the other very important element for good websites was the ease of accessing the contact details of specific people working in a specific company. B2B SMEs managers noted that there was “*nothing worse*”, “*nothing more annoying*” and “*most frustrating*” if they could not identify specific contact details. The importance of accessing contact details was further elaborated: “*when it comes to business websites, [...] you want to know about*

*people*” and “*because you’re looking for someone in particular that you’d like to communicate with*” since it was important to build one-to-one personal relationships in the industry. Thus, rather than being a new way of doing business and a strategic resource (Charlesworth, 2014), the website as a DMC channel was used to facilitate a one-to-one personal relationship, which is the way the industry operates. The importance of having prominent and easily accessible contact details indicates that DMC was used if it supported the way industry had previously done business.

A multi-staged approach for websites is supported by longitudinal observation, interviews with B2B SMEs and recommended by agency marketers as the foundation for successful website marketing. In general, these stages correspond with the main marketing activities of acquisition and retention. However, the empirical data shows that the main focus of B2B SMEs websites is to attract website visitors, with retaining visitors’ interest being less utilised. None of B2B SMEs seemed to have a set goal for their websites (Taiminen and Karjaluo, 2015). The study also reveals that B2B SMEs saw websites as being more business-focused and providing information about their business rather than being customer-focused by servicing existing or potential customers’ needs. These findings correspond with Taiminen and Karjaluo (2015), who suggest that websites are one-way communication channels associated with high company control.

While some of the previous studies mention the website as a DMC channels, none of them analyse specific factors within the website. Therefore, this thesis extends theory on websites as a DMC channel for B2B SMEs and details how various elements are implemented within websites employing Kierzkowski *et al.*’s (1996) framework.

### **6.3.1. Website – Attract**

From all the features within the *attract* stage, the website domain name and mobile-optimised websites seemed to be the most important for oil and gas SMEs. During interviews it was argued that the website domain name needed to be related the actual company name to attract traffic, which was confirmed during observation. Mobile-optimised websites were noted as being important by interviewees from B2B SMEs and it was observed that all companies had adopted mobile-optimised websites by the end of observations. The agency managers also confirmed that companies now understood the need for mobile websites. This is in line with Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2017), who advocate that ensuring good user experience of mobile-optimised websites is a key activity for companies now.

On the other hand, the observation showed that companies had not fully utilised all options to build traffic to their own websites as they did not always use their social media sites to refer traffic back to the website: some did not include a company website address on their social media or the links on their websites to social media were broken. Interviewees queried whether social media was of any use to the oil and gas industry since its ability to bring traffic to a website was questionable. Only one manager



advocated for leveraging different channels: “*putting a story in one place and making sure that it gets a hit everywhere else*”.

SEM is also a part of the attract stage, aiming to attract and build more traffic to the website. However, it was underutilised within B2B SMEs. This is in line with Taiminen and Karjaluo (2015), who argue that SEO and SEA was used by larger companies, but their potential was not fully understood by SMEs. Marketing agency managers suggested that companies had started to consider visibility on search engines as a channel to reach customers, but, this was at an early stage. SEM as a part of online visibility is advocated by the existing literature (Charlesworth, 2014; Taiminen and Karjaluo, 2015; Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2017). While agency managers did not discuss SEM in great depth, it was also apparent that B2B SMEs lacked knowledge about it. In line with Taiminen and Karjaluo (2015), who suggest that websites and SEO is used by SMEs as a channel for online visibility, Manager\_IS explained that websites and search could be “*important so that you can feature on the radar*”, however, it was not articulated using SEO terminology.

The B2B SME interviewees acknowledged that they used search engines intensively as a part of their role as they undertook a lot of brand searches about companies of which they were already aware for business lead identification rather than for their own company use. However, the concept of SEO was unfamiliar to most of the interviewees. Only two interviewees had a vague idea of SEO reports but did not know how to use them. The longitudinal observations also showed that limited knowledge and focus was placed on SEO. The tests reveal that only one company improved its SEO during the three-year period, while the remaining companies struggled. This may be why some companies kept redesigning their websites, but because of limited knowledge and understanding, after the redesign SEO scores were even lower. Regarding SEA, only one B2B SME used Google AdWords. However, Manager\_PD concluded “*that has proved unsuccessful*” and he admitted that he personally would never click on paid ads. He concluded that Google AdWords would be more relevant to other industries rather than oil and gas. Most of SME interviewees could not distinguish paid results from organic, although some felt that there was something not right with the first few results (which were the paid advertising). Thus, it is not surprising that B2B SMEs were not involved in SEA activities. B2B SMEs were aware that the website needs to attract traffic, while choosing recognisable domain name, as they felt that this will make it easier for their potential customer to find them. However, they did not have any expectations for this channel.

### **6.3.2. Website – Engage and Retain**

The stage of *engage* and *retain* within B2B SMEs was not fully implemented either. This stage is about creating an incentive and more interactive functionality to nurture relationships with current and potential customers, which could be in the form of groups and forums, prize draws or games. All these activities generally aim to increase the amount of time prospects spend on a website by generating

interest and participation to encourage visitors to return. However, findings from the observation differed to the interviews with B2B SME managers.

While most of the managers from B2B SMEs suggested that various games and lucky draws are not applicable to oil and gas industry, Manager\_PH advocated having “*fun stuff*” on websites or social media just to encourage interaction. However, none of the observed companies engaged with any of these activities during the observed period. Nevertheless, offline lucky draws during the trade shows, where companies collect the business cards of potential leads, seemed to be a common practice within the industry. The idea of having online forums or discussion groups was also questioned by B2B SME interviewees and none of the companies offered such forums or LinkedIn groups. It was suggested by the interviewees that such facilities required resources “*to keep it going*” and, instead of having open discussions, companies should be having direct communications with their clients. B2B SME managers agreed that website loading time was an important factor, as suggested by Tarafdar and Zhang (2005), Chaffey and Smith (2013) and Charlesworth (2014). Throughout observations, website loading times fluctuated, but in general high loading speeds were identified. While B2B SME managers argued that interactive functions on websites were not important, the observation found that the company websites included some interactive functions, in particular interactive office location maps, galleries and contact forms.

The B2B SME interviewees agreed that security and privacy features and statements, including accreditation and membership logos, T&Cs, and FAQs, added more credibility to a company. This is also supported by the longitudinal observation as companies made these sections more prominent on their websites. It suggests that companies felt that adding all these additional elements on the website better communicated their offering and potentially reduced doubts about the company’s credibility. News section on websites were deemed to be important by B2B SME managers “*as long as you have it regularly updated*”. The observation revealed that, while companies appeared to understand the need for a news section on their websites, it was not used strategically and included irregular news postings rather than evidencing any strategic use or a news posting strategy. Additionally, downloadable resources were also deemed to be important by interviewees. These downloadable resources were also offered by the companies and that, all expanded these sections and added more resources.

Thus, it is evident that some tactical understanding existed on how websites should be used as a DMC channel and that certain elements within websites should be used to encourage interaction. While the observed situation was different to what was advocated by interviewees, it is evident that companies felt that new and up-dated content was required (Chaffey and Smith, 2008). It is therefore evident that some knowledge existed about how websites could be used as a DMC channel to retain visitors by giving them valuable information and making them spend more time on the website, but there was a lack of integrated approach and limited knowledge on how to utilise websites and which factors are important.

### **6.3.3. Website – Learn**

The *learn* stage is related to learning about and understanding customers and their preferences, which seemed to be very limited within B2B SMEs. Interviewees were quite neutral about this stage's elements, while observation showed it was underutilised among the observed SMEs. While Chaffey and Smith (2008) argue that one of the key objectives of DMC should be to listen and understand to get close to the customer, this did not seem to be important to the B2B SMEs in this thesis. While DMC is associated with learning about customers, getting their feedback and understanding them better (Rowley, 2001), achieving this using website as a channel was not deemed to be important by B2B SMEs.

E-mail news sign-up on websites as a way to learn about the customers received neutral responses by the interviewees, which showed that B2B SMEs did not know much about how to use e-mail marketing. The opportunity to offer feedback online in order to better understand clients was deemed unimportant by the interviewees as well, although feedback itself was judged to be very important. However, it was suggested that, instead of anonymous online feedback, it should be offered personally. From observed companies, one offered an online feedback form on their website. In addition, Google Analytics to learn about the clients was used only by one observed company. While only two interviewed B2B SMEs showed some very vague idea about SEO and Google Analytics reports, but had limited understanding how to use it. Thus, the objectives of improved information gathering and feedback or increased knowledge (Tiago and Verissimo, 2014) were not deemed as being important.

### **6.3.4. Website – Relate**

The final stage of *relate* by providing customised interaction and value for the customers, were not important for B2B SMEs either. While Keller (2009) suggests the greater interaction and individualising are the main benefits of DMC in order to send tailored messages for different segments, this did not receive any confirmation in the study. To relate and offer personalised options was not deemed as important activity. Real-time interactions on website were questioned how this could be applied to oil and gas industry, because it required a lot of resources. Only one observed company offered a real-time interaction function on their website. Another tactic of relating while using e-mails to send personalised messages to current and potential customers was not utilised by companies either.

Therefore, the idea of greater interaction with greater personalisation and deeper relationships (Parsons, Zeisser and Waitman, 1998) while using DMC channels was of limited importance for B2B SMEs. The final stages of marketing of relating to customers by offering personalised options, did not seem to be valued. On the other hand, one-to-one relationships were important, however, only offline and not in online environment. Thus, in line with DMC playing a supporting role in oil and gas SMEs, it was not expected to achieve major marketing objections, such as building relationships via website communications (Taiminen and Karjaluo, 2015).

## **6.4. DIGITAL MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS CHANNELS AND PLATFORMS**

The new dimension of DMC channels was added in the conceptual framework because the first framework was developed 10 years ago and since then DMC landscape has changed significantly. The suggested Kierzkowski *et al.* (1996) framework for DMC channels was not applicable. Limited approaches were identified for DMC channels other than websites. A much simpler approach was used for other DMC channels. Hence, B2B SMEs used DMC channels in an *ad hoc* tactical manner, for broadcasting news and sharing content, but not in a strategic way. One of the reasons for this could be that DMC channels are not deemed as applicable or important. It also seems that managers from B2B SMEs do not see the link between DMC channels and their business objective, which, according to them, is the bottom line. As a part of strategy planning, the agency marketers even suggested various approaches relating to how to choose the most suitable DMC channels, but this was not required by the B2B SME managers as they deemed social media to be not applicable to their industry.

### **6.4.1. Social Media**

Social media as a DMC channel received a lot of attention throughout the interviews and large amounts of the data collected during the longitudinal observation. While interviewees from the marketing agencies offered purportedly expert views of how social media should be used, their views were very different, even contradicting each other. On the other hand, B2B SME managers showed their scepticism about the applicability of social media to the oil and gas industry, and their limited knowledge resulted in a tactical use. In one study of SMEs and social media, social media is “claimed to be the third most important channel” (Taiminen and Karjaluoto, 2015, p.645), however it is not used and understood as a two-way communication channel for customer relationships. Similar results emerged from the longitudinal observation: while companies did use social media to some degree, their posts were only of a promotional nature and it was purely used for news sharing and broadcasting rather than dialogues.

Very low levels of social media use were identified during the interviews and longitudinal observation. Some B2B SME managers claimed they created company profiles, but never shared any news. Similarly, Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides (2011) concluded that less than one-third of B2B companies used social media, while more than two-thirds did not use social media to support their marketing strategies. Only one SME manager advocated for social media use and his opinion differed from the rest of the SME managers. In his case, he was building a new company, thus establishing the business and building awareness was very important, while the others already worked in established businesses. The observation showed slightly different approaches to different social media: while Facebook was disregarded as a DMC channel for the oil and gas industry and YouTube used only for video storing, Twitter received more interest and LinkedIn was perceived as the most suitable platform. While Taiminen and Karjaluoto (2015) concluded that SMEs mostly used social media to post company news and not for dialogical communication, Swahi *et al.* (2017) explain that viewers of B2B and B2C

social media posts demonstrate significant differences in their liking and commenting behaviours. Regardless of message content, viewers of B2B content comment less because commenting on messages requires more time and resources. B2B content viewers are less likely to comment on messages, but more likely to like messages than viewers of B2C messages. This agrees with the findings of this study's observation as companies used social media to share news updates, however, comments received to posts were very limited, while some likes were achieved.

These findings only partly support the previous research of Taiminen and Karjaluo (2015, p.45) who conclude that "SMEs use social media in the same way they use other digital channels, as a form of one-way broadcasting while attempting to drive sales". While B2B SMEs used social media for news updates, they did not have clear understanding how it could contribute to their business. This is also supported by McCann and Barlow's (2015) investigation into Scottish SMEs, which concludes that SMEs do not have a strategy with specific goals and measurement processes to identify how these goals are being achieved. Oil and gas SMEs did not have any specific goals for their social media presence and no strategies were thus in place. While McCann and Barlow (2015) with Brink (2017) suggest that SMEs and B2B SMEs believe that social media could be beneficial for their businesses, the present study disagrees with this finding since the B2B SMEs studied here were confused and unsure about the benefits social media could bring to them.

The literature suggests that social media could be beneficial for B2B marketing as a vehicle for relationship and brand development (Brennan and Croft, 2012) rather than a vehicle for hard sales, which was also advocated by some marketing agencies, though SME managers seemed to be focusing only on this aspect of achieving sales via social media. Brink (2017) argues that, due to their limited resources, B2B SMEs could use social media to overcome this limitation and enhance their collaboration with different stakeholders, but none of this was found in this study. Relationships were of high importance to the interviewees, but these needed to be face-to-face rather than online. Similar conclusions are offered by Järvinen *et al.* (2012, p.102) that "the great gap remains between the potential and actual use of social media by B2B firms", with B2B companies using more established digital tools, such as e-mail marketing, digital newsletters, and sales support materials, with the use of social media being less appropriate. The same still applies to B2B SMEs social media use.

This study identified a high number of barriers against social media use within the oil and gas industry. Its applicability was frequently questioned by the managers from the industry, and some interviewees from the marketing agencies also supported this view. The main barriers for social media use for B2B SMEs, according to Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides (2011), are the perception of social media being not important within the industry in which the company operates, the uncertainty of whether and how social media can help the brand, and staff not being familiar with social media. This study strongly supports the main barrier to be the belief that social media is not applicable to the oil and gas

industry. In addition, the marketing agency interviewees argued that staff had limited knowledge as to how to use social media and mentioned the time issue. However, since the B2B SME interviewees were convinced that social media is not applicable to the industry, these barriers were of little importance to them. Similarly, Brink (2017) identifies two main reasons for slow social media adoption within B2B industries because of the nature of these industries: there are fewer transactions taking place and they are more economically significant than those in B2C context, and business relations in the B2B context have been traditionally characterised by face-to-face meetings which tend to create personal relationships. Interviews with B2B SME managers evidenced the importance of personal relationships within the oil and gas industry as way of doing business, thus managers' views acted as a barrier to social media use.

The literature agrees that, due to B2B differences, social media is less applicable to this type of business (Järvinen *et al.*, 2012). This is supported by this study, particularly the interviews with B2B SME managers, who advocated that social media was not compatible with the oil and gas industry. Barriers related to the slow adoption of social media relate to firms' resources, expertise and the perception that digital marketing does not drive business outcomes in the specific industry. This is in line with Jussila, Kärkkäinen and Aramo-Immonen's (2014, p.608) explanation that "the incentives that motivate individual consumers or hobbyists to participate in social media-based user communities may, despite some possible similarities, be very different from those of professional (B2B sector) customers". Brink (2017) suggests that there is a paradoxical gap of knowledge related to social media use within B2B SMEs. Academic literature advocates for social media use within B2B companies to overcome limited resources in terms of time and money, but, in reality, the pace of adoption is very slow, as evidenced in this thesis.

Agency Manager\_E suggested that employees in charge of a company's social media needed to use it personally. However, during the interviews with SME managers it became apparent that they did not use social media in either their personal or professional life. This is in line with Keinänen and Kuivalainen's (2015) study which concludes that social media use for B2B purposes in an industrial marketing setting is influenced by corporate culture, colleagues' support and personal and psychological factors on consumer behaviour towards social media business use. This is supported by the findings of this study: the managers from older generations did not use social media personally, corporate culture was also against social media use, and therefore it is not surprising that it was used very little. It was suggested that social media use in oil and gas industry was a generational thing, and it was highlighted that social media was important to younger generations. One of the managers from SME mentioned "*it might be an age thing*" when discussing social media's potential advantages. While marketing agency managers suggested that social media should be managed internally, Manager\_C also explained that their clients were sometimes afraid of social media and thus asked the marketing agency to manage these channels. Similarly, Brink (2017) investigated social media use by B2B SMEs and found that, to

reduce the challenge of having limited knowledge about social media, SMEs considered outsourcing it to specialists. Some issues associated with social media were also noted by agencies, which included the message and employee behaviour control.

Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides' (2011) study found that the main reasons for B2B SMEs to use social media were to attract new customers, cultivate relationships, increase awareness, communicate the brand online, receive feedback and interact with suppliers; little support was found in this study for such uses. B2B SME managers suggested that, for the oil and gas industry, some company and brand awareness could potentially be achieved, however, none of the other objectives were mentioned. Managers from marketing agencies agreed that enhanced visibility could be achieved, but, for the oil and gas industry, none of the other goals could be achieved. It was also added that no sales could be achieved. Manager\_D, who was a digital strategist, completely questioned the need of social media for B2B. He was the only interviewee who considered social media from a ROI perspective, while the remaining managers just assumed that all companies need to do social media. Järvinen *et al.* (2012) conclude that social media has been utilised for various B2B marketing objectives in line with general marketing objectives, such as acquiring new customers and enhancing current customer relationships. Again, the B2B SME managers seemed to focus solely on sales and acquiring new business, and since they could not see direct sales from these channels, their use seemed to be disregarded, with the relationship aspect not being mentioned. According to Brink (2017), the overall goal of using social media is increasing sales and profit through enhanced business communications. However, that communication aspect was not found to be of any importance to the managers interviewed.

This study suggests that B2B SMEs do not have clear objectives for their social media and achieving direct sales is the most important objective. McCann and Barlow (2014) suggest that, if companies want to ensure effective use of social media, there is a need for a clear plan detailing how it is used and what it aims to achieve. However, from the interviews with B2B SMEs it is evident that none of these plans existed in the companies studied. Durkin, McGowan and McKeown (2013, p.722) explored SMEs and found that “motivations to adopt social media in marketing activity were driven by the lead entrepreneur/owner/CEO”. This shows again that, rather than having clear objectives for using social media, use was driven by the owner-manager. In the case of this study, it was the opposite and most owner-managers were against social media use.

#### **6.4.2. LinkedIn**

In comparison to the above debate on social media as a DMC channel, LinkedIn requires a different discussion. LinkedIn was the most popular social media channel among B2B SME managers and, while they questioned other social media channels' applicability to the oil and gas industry, they agreed that LinkedIn was a valuable DMC channel and it was seen as the second most important channel after websites. While LinkedIn offers two options: either connecting with people and expanding the network

or simply connecting with organisations by following them, the networking option seemed to be more important for B2B SMEs as it was a professional social media platform. Since no previous studies on B2B and SME companies investigated LinkedIn as a DMC channel, this study provides important findings regarding how small industrial companies used LinkedIn.

LinkedIn was also seen as the most suitable channel for B2B companies by the marketing agency interviewees. As Manager\_D noted, *“If there was any one channel that I would suggest you invest in, in B2B space regardless of the size of your company that would be LinkedIn”*. B2B SME interviewees also perceived LinkedIn as useful for the oil and gas industry. The preferred option was to focus on personal profiles and connecting with other people rather than following company news, as Manager\_GS explained: *“I look for people on LinkedIn, I don’t go to company pages”*. Only two SME interviewees followed company profiles. It was suggested that LinkedIn was *“a database of people”*, and very useful for identifying potential leads in specific companies. In general, these B2B SME managers saw LinkedIn as another tool that could assist their businesses and through which they could transfer their offline traditional ways of doing business to an online environment. While not clearly articulated, SME managers used LinkedIn for identifying sales leads and supporting sales (Järvinen *et al.*, 2012; Karjaluoto, Mustonen and Ulkuniemi, 2015; Taiminen and Karjaluoto, 2015).

While agency managers also suggested that LinkedIn could be useful for recruitment, business development, creating an authority for company, networking, brand visibility and communications, information gathering and information sharing (Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011), only limited support was found by managers from B2B SMEs that LinkedIn could be useful in information gathering and awareness building. During discussions with SME managers, two managers mentioned that their company gained business from LinkedIn as a person who contacted them via LinkedIn became a client. However, the interviewees did not want to acknowledge that this was due to LinkedIn, rather they mentioned reasons such as ease of contacting as the main advantage. Therefore, even when sales results were evident, SME managers still had some prejudices about social media use and were unsure on how to use these channels (Taiminen and Karjaluoto, 2015).

#### **6.4.3. Mobile Applications**

Mobile applications were deemed by SME managers to be comparatively unimportant. Interviewees from the marketing agencies argued that very strong evidence was required from companies to build mobile applications as usually websites were sufficient. B2B SME managers questioned the use of mobile applications for the industry. The only apps that seemed to be used by interviewees were the oil and gas industry news websites, which had an app format. Thus, the use of mobile applications for the oil and gas industry was not seen to be important.

Watson, McCarthy and Rowley (2013) explain that mobile marketing is beneficial to marketers as mobile devices provide one-to-one, one-to-many and mass communications that are effective and do not



require large financial resources, with the main advantage of mobile being pull communication (Persaud and Azhar, 2012; Watson, McCarthy and Rowley, 2013). However, mobile applications were seen as requiring a large amount of resources, and thus not being a suitable option for SMEs. It was, however, suggested by B2B SMEs that large corporations in oil and gas company with large budgets might have a use for mobile applications. In addition, Manager\_GS also suggested there was a related technical challenge of using mobile applications in the oil and gas industry, because people were based in remote locations with limited connectivity or even offshore. The study's observation supports this finding, as only one company initially offered a mobile application, but, after a website redesign, did not have the application anymore.

On the other hand, mobile-optimised websites were an important factor and managers from B2B SMEs advocated for mobile-optimised websites. The same is evident from the longitudinal observation, as by the end of the observation period all observed companies had mobile-optimised websites. Thus, from eight types of mobile marketing options suggested by Chaffey and Smith (2017), only mobile-optimised websites seemed to be applicable to the oil and gas industry. This is in line with Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2016) who argue that mobile websites and their user experience are key tasks for marketers.

#### **6.4.4. E-mail Marketing**

E-mail marketing as a DMC channel for the oil and gas industry received little support from either the marketing agencies or from B2B SMEs despite the suggestion that e-mail can be used successfully for both customer acquisition and customer retention (Chaffey and Smith, 2008; Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2016; Chaffey and Smith, 2017). E-mail was not deemed an important DMC channel by the agencies as Manager\_B noted: "*e-mail marketing is very under-used in B2B*". In line with Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2016) and Chaffey and Smith (2017), Manager\_D suggested it should be a part of marketing automation rather than a separate tool and channel on its own.

The majority of B2B SMEs used e-mails as a one-to-one communication channel to replace traditional telephone conversations, in line with Karjaluoto, Mustonen and Ulkuniemi's (2015) findings. For example, one manager showed a marketing/sales e-mail he was planning to send. It was a very simple marketing e-mail, which was more like a personal e-mail. He explained that he received advice from a senior manager in the oil and gas industry that an e-mail should be a brief and highly personalised message. This is supported by Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2016) who advocate that e-mails need to be highly personalised and relevant to recipients to be successful. In addition, e-mail was used more as a one-to-one channel to keep a relationship going with existing and previous customers. Another manager gave the example of keeping in touch with previous clients by personally e-mailing news and updates from his company. These findings only partly support Taiminen and Karjaluoto (2015), who argue that e-mails can be used for information sharing, promotion, building and maintaining relationships and guiding customers to the website.

When interviewees were prompted to think about e-mail as a marketing communication channel for sending and receiving company news or e-mail newsletters, there was limited interest. Taiminen and Karjaluoto (2015) present conflicting results about e-mail as their survey results show that e-mail was not considered important, but during interviews with SMEs, it was argued that it was the second most important channel after websites. Two SME managers noted they would consider e-mail news and newsletters as possibilities for their companies in the future, when they have enough information coming from the company. In agreement with Taiminen and Karjaluoto's (2015) findings, e-mail as a DMC channel was not used much by B2B SMEs, though it was used to distribute digital magazines, which was evident from the observation as well. The study disagrees with Taiminen and Karjaluoto (2015), who argue that, instead of two-way communications, SMEs use e-mail as a one-way communication channel to deliver newsletters or advertising. The findings show that e-mails were used for personal one-to-one communications.

These examples clearly show that these companies were far away from using e-mail marketing strategically as a part of their DMC. The longitudinal observation revealed that, while companies tried to capture potential leads by having the option to sign-up for company news on their websites, in reality this did not go any further. While the interviewed companies suggested that personal e-mails were an important channel for communication due to the fact it was like person-to-person communication, it was not seen as a channel for marketing communications (Karjaluoto, Mustonen, and Ulkuniemi, 2015).

## **6.5. EXTERNAL FACTORS**

The final category of factors influencing DMC in the conceptual framework is external factors, which seemed to be very important in how DMC was used by the companies in this study. Data supporting all five influencing factors were found. However, three new dimensions were added based on the empirical data. Trust, security and privacy, with easy and affordable access to internet was supported, although not strongly. In comparison, successful relationships and customer acceptance were found to be more relevant factors. Moreover, three new dimensions emerged as important: industry type, competition, and the recession in the oil and gas industry, as a part of macroeconomic factors, which resulted in major changes in the industry and affected DMC. The study contradicts Taiminen and Karjaluoto (2015) findings, which suggest that the key factor explaining decision-making in SMEs is the internal resources factors, with external factors playing a relatively small role; this study found that external factors play a significant role. This supports Karjaluoto and Huhtamäki's (2010) argument that external factors, outside a company's control, such as product/service type, competitive landscape, industry sector and customer behaviour, influence DMC use for SMEs.

### **6.5.1. Trust**

The study identified a demonstrable fear of DMC, due to the very limited knowledge about digital in the companies studied. Trust issues were associated with older generations. The oil and gas industry is

especially dominated by an older generation of men, who were against DMC use in the industry because it was not the way it was done in the past and who argued that there were specific ways in which things were handled. Marketing agencies explained that digital marketing was a “*generation thing*” and people from older generations relied heavily on traditional sales techniques and were suspicious of DMC. It was suggested that the lack of knowledge about DMC resulted in a lack of trust and suspicion towards DMC (Karjaluo and Huhtamäki, 2010; Taiminen and Karjaluo, 2015) in the oil and gas industry in general. An example used by a marketing agency manager was conversations with clients when talking about SEA: “*How do you know that somebody [...] is a real person, it might just be a robot. [...] I read something that Google have these robots that just knock up clicks automatically*”. Again, in Manager\_D’s opinion, this could be explained by age: these people had suspicion and a lack of understanding about DMC as they have been working successfully for the last 30 years without any need for social media, thus these people cannot adopt new ways of doing business very quickly. In line with limited knowledge about DMC, the senior managers within oil and gas industry had trust issues. Lack of knowledge resulted in uncertainty how DMC should be used (Taiminen and Karjaluo, 2015).

### **6.5.2. Security and Privacy**

Another important aspect relating to trust issues, due to limited knowledge of DMC, was that of commercially sensitive information in the oil and gas industry. Thus, some B2B SME interviewees argued that they could not share information with all the industry and needed to be very careful how much they could reveal due to competition. Some managers even considered having a restricted area on their website to give fuller information about products and services for specific people rather than everyone. Others mentioned that they needed to be very careful when promoting their products on YouTube as others might steal the idea. It was suggested that, during a recession, it became even more important to protect knowledge. This again was another barrier for DMC use as B2B SME managers questioned how much they could reveal and thus had limited information and content to share and use on DMC channels. Karjaluo, Mustonen, and Ulkuniemi (2015, p.706) explain that, since industrial companies rely heavily on research and development activities, “discussing problems on an open forum or blog might jeopardize their competitive advantage”. They also suggest that social media has limited applicability within industrial marketing communications due to the confidentiality in business relationships, thus revealing more information might negatively affect competitive advantage.

### **6.5.3. Successful Relationships**

The importance of relationships was highlighted as a key factor in how B2B SMEs are conducting business. Gilmore, Carson and Grant (2001) argue that SMEs marketing is based on networking through personal contact networks. Empirical data from the interviews with B2B SMEs and marketing agencies supports the notion that building relationships and using established networks were very important to oil and gas SMEs. Two streams of existing literature explain the importance of these relationships. On

one hand, SMEs practice doing business through relationships and networks (Hill, 2001a; Gilmore, Carson and Grant, 2001; Durkin, McGowan and McKeown, 2013), and on the other – the literature on industrial marketing practices suggest that, typically, the focus is on sales and business development activities, which is strongly related to relationship building (Avlonitis and Karayanni, 2000; Coviello and Brodie, 2001; Kotler and Keller, 2012). Finally, although limited, the research into the oil and gas industry also suggests that networking is a key approach to doing business in Aberdeen, which is described as an “industrial village” (Crabtree, Bower and Keogh, 1997; MacKinnon, Chapman and Cumbers, 2004). Chong, Shafaghi and Tan’s (2011) study of CSFs for B2B SMEs also concludes that successful customer relationships are the most important factor.

B2B SME managers suggested that existing networks and word-of-mouth were the means of gaining new business. Manager\_AM explained “*a lot of the customers are ex-customers or people that we’ve dealt with [...] over the years, they just know we are here*”. The existing literature on SMEs and their marketing practices highlight the fact that SMEs have specific characteristics, with one of them being that a key aspect of doing business is networked relationships and personal contact networks (Durkin, McGowan and McKeown, 2013). Direct and indirect networking and relying upon personal relationships were perceived to be particularly important to the oil and gas industry, which is also supported by previous studies into oil and gas SMEs (Keogh and Evans, 1999). Manager\_TM suggested that the approach of doing business in the industry was “*who the managing director knows*”. It is even suggested that “that networking is a marketing ‘competence’ and as such can be developed as a way of doing marketing for SMEs, that is, marketing by networking” (Gilmore, Carson and Grant, 2001, p.6). Thus, visiting existing and potential clients was a central activity for personal relationship building. However, congruent with Wagner, Fillis and Johansson (2003), these personal relationships needed to be offline rather than online using various DMC channels.

As a result, the business development role was very important, as Manager\_DR explained: “*my role has always been about building relationships*” and Manager\_RK continued “*they’ve got a network of people and they know people in the industry*”. Gilmore, Carson and Grant (2001, p.10) explain further: “When they claim to have relationships with a client company, they are actually referring to their relationship with a few key figures in that company. When these people leave the company, usually the relationship with that company dissolves”. This is also evident in B2B SME interviews explaining how business development works: typically, business development managers have been working in the industry for a long time and have strong and established networks, thus they can bring business by simply speaking to existing connections. When these business development people left a company, they took their connections with them. The same was found by MacKinnon, Chapman and Cumbers (2004, p.101): “business coming from people whom the company already knew”.

It is recognised that building various relationships is vital for SMEs success, and therefore time and effort is invested to keep and maintain relationships with key clients (Gilmore, Carson and Grant, 2001). As a part of traditional sales techniques, lunch-and-learn sessions together with client entertainment, in particular “*a game of golf*”, was used among B2B SMEs. As explained in the literature, “SME owner/managers are doing marketing through their natural and inherent networking activity, through all their normal communication activities, such as interacting and participating in social, business and trade activities” (Gilmore, Carson and Grant, 2001, p.7). Thus, it was important to have a visible presence in Aberdeen by attending key events, such as trade shows or golfing events (MacKinnon, Chapman and Cumbers, 2004). Another associated activity was “*phoning them up*”, a common expression used by B2B SMEs as this was the way business was done. As Manager\_PD explained: “*I took over the business in 2011. Prior that we had been successful, the company has been going for some 26 years without any website or anything, so the only dialogue was face-to-face or on the phone, some e-mail, but basically face-to-face*”.

B2B SME managers also suggested that LinkedIn could be used to identify specific people in potential companies, and then traditional communications via telephone could be employed. Marketing agency interviewees explained that, because of strong personal networks, there was even no need for search activities on search engines as people in the industry already knew who sells what, plus the fact that, with highly specialised and technical products, there was a limited demand and thus only a few potential clients.

#### **6.5.4. Easy and Affordable Access to the Internet**

Since the original study of Eid, Elbeltagi and Trueman (2006), access to the internet has become a less important factor. This dimension was not discussed in great depth and just mentioned by two managers from B2B SMEs, who noted that where they live and work the internet connection is not strong, which does affect their business. However, these interviewees agreed that, while their internet connection is slow, it does not impact how they do their business. In addition, one of the agency interviewees added that another factor is that part of the oil and gas industry operates in offshore locations and thus there is an additional challenge as the internet needs to work in remote locations.

#### **6.5.5. Customer Acceptance**

It was identified that there are major generational differences with regards to customers and their acceptance of DMC. On one side there are the older generations, who do not use the technology, and on the other side the younger generations, who do use the technology. As Gilmore, Gallagher and Henry (2007) argue, DMC initiatives might not be appreciated by the “*techno-phobic customers*” of some SMEs. This is somewhat supported by the findings of this study. The B2B SME interviewees argued themselves that digital was not the way business was done. In addition, the marketing agencies provided examples of how people from the oil and gas industry were simply not in favour of digital technologies.

Karjaluoto and Huhtamäki (2010) suggest that customers also influence the decision on DMC use: if they use digital tools, the companies will follow them. However, the whole oil and gas industry seemed not to be using DMC channels intensively, instead focusing on traditional sales techniques, and there were specific ways how people from oil and gas companies worked. There were approved traditional ways that decision-makers communicated. However, it was felt that, rather than customers accepting or not accepting the DMC use within the oil and gas industry, the industry itself affected whether DMC was used or not used.

#### **6.5.6. Industry Type (New Dimension)**

One new significant dimension that emerged from the empirical data, and which was not in the conceptual framework, was the type of industry. It is argued that this is a significant dimension influencing DMC use and adoption within B2B SMEs. In general, it is suggested that B2B marketing practices, which have a strong personal-sales orientation, require different approaches than B2C companies. In addition, the whole oil and gas industry, which is the context of this study, is a different industry that requires specific marketing approaches with a focus on networking and a relationship-building approach. Therefore, these norms dictate which approaches from DMC are suitable and applicable for B2B SMEs operating within the industry. Gilmore, Carson and Grant (2001, p.7) support the findings that “the way in which marketing by networking is carried out is often pre-determined by industry behaviours and norms”.

The oil and gas industry and its features emerged as one of the key determining factor for marketing and digital marketing practices within the industry. Before detailing DMC practices in the industry, a large part of the interviews with marketing agencies focused on the oil and gas industry in general as they explained that, to understand DMC, it was important to understand how the industry operated. Karjaluoto and Huhtamäki (2010) also identify specific industry and sectorial environmental factors that significantly affect SMEs use of DMC. They use the example of high-tech and craft micro firms to illustrate their different needs. Marketing agency managers explained that the oil and gas industry was a significantly different industry and thus there were specific marketing practices within the industry. Overall, the industry was of sales and business development and marketing was a supporting activity. It was also argued by B2B SME managers that there were traditional activities approved by the industry and newer communications activities were not accepted due to the age and generation of the majority of managers in the industry. Similarly, Wagner, Fillis and Johansson (2003) suggest that an industry dictates the need to maintain traditional ways of doing business and thus influences e-business adoption among SMEs. These features of the oil and gas industry emerged as one of the key determining factors for marketing practices.

All interviewees from the marketing agencies acknowledged that B2B and B2C companies were different, and thus different marketing and digital marketing approaches were required in line with

Karjaluoto, Mustonen and Ulkuniemi's (2015) argument about the different communication norms between B2B and B2C companies. The B2B SME interviewees also noted that they have a limited number of clients, and thus the marketing tactics applicable to consumer markets were not suitable for them. This is in line with Gilliland and Johnston (1997, p.15), who argue that "inherent differences between B2B marketing and consumer marketing results in important differences in how marketing communications tools are processed and acted on by their targets". The suggested differences in the oil and gas industry included localisation and strong personal networks, generational differences, highly technical and specialised products, focus on business development and the fact that it was a lucrative industry in which marketing was not seen as important and played only supportive role.

Factors relating to the oil and gas industry include the fact that it is localised, meaning strong professional networks have been formed. When describing the oil and gas industry terms such as "*old boys club*" was used to explain how the industry operated, because typically men from older generations, who knew each other, dominated the industry. These people did not see marketing as being relevant and instead focused on one-to-one business development due to the highly technical and specialised products and services needed in the industry. Karjaluoto, Mustonen, and Ulkuniemi (2015) explain that the buying process typically involves complex decision-making and is time-consuming for both the buyer and the seller because they mainly require personal interaction, which is an additional challenge for industrial marketing. At the same time, it was noted that the oil and gas industry was a very lucrative market, but the actual market sizes were much smaller in comparison to other industries. Thus, industry composition also meant the dynamics and industry structure was different as small companies usually needed only a few big clients to sustain their profitable businesses with the main marketing approaches including oil trade shows, brochures, presentations and receptions, which were associated with sales activities. Therefore, it was argued that all these industry features affected the way marketing and digital marketing could be used in general. These differences are in line with Habibi *et al.* (2015) argument on the main differences in B2B and B2C, which include the number of decision makers, slower decision-making cycles, high value exchange, more direct and intense relationships with customers, more functional and rational decision-making, product complexity, customers more knowledgeable and differences in communication promotional tools and messages.

The B2B SME interviewees constantly questioned the applicability of marketing in the oil and gas industry due to product complexity in line with Karjaluoto and Huhtamäki's (2010) argument that some products are more suitable for DMC channels than others. Manager\_PD argued that, because of the highly customised products, the applicability of marketing was questionable. "*Our products generally are something that are custom built, and they are one offs, so even the same customer, if they weren't to use it on that particular job, they probably couldn't use it on another job.*" Altogether, the products were very specific, with very few clients in the industry, which resulted in low product demands in general. One manager explained: "*We are probably more a traditional oil and gas company*" who "*don't*

*have very many competitors*” and *“in what we do it’s such a small niche market I don’t know who else does it”*. Therefore, he had strong views that *“ultimately no matter how good a salesman is, if they have no requirement to buy one of our products, they won’t buy”*. It is further suggested that business type, depending on the product/service, is an important factor, and thus some companies can exploit DMC channels to a very limited degree because their products simply require face-to-face interaction (Karjaluo and Huhtamäki, 2010).

In general, the oil and gas industry did not see value from marketing activities, and there was a lack of knowledge and respect for the marketing function. The industry was dominated by personal communications and sales activities, which is the key element in the B2B communications mix (Karjaluo, Mustonen and Ulkuniemi, 2015). Manager\_E explained how difficult it was to hold a marketing position in the oil and gas industry as these managers needed to constantly prove that marketing was relevant. On the other hand, there were large marketing budgets and no accountability for marketing practices. Marketing was seen only as *“box-ticking exercise”*. Agency managers suggested that marketing was rarely deemed an important function within the organisations and played only a supporting role within the industry. Similarly, Järvinen *et al.* (2012, p.102) note that *“it is often noted that personal face-to-face selling works best in complex and long-lasting buying processes, while non-personal communication channels, such as advertising and digital channels, play supportive roles by creating synergies in achieving sales objectives”*.

In the same vein, B2B SME interviewees argued that DMC was applicable to other industries but questioned its applicability to the oil and gas industry in general and agreed that word-of-mouth was their main communications and channel for getting new business and sales, as Manager\_RK explained, *“90% probably 95% of our business is through word-of-mouth”*. Traditional sales techniques were the focus of the industry as there was a belief in the industry that *“marketing is a waste of money”* because *“everyone knew each other and that’s how they got their business”* (Crabtree, Bower and Keogh, 1997; MacKinnon, Chapman and Cumbers, 2004). While it was suggested *“there is a place for marketing”*, this was only during tender phases, especially if the organisation provided very specific services and the potential supplier was not known. However, again it shows that marketing was seen only as a supporting activity. The above arguments about the oil and gas industry are supported by Karjaluo, Mustonen and Ulkuniemi (2015), who argue that traditional marketing communications play a lesser role than customer relationship management, personal interaction and other variables in the industrial marketing mix – product, price and place, when it comes to communications with industrial customers. Personal communication tools, especially sales force, have been playing a core role in the B2B communications mix, with other tools playing only supportive roles.

In line with views on marketing, digital marketing was not deemed to be an important activity by the oil and gas industry. It was explained that marketing in the oil and gas industry was the *“old B2B way of*



*working*". Manager\_D several times highlighted that the oil and gas industry was "*well behind*", "*way behind*", "*far behind*", "*taking a step back*" compared to other industries' marketing practices. Other managers also referred to marketing in the oil and gas industry as old-style PR activities with no accountability. For example, people from oil and gas were interested in seeing their pictures in local newspapers and "*that's success for them*". Similar evidence is found by Karjaluoto, Mustonen and Ulkuniemi (2015), whose B2B respondents were good at PR and exhibitions, but struggled with DMC. It was also suggested that age and generation became an important factor in how DMC was implemented and why it has been underutilised in the oil and gas industry. The B2B SME managers outlined major differences between "*younger*" and "*older*" generations. There were different ways of working and it was "*a generational thing*", with the younger generations preferring DMC, while the older generations were simply "*not digitally focused*" and made sales calls or turned up "*on a door*". The barriers for digital marketing included suspicion and lack of understanding about DMC and typically, the "*elderly gentleman at the top*" was against digital practices because "*they have come from the world of doing golf days, brochures, exhibitions stands*". The existing research (Järvinen *et al.* 2012; Charlesworth, 2014; Karjaluoto, Mustonen and Ulkuniemi, 2015) also supports the idea that, due to complex business relationships, industrial products still benefit from traditional communication platforms, such as telephone calls, e-mails and face-to-face meetings.

#### **6.5.7. Competitors (New Dimension)**

Another important dimension that emerged within the external environment is competitors. The existing research on SMEs mentions that competition is an important factor in encouraging companies to engage with DMC (Wagner, Fillis and Johansson, 2003; Gilmore, Gallagher and Henry, 2007; Pavic *et al.*, 2007). Karjaluoto and Huhtamäki (2010) explain how the competitive situation in the market can influence adoption for SMEs: if competitors are using DMC channels, the company might adopt to remain competitive, but if no one adopts, then the company will not either. However, rather than competitive pressure driving DMC, interviewees from the marketing agencies suggested that it was more of a "*bandwagon approach*" and "*me too mind-set*". An example given by a marketing agency manager explaining that competitors always raised the bar for other companies because "*we do get a lot of enquiries to say 'well they have got a better website, so we have to update ours'*". Therefore, companies simply followed their competitors "*rather than really thinking why and what's your strategy, what are you going to do with this, when you have this, is there really a need for it*".

These findings support Ramsey *et al.* (2003, p.262) who investigated e-business among SMEs and conclude "SMEs need to realise that the "me too" approach is dead. It is essential for small businesses to realise that Internet technology is not a technical tool, but a business tool". However, it is evident that oil and gas SMEs do not follow strategy when it comes to DMC but use more of a tactical approach. It

is suggested that the competitive situation plays a role in DMC use, although less important than company orientation and customers (Taiminen and Karjaluoto, 2015).

#### **6.5.8. Macroeconomic Factors – Recession (New Dimension)**

Another important dimension in relation to DMC within the oil and gas industry that emerged is the macroeconomic factor: the recession in the industry. This was the main influencer related to the fact that “*that old B2B way of working is dying*”. Wagner, Fillis and Johansson (2003) also found that macro factors, such as recession, act as a driver for e-business adoption between SMEs. Marketing agencies reported that oil and gas companies started to become more interested in DMC due to the recession in the industry, which started in 2014 and deepened throughout 2015 and 2016. They suggested that a shift towards DMC in the industry occurred because of the recession, which resulted in smaller marketing budgets and the requirement for more accountability. However, it was acknowledged that the pace of change was very slow.

The marketing agencies suggested that DMC became of more interest because it was perceived to be more cost-effective and that oil and gas companies became more interested in social media as a way to keep their brand visible. However, companies still used social media in a tactical way. B2B SME managers also noted that they were changing and doing things differently because there was a recession in the industry. Moreover, the recession dimension was highly visible throughout the longitudinal observation. At the start of the observations, companies had a presence on key social channels, but just before or just after the second observation, companies stopped using Facebook, Twitter use fluctuated, some companies also stopped posting on LinkedIn and only one company seemed to have a plan for its social media presence. Therefore, this study extends the theory that macroeconomic factors also play a role in DMC use. None of the previous related studies mentioned that DMC use is affected by macroeconomic factors as a part of external factors, though it was found to be important for SMEs e-business adoption (Wagner, Fillis and Johansson, 2003).

#### **6.6. DIGITAL MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY**

The final dimension in the conceptual framework is DMC strategy success, which is the outcome, influenced by five groups of CSFs. This thesis adopts the view that a successful DMC strategy is one that meets business objectives (Eid and El-Gohary, 2013), where the main business objectives are defined as new customer acquisition and existing customer retention. Customer acquisition and retention as the key objectives are reflected in the proposed DMC definition (p.18) and is also in alignment with existing literature (Rowley, 2011; Wymbs, 2011; Pulizzi, 2012; Fill, 2013; Egan, 2015; Chaffey and Smith, 2017). This study argues that a successful DMC strategy is one that facilitates and drives customer acquisition and retention.

It is identified that five groups of factors influence the success of DMC. The strongest influence comes from internal and external factors, which directly influence the marketing strategy, which then affects the choices on website and other DMC channels, leading to DMC success. In addition, these internal, external and marketing strategy factors also have a direct influence on the DMC success. The empirical data suggests that, within internal factors, internal culture, the role of sales and resources, directly influence marketing strategy for B2B SMEs. Due to limited resources, focus on sales and the owner-manager being the main decision-maker, two factors in marketing strategy category (setting the strategic goal and having top management support) largely did not exist with B2B SMEs. In addition, external factors, such as successful relationships, industry type and macroeconomic factors, seemed to be significant in determining the marketing strategy and DMC strategy directly. These CSFs were identified to be either enablers or inhibitors for DMC strategy. In this study, all factors acted as inhibitors excluding the recession, the macroeconomic factor, which acted as an enabler for DMC.

It is generally assumed that, to achieve any benefits from DMC, there is a need for strategic use and integration. However, due to the very specific nature of this study of oil and gas industry B2B SMEs, DMC strategy planning and implementation requires a different approach. It is evident that SMEs have specific approaches to marketing. In addition, there are specific industrial marketing practices, meaning that traditional DMC theory seems to be less applicable to oil and gas B2B SMEs practice. Thus, this section first presents five issues and challenges that impact DMC success in B2B SMEs and then presents best practice for B2B SMEs, based on primary and secondary research. Therefore, in order to have a successful DMC strategy, which would facilitate customer acquisition and retention, these five issues need to be addressed.

### **6.6.1. Issue 1 – Definition**

The first issue relates to a lack of understanding and agreement about digital marketing and digital marketing communications. These differences also exist in the academic literature, as revealed in the literature review, as some scholars themselves confuse the definitions. Some scholars tend to use the term digital marketing, which is a broader concept including 4Ps or 7Ps, instead of DMC. At the same time, marketing agencies use the term digital marketing when talking about DMC. Only one manager used the term DMC, because he was representing an integrated marketing communications agency. In practice, marketing practitioners use the term digital marketing to refer to DMC. Moreover, these marketing agencies provided varied definitions of DMC in line with the varied definitions found in the academic literature. Some marketing agencies even used the terms social media marketing and digital marketing interchangeably. In comparison, a manager from B2B SME explained that digital marketing for them was a website: “*digital, well I call it marketing, it’s just sort of through the website we have*”, while another manager understood it as “*marketing in the media*”. Therefore, it is not surprising that B2B SMEs were even more confused. These companies had limited resources, including limited

marketing knowledge, with no specific people in charge of their marketing, and the responsibility of marketing scattered among various company employees.

Thus, different definitions indicated a lack of agreement and understanding by academics and practitioners. In her study on SMEs marketing, Reijonen (2010, p.290) noted that marketing was understood “as a mean to inform the customers about the firm, its products and services,” and while they were interested in using marketing for creating and maintaining relationships, the ultimate goal was sales. This is only partly supported by this study, as it seemed that B2B SMEs were not sure how DMC could be used to contribute to their business, only identifying a supporting role, although they were expecting sales to justify the use of DMC. Therefore, to successfully use DMC, there is a need to have a common understanding of what DMC actually is and how it could benefit B2B SMEs. There is thus a need for outside support in educating and training oil and gas SMEs about DMC (Wagner, Fillis and Johansson, 2003; Karjaluoto and Huhtamäki, 2010; Järvinen *et al.*, 2012; Taiminen and Karjaluoto, 2015).

#### **6.6.2. Issue 2 – Planning and Implementation**

Another issue related to DMC is strategy planning and implementation. Marketing agency interviewees suggested that a large part of DMC is planning and advocated in-depth planning before moving to the tactical and operational side of marketing. As Manager\_C noted “*all good planning needs a strategy, it’s like any kind of marketing [...] you need a direction, hence, a strategy*”. This notion is also deeply rooted in the existing academic marketing literature. However, agencies emphasised that companies in oil and gas tend to get carried away with the tactical aspects. Similarly, Reijonen (2010) argues that the tactics and methods side of marketing is typically emphasised in SMEs, which is highly evident from interviews with B2B SMEs and supported by the longitudinal observation.

This is also evident from interviews with B2B SMEs as they largely discussed issues related to the tactical aspects of DMC. DMC within SMEs focuses on tactical aspects, with Hill (2001a, p.224) explaining that, when it comes to marketing, “the majority of decisions taken are operationally focused”, which would explain the current findings as well. Hill (2001a, p.224) goes further and explains that SMEs focus is “the tactical implementation of marketing planning”. In addition, none of these companies had a separate marketing role, and only one interviewed company was working closely with a marketing agency. The marketing agencies suggested that, for DMC to be successful, implementation was important. However, no agreement was reached on whether the implementation should be done by companies themselves or externally by marketing agencies. Again, B2B SME interviewees focused on their limited resources and identified these as a barrier to explain why DMC was very limited within their companies.

In the opinion of the marketing agencies, for a company to successfully implement DMC it needed to be fully integrated within the company with the aim of contributing to overall business objectives. This

largely contrasts to the opinions found in interviews with B2B SME managers as they were not sure how DMC could help their businesses, as the ultimate goal seemed to be the sale and sales-orientation. This is in line with existing research on SME marketing practices. As Hill (2001a, p.182) explains, “when conditions of uncertainty prevail, small firms will focus on doing instead of engaging in formal strategic planning”, which is supported by the interviews with B2B SMEs as none of them raised the idea of planning or having a strategy for DMC. The majority of discussions revolved around the tactical side of websites or social media use. Coviello, Brodie and Munro (2000, p.540) argue that “size-related differences are also reflected in the approach to market planning, where smaller firms are found to be more informal than larger firms”, together with limited measurement. In general, DMC within the companies studied was implemented in an *ad hoc* manner, with no goals or measurement, as also found by García, Díaz and Durán (2012), Taiminen and Karjaluoto (2015), and McCann and Barlow (2015). According to McCann and Barlow (2015), to have a successful DMC strategy, B2B SMEs should dedicate their resources and undertake planning to identify what they would like to achieve from DMC use and set specific goals, together with an implementation plan and measurement system, to see whether these goals are achieved.

### **6.6.3. Issue 3 – Integration**

Another aspect often mentioned in academic literature, related to planning and implementation, is online and offline marketing integration, which was also urged by the marketing agencies. Marketing agency interviewees advocated for DMC integration and listed a large number of benefits associated with integrating online and offline channels. However, the reality of SMEs was significantly different as they relied heavily on traditional sales techniques, questioned digital channels’ application to the oil and gas industry and could not identify how this could contribute to their overall business. This lack of integration supports Gabrielli and Balboni’s (2009, p.285) comment about SMEs: “they seem to be far removed from integration in marketing communications, because they do not adopt a true strategic approach aimed at increasing the relationship value for the customer within the target market, but rather an operational approach focused on products”.

However, other types of channel integration were found in B2B SMEs. They used those DMC channels that could be easily integrated with their traditional ways of doing business, the channels that could help to transfer their traditional business activities to an online environment. Managers from B2B SMEs highlighted that contact details on websites were highly important together with LinkedIn personal profiles, which could be used to identify potential leads with sales opportunities, and then traditional sales techniques, such as sales calls, would be used. It is suggested that traditional communication techniques, such as trade shows, face-to-face visits and sales calls, still play a significant role for B2B companies (Järvinen *et al.*, 2012; Taiminen and Karjaluoto, 2015, Habibi *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, a successful DMC strategy for B2B SMEs should use channels that are compatible and easily integrated

with their traditional ways of doing business rather than adopting radically new channels, which do not support these ways of doing business.

#### **6.6.4. Issue 4 – Channels Use**

It could be concluded that B2B SMEs within oil and gas industry prefer using the simpler DMC channels, but more for traditional one-way communications rather than adopting to two-way dialogues. DMC channels are used by oil and gas SMEs; however, they play a supportive role in the highly sales-focused processes. This is in line with Karjaluo, Mustonen, and Ulkuniemi (2015, p.708) who state that “significant shifts in industrial firms’ customer communications are not yet occurring”, since B2B SMEs use more of traditional ways for communication. B2B SMEs have adopted DMC channels such website, e-mails and LinkedIn, which support the traditional ways of how B2B SMEs do the business. The use of these channels is associated with focusing on the business and its need to promote the company and its services rather than being truly customer-focused channels providing solutions to their clients. This is also supported by Järvinen *et al.* (2012, p.112) who argue that “B2B marketers prefer to use one-directional and push-oriented digital channels”.

While B2B SMEs from the oil and gas industry have started using basic DMC channels, they still rely heavily on traditional offline channels, as Karjaluo, Mustonen, and Ulkuniemi (2015) explain that, within an industrial setting, the focus is on personal one-to-one communication due to complexity and long-term business relationships. It is suggested that DMC channels are less suitable for marketing some complex products and services and it is also argued that, to successfully use DMC for B2B industries, there is a need for open-minded and innovative marketing people. However, within the industrial sector this is rare (Karjaluo, Mustonen, and Ulkuniemi, 2015), and in the case of this study no separate role of marketing manager was found in the studied companies. In addition, SMEs marketing is associated more with chaotic and operational focus (Hill, 2001a) and thus, rather than strategically choosing DMC channels that are compatible with how the business operates, companies are driven by tactical decisions.

#### **6.6.5. Issue 5 – Objectives**

The final issue is related to B2B SMEs having no clear objectives for their DMC or having unrealistic expectations that it can drive sales directly. Objectives for using DMC within the oil and gas industry, as suggested by the marketing agency interviewees, are associated with brand awareness, which is supported by Järvinen *et al.* (2012) study. In addition, the website as a DMC channel was also related to potential lead generation. It is evident from the interviews that DMC channels should play a supportive role in the oil and gas industry, though it was not always well articulated, due to the complex and long B2B buying process (Järvinen *et al.*, 2012). Some of the B2B SMEs interviewees suggested that there is a place for DMC within oil and gas industry, but the lack of knowledge and resources was hindering the ability to use these channels successfully, agreeing with Taiminen and Karjaluo (2015).

It thus should be clearly explained that, for B2B SMEs, DMC channels should play a supporting role in the sales process, facilitating new customer acquisition and existing customer retention.

Empirical data from Karjaluoto, Mustonen and Ulkuniemi (2015) revealed three important areas in which DMC in B2B companies is already used for communication purposes: customer relationships, sales support and brand building. However, this thesis' B2B SMEs were expecting direct sales from using DMC channels rather than seeing these channels play a supporting role in the sales process together with communications and brand building. Therefore, companies with limited knowledge of how to use DMC, had unrealistic expectations, and blamed DMC channels and questioned their applicability since no sales were directly generated. While it is argued by Karjaluoto, Mustonen and Ulkuniemi (2015) that DMC becomes a central part of industrial organisations and can have a profound impact on industrial companies' marketing communications and sales, this was not the case in this thesis. Thus, it seems the extent to which these new forms of communications are utilised vary significantly depending on the context of the study.

It is suggested that "SMEs cannot do conventional marketing because of the limitations of resources which are inherent to all SMEs and also because SME owner/managers behave and think differently from conventional marketing decision-making practices in large companies" (Gilmore, Carson and Grant, 2001, p.6). This would explain why DMC practices within the studied B2B SMEs are different to the findings of previous academic studies of successful DMC use. Due to their limited resources, these SMEs, which also operate in an industrial setting, "do not conform to the conventional marketing characteristics of marketing textbook theories; instead their marketing is characterised by the limitations" (Gilmore, Carson and Grant, 2001, p.6). As a result, their DMC practices are haphazard, informal, loose, unstructured, spontaneous and reactive, built upon and conforming to industry norms. This means that traditional marketing theories are not applicable to the SMEs marketing as they engage in chaotic and informal marketing practices, which are different from those offered by marketing textbooks (Reijonen, 2010). Therefore, instead of having complicated objectives and strategies for achieving these goals (O'Dwyer, Gilmore and Carson, 2009b), for B2B SMEs DMC should be used to support the achievement of sales, by driving customer acquisition and retention.

#### **6.6.6. Best Practice for Digital Marketing Communications Strategy Success**

This section presents the best practice for DMC strategy for B2B SMEs, based on primary and secondary research. It addresses the five major challenges identified above and provides suggestions for successful use of DMC for oil and gas SMEs. Based on the successful DMC definition, a strategy is successful if it meets business objectives (Eid and El-Gohary, 2013), which in the context of this study is customer acquisition and retention.

This study demonstrates that the use of DMC channels in the specific context of oil and gas SMEs is unlikely to generate direct sales either from new or existing customer, and therefore should be related

to the soft side of marketing communications objectives. Instead of delivering direct sales, DMC could be used for branding and awareness, which are also important business objectives. This is in line with the conclusion of Järvinen *et al.* (2012) and Brennan and Croft (2012) that the two most important objectives of DMC for B2B are related to the soft side of marketing: creating awareness and enhancing brand image, which could then lead to increasing sales from new and existing customers further down the line. While it is not likely that DMC channels would generate sales directly, they can play a supporting role in overall marketing communications mix. It is clear from empirical data that relationship building with their clients is extremely important to B2B SMEs, however, their focus is on offline relationship building, while using more traditional sales techniques. For B2B SMEs who are looking to DMC channels to assist with customer acquisition and retention, the following recommendations emerge as best practice from this study.

The first suggestion would be that B2B SMEs should have clear goals for DMC use, with clear explanations of what they are trying to achieve via these channels, as different companies will have different meanings of what success is to them. Thus, for B2B SMEs with limited resources and within the specifics of the oil and gas industry, success should be related to the idea that DMC channels could be used to identify new sales leads and then traditional techniques such as sales calls and face-to-face meetings would take over. In addition, brand awareness and brand building would be key objectives for DMC channels, which would play a supporting role to the sales function and build the company profile within the oil and gas industry, where it seems that everyone knows each other. These suggestions support the findings of Karjaluoto, Mustonen, and Ulkuniemi (2015).

The importance of DMC is understood by oil and gas SMEs, but it is not considered to be significant for their success in line with Taiminen and Karjaluoto (2015). In addition, the limited planning and implementation regarding DMC is evident. B2B SMEs still lack knowledge of how to use and integrate DMC within their companies and still use it as a traditional communication technique within the digital environment rather than following best practice. While Taiminen and Karjaluoto (2015) identified B2B company goals for DMC channels, such as increasing sales to existing customers, enhancing customer service, facilitating communication, facilitating advertising, strengthening brand, facilitating dialogue with customers and recruitment, this study shows that B2B SMEs partly agreed that DMC could help to achieve brand awareness and brand building. In line with Taiminen and Karjaluoto's (2015) conclusions that SMEs did not have clear goals for either their website or social media, the interviews demonstrate that SMEs do not undertake any planning and do not know how DMC channels could contribute. However, while marketing agencies suggested that these channels could also assist with lead generation, B2B SMEs themselves were looking for actual sales from these channels, and thus were sceptical. External support and education of B2B SMEs is therefore needed, explaining what could be achieved via DMC use and how it should align with overall company objectives. There is thus a significant need



for outside support, either from the marketing agencies themselves, or from local government bodies and organisations.

This study shows that B2B SMEs do not use DMC to the full potential, in line with previous findings (Gilmore, Gallagher and Henry, 2007; Taiminen and Karjaluo, 2015). Though B2B SMEs do not require DMC in the strategic way proposed by existing literature. They seek ways to use DMC to assist in their traditional ways of doing business, but within the online environment. The way they use LinkedIn is not about building their company's profile, but about building their owner-manager's profile, because it is about that person and his/her network. In addition, LinkedIn is also used as a people database to identify potential leads within companies who could bring some business. Moreover, these B2B SMEs are heavily sales-focused, and thus DMC is only a supporting activity for their sales-orientation. However, at the same time it might be the case that these SMEs do not require the same digital activities as large companies do. This could be one of the reasons that these B2B SMEs do not achieve all the major benefits that DMC is argued to bring, for example Chaffey and Smith's (2008) 5Ss objectives. Some B2B SME managers argue that they are "*happy to be under the radar*" and do not need more clients due to their limited capacity. Hence, the recommendation is for B2B SMEs to use DMC in a way that supports their traditional way of doing business, meaning that face-to-face meeting and relationship building remain a key technique and the DMC strategy should complement this way of doing business.

The final recommendation is related to the use of DMC channels for B2B SMEs. Since these companies have limited financial resources and marketing knowledge, they should focus on more traditional and simpler DMC channels. Websites should be the key channel for B2B SMEs. The B2B SME interviewees felt that their websites were the most important DMC channel, although some agreed that they were brochure-type websites rather than actual lead-generation channels. Therefore, websites should receive more attention and should be more customer-focused, by including more resources in the form of data sheets, previous successful case studies, company presentations and company news stories to engage website visitors by explaining what solutions could be provided to clients. Thus, instead of being a one-way company promotion tool, websites could be used to facilitate current and potential clients and their needs better by providing relevant and up-to-date content. The longitudinal observation revealed that companies did try to redesign their websites to keep them fresh and interesting, however, sometimes the results of website redesign were questionable. Companies should therefore use external help to make sure their websites can become a strategic business tool rather than only an online brochure.

It is also evident that the focus on websites is on the customer acquisition stages rather than retention. At the same time, B2B SMEs do not expect to acquire business via websites. It is recommended that companies should better utilise their websites by adopting Kierzkowski *et al.* (1996) framework to ensure that various elements and tactics are in place for users at the different stages. Companies should

significantly better utilise the learn and relate stages, helping with customer retention, as well as the attract and retain/engage stages. While B2B SMEs do understand that mobile-optimised websites are important, they should also utilise SEO and ensure website are optimised for brand searches. In addition, websites should be better utilised to understand visitors by using Google Analytics. Again, due to very limited knowledge, external help might be required.

The longitudinal observation showed that companies understood that capturing potential leads' e-mails was important, and thus offered this function on their website. However, it did not go any further and personalised news stories or newsletters were not shared. B2B SMEs could better utilise e-mail marketing, which is a one-to-one communication channel suitable for relationship building. Companies do not need sophisticated CRM systems, which are too complicated for SMEs, but using e-mails as a marketing communication tool would be advantageous. While the usefulness of social media was doubted by many interviewees, LinkedIn seems to be a suitable channel for oil and gas SMEs. Instead of having company pages, these companies should focus on their owner-manager's or senior manager's profiles, who are the key people in the company and whose networks are valuable company resources. Thus, having an up-to-date and well-populated personal profile should be a requirement for B2B SMEs as LinkedIn is considered to be a database of people.

Thus, by optimising websites, increasing the use of e-mails as a marketing communications tool and focusing on key employees' profiles on LinkedIn, B2B SMEs could successfully use some DMC channels. Taking into consideration the practicalities of these oil and gas industry SMEs, including the focus on sales and oil and gas industry practices, the use of DMC would then support their traditional way of doing business. This use would then also be integrated with the overall business goals of increasing sales. The more active use of DMC channels would then result in these channels being more customer-centred as a tool for lead generation. Following these recommendations, B2B SMEs would be more successful with their DMC, which would then assist in their overall business objectives of increasing sales by acquiring new and retaining existing customers.

## **6.7. REVISED CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS FRAMEWORK**

The discussion reveals which factors are more or less important in the conceptual framework. The primary data reveals that some factors play a more significant role in influencing DMC than others. It also shows that there are more relationships between these factors than initially shown in the conceptual framework. The internal and external factors directly influence the marketing strategy factors. The existing marketing strategy factors then influence the choices on the website and other digital channels, which then leads to a successful DMC strategy, that is, one resulting in customer acquisition and retention. In addition, internal, external and marketing strategy factors not only influence choices on websites and other DMC channels, but also has a direct influence the DMC strategy success. The

relationships and influence of these five groups of factors on a successful DMC strategy is shown in Figure 6.2.

Within the internal, external and marketing strategy categories there are factors which play a more significant role. The more significant factors in internal, external and marketing strategy categories are noted in *Italics*. These factors can act as facilitators or inhibitors for a successful DMC strategy. For example, if there is a positive internal culture, it is more likely that DMC will be successful. Similarly, if the industry type supports the use of DMC, it will also likely to be more successful. However, if the opposite is true, and there is no company culture internally or industry type externally supporting DMC use, the DMC is less likely to be successful. Although, in this study the recession in the industry, the macroeconomic factor, acted as an enabler for DMC.

Based on the empirical data, the most important factors in the internal category are internal culture, the role of sales, training programmes and access to resources. Typically, these B2B SMEs have limited resources which significantly influence what and how DMC can be approached. While training programmes are important within the internal category, which means that internally key people and the main decision-makers within organisations should be interested in learning about the potential of DMC, at the same time externally there should be bodies and organisations to provide support in SMEs' training and education. Because owner-managers are the key decision-makers within these SMEs, their personal attitudes against DMC meant that the companies were not using DMC. In addition, these companies were also heavily focused on personal sales, arguing that marketing was not important to them, which again acted as a barrier for DMC.

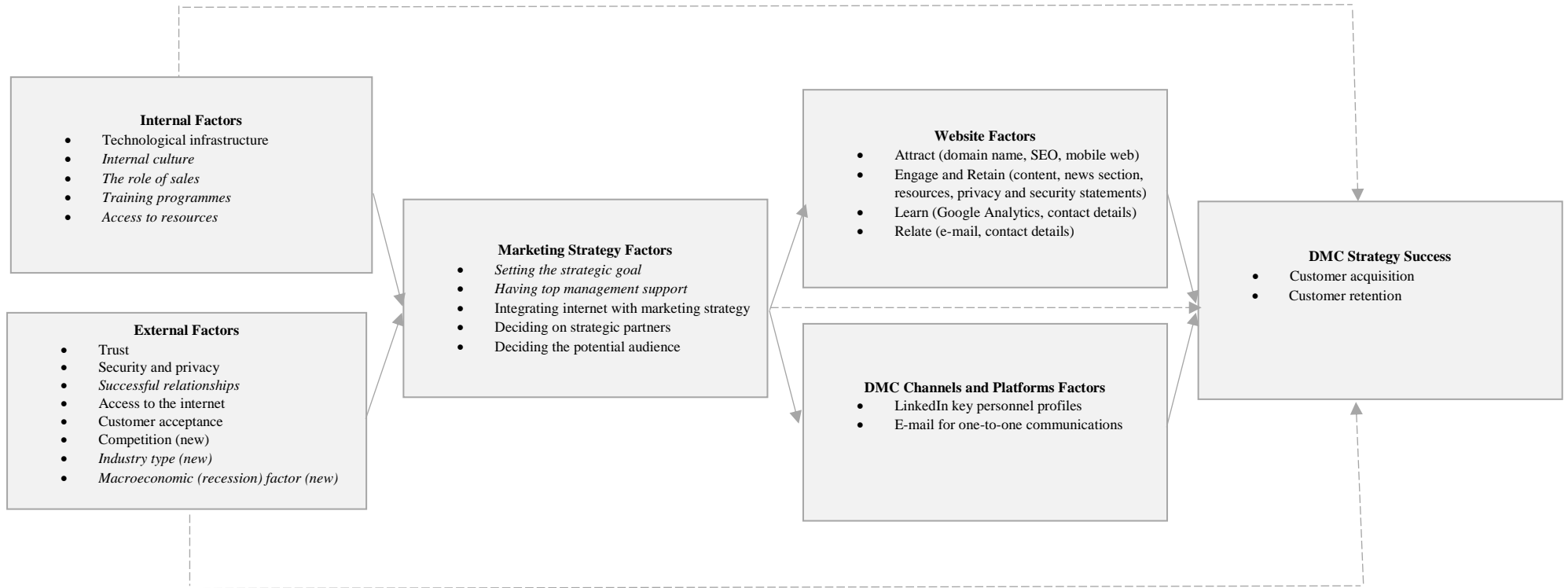
Together with internal factors, external factors are also an important category, with the role of external factors being significantly underestimated within the previous framework. While Taiminen and Karjaluoto (2015, p.637) argue that "resources are the dominating factor explaining decision making in small businesses, and that external factors play a relatively small role", this is only partly supported by this research as limited resources within SMEs play a major role in how DMC is approached, but external factors also play a significant role. In addition, three new dimensions in the external category emerged from the empirical data as being important in influencing DMC strategy: industry type, macroeconomic factors and competition. Industry norms are found to be of high importance in how the oil and gas industry used DMC. In addition, the recession acted as a facilitator for DMC use among the companies.

Internal and external factors directly influence marketing strategy. Within this category, setting the strategic goal and having top management support are the most influencing factors. However, in this study, there were no specific goals set for DMC. In addition, internally decision-makers were not supporting DMC either. Thus, again, these two factors acted as the inhibitors for DMC strategy. In

addition, internal, external and marketing strategy factors also have a direct influence on DMC strategy success.

The marketing strategy factors then influence choices made about websites and other DMC channels. The website was identified as the main DMC channel and the specific tactics for each stage of the digital marketing framework were identified. In addition, the other supporting DMC channels, including social media, with mobile and e-mail marketing, were found to be of less significance than previously predicted in the conceptual framework. Thus, only use of LinkedIn and key personnel profiles together with one-to-one personal e-mail communications were found to be applicable and relevant for B2B SMEs.

The final dimension in the framework is the outcome, the successful DMC strategy, which is associated with customer acquisition and retention. Due to the context of this study, in order to achieve sales, B2B SMEs require traditional marketing communication actions transferred to an online environment. The use of DMC needs to support the traditional ways of doing business among B2B SMEs. The main DMC objective in this context should be to support sales while building relationships with new and existing customers. Thus, in this way DMC use, in terms of websites and other channels, like LinkedIn and e-mail communications, will assist in acquiring and retaining customers, which is also the main goal of sales in B2B SMEs.



**Figure 6.2:** Revised digital marketing communications critical success factors framework

## 7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 7.0. CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This final chapter addresses the aim and objectives and presents the overall conclusions arising from the research. The following sections discuss the key findings, contextualising them with the existing literature and theories to support the conclusions, as well as to show how the research compares, contrasts and extends current studies. The chapter presents how each of the six research objectives have been achieved, as shown in Table 7.1., and conclusions for each objective are presented separately. The first two objectives were achieved by a literature review, while the other four were achieved through primary data collection and were evidenced in the Discussion Chapter (p.182). Following this, the contribution to theory is detailed. The chapter ends with study limitations and future research considerations.

**Table 7.1:** Research aim and objectives

<b>Aim: To critically evaluate the role and usage of digital marketing communications in oil and gas industry B2B SMEs.</b>					
<b>RO1:</b> Define digital marketing and explore key concepts of digital marketing communications channels.	<b>RO2:</b> Identify and evaluate the characteristics of marketing and digital marketing in the context of SMEs and B2B enterprises.	<b>RO3:</b> Analyse the effectiveness of digital marketing communications in achieving strategic marketing objectives in oil and gas SMEs.	<b>RO4:</b> Investigate the challenges and opportunities of utilising digital marketing within the industrial context of oil and gas SMEs.	<b>RO5:</b> Critically evaluate the success factors of digital marketing communications use in B2B SMEs.	<b>RO6:</b> Produce best practice recommendations for digital marketing communications applicable to B2B SMEs based on primary and secondary research findings.

### 7.1. RO1: DIGITAL MARKETING AND DIGITAL MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

An extensive literature review was undertaken regarding digital marketing and its definitions. The study found that there are different definitions proposed by academics and some of the definitions contradict each other. It was even found that sometimes digital marketing is used as a synonym for social media marketing and that various terms are used for digital marketing, including e-marketing, online and internet marketing. It has been suggested that the term digital marketing should be used, based on a review of how the term has evolved.

The review also revealed the differences between digital marketing and digital marketing communications and highlighted that some researchers focus only on the communications aspect, while others include other marketing mix elements: product, price, place and promotion, as well. This thesis therefore argues that, before conducting academic research into digital marketing, it is essential to first establish a clear definition of the term, including whether it refers to the communications aspect only

(promotion) or extends to the other three elements of the marketing mix – product, price, and place. This thesis adopted the digital marketing definition proposed by Kannan and Li (2017, p.23), which is based on AMA marketing definition:

*“Digital marketing may be seen as activities, institutions, and processes facilitated by digital technologies for creating, communicating and delivering value for customers and other stake-holders”.*

The empirical data to some degree supported the terminology variance in relation to digital marketing and digital marketing communications. During the interviews, both marketing agencies and B2B SMEs managers talked about the communications aspect only, however, they used the term digital marketing to refer to digital marketing communications. These marketing agencies are never involved in digital products, price or place discussions, and just focus on the communications aspect. Interviews with the marketing agencies revealed that different definitions of digital marketing were used, depending on the agency focus. Moreover, B2B SMEs had a very limited knowledge of marketing, and thus a very limited understanding of digital marketing and struggled to articulate a clear definition of the terms. While digital marketing and digital marketing communications are interlinked, with some scholars using these terms interchangeably, this thesis argues that it is important to distinguish between the terms. Based on the extensive literature review, this thesis proposes a definition of DMC:

*Digital marketing communications is the use of digital communications channels, such as website, search engine marketing, digital advertising, social media, e-mails and mobile, to create an integrated, targeted and measurable communication, which helps to acquire and retain customers, while building deeper relationships with them.*

Empirical data from interviews with the marketing agencies largely supported this definition of DMC. While their specific knowledge on digital marketing varied and consequently the focus of definitions was slightly different, in general, the same components and elements of DMC is found. When talking about DMC, managers from marketing agencies discussed various DMC channels, such as websites, social media, e-mails, mobile applications, mobile-optimised websites and SEM. They also noted that it was important to integrate both online and offline channels to deliver the same message across different channels. It was also strongly suggested that DMC channels had some advantages over traditional offline channels, such as the ability to target specific audiences, and the measurability of DMC activity. Finally, it was also suggested that these DMC channels can help to increase sales from new and existing customers, which can also help to build relationships with them.

Interviews with B2B SME managers revealed that they had very limited understanding of digital marketing, though the participants mentioned different DMC channels as the key component of DMC. However, the knowledge of how to use these channels for strategic communication objectives, was less evident as these managers had very limited knowledge of marketing overall. B2B SME managers argued that the idea that DMC is only useful if it can assist in new sales generation from either new or existing

customers. The relationship building aspect to these B2B SME managers was extremely important, however, they struggled to see how digital channels could help, thus, focussed on building these relationships offline and via traditional means. In summary, the DMC definition proposed in this study, was supported not just by the academic literature, but by primary data from industry respondents, even if, in the case of the B2B SME managers, this was not fully articulated on account of a limited understanding of marketing more generally.

As a part of the literature review, many channels, together with different categories, were identified (Table 2.6., p.23), although some overlap and similarities were noted. In addition, the use of social media as a DMC channel requires a separate discussion since different definitions exist (Table 2.8., p.30) and correspondingly various social media channels (Table 2.9., p.34). It is therefore clear that digital marketing and DMC is a complex discipline as there are different terms used, the definitions lack agreement and there is a large number of channels available. One effective way to categorise different channels is using an owned, paid and earned media framework (Corcoran, 2009), this was a useful concept to approach various digital channels and would also be effective for other researchers to approach DMC in a strategic marketing communications context.

## **7.2. RO2: MARKETING AND DIGITAL MARKETING FOR B2B SMES**

An in-depth literature review was undertaken to understand how SMEs approach their marketing practices, with the aim of understanding how DMC practices could be adopted. This revealed that SMEs have a distinctive way in how they undertake marketing (Coviello, Brodie and Munro, 2000; Gilmore, Carson and Grant, 2001; Hill 2001a, 2001b). Due to limited resources, small companies do not engage in intensive strategic planning, but instead focus on a more reactive approach with the owner-manager being the key person within the SME and making the main decisions regarding its marketing practices (Gilmore, Carson and Grant, 2001; Hill 2001a). In line with this limited strategic marketing, their DMC practices are also somewhat limited as well (Karjaluo and Huhtamäki, 2010; Reijonen, 2010; Taiminen and Karjaluo, 2015). The review shows that SMEs are lagging behind large corporations in terms of DMC practices and, due to limited resources, typically have very simple DMC practices and are only just starting to adopt these newer digital practices (Ramsey *et al.*, 2003; Wagner, Fillis and Johansson, 2003; Pavic *et al.*, 2007; McCann and Barlow, 2015).

A literature review was also completed regarding marketing practices within B2B companies, which revealed that industrial companies face other challenges. The literature highlights that there are differences between B2B and B2C industries, and thus the same marketing approaches are not applicable (Coviello and Brodie, 2001; Rowley, 2001; Kotler and Keller, 2012). Industrial companies focus on personal interaction and sales activities instead of marketing communications. It has been argued that, due to product complexity, the number of decision-makers involved in purchasing decisions and the financial significance of these products, one-to-one sales activities are more suitable (Kärkkäinen,



Jussila and Väisänen, 2010; Järvinen *et al.*, 2012; Jussila, Kärkkäinen and Aramo-Immonen, 2014; Habibi *et al.*, 2017). Due to these differences, industrial companies have been slower to adopt DMC practices (Karjaluo, Mustonen and Ulkuniemi, 2015). In addition, as a result of major situational differences between consumer and industrial buyers' contextual situations, the same DMC practices are not applicable and different approaches are required (Gilliland and Johnston, 1997; Swahi *et al.* 2017).

Only two studies were identified dealing with B2B SMEs and their DMC practices, specifically social media (Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011; Salo, 2017). It is suggested that B2B SMEs have the additional challenges of limited resources, while operating in the industrial sector. Therefore, taking into consideration the differences associated with small companies and the challenges of industrial companies regarding marketing practices, it indicates that digital marketing practices require a specific approach suited to tackle the challenges of these B2B SME companies. It is evident that B2B SMEs necessitate a specific DMC strategy to deal with their limited resources and their position within an industrial sector. This strategy needs to be compatible with SMEs challenges of limited resources, including financial and marketing, and their tactical focus on implementation rather than strategic planning. In addition, DMC needs to be compatible with B2B marketing practices, where the focus is on traditional sales techniques, including face-to-face meetings and personal relationship building.

### **7.3. RO3: DIGITAL MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS FOR OIL AND GAS SMES**

In line with the previously identified differences in marketing practices for B2B and SME organisations, the marketing objectives for B2B SMEs are also slightly different. Instead of DMC achieving a large number of objectives, as proposed in the literature, the empirical data showed that B2B SMEs questioned the need and applicability of DMC to their businesses. Instead of having clear objectives for their marketing and digital marketing initiatives, oil and gas SMEs argued that this was not important for their industry as they rely heavily on traditional sales techniques. Though not fully articulated, the empirical findings suggest that the main objectives for B2B SMEs should be brand building and brand awareness, together with leads generation, in order to support the sales processes by facilitating customer acquisition and retention. Oil and gas SMEs expected direct sales from using these channels rather than these channels playing a supporting role in the sales processes. Thus, objectives for B2B SMEs should be creating brand awareness and building the brand, which would subsequently lead to increasing sales from new and existing customers, in line with Järvinen *et al.* (2012), Karjaluo, Mustonen and Ulkuniemi (2015) and Taiminen and Karjaluo (2015).

In order to achieve the objective of generating leads, the most applicable DMC channels for oil and gas SMEs are corporate websites with some traffic building techniques for brand SEO, LinkedIn and e-mails (Karjaluo, Mustonen and Ulkuniemi, 2015; Taiminen and Karjaluo, 2015). Brand SEO should focus ensuring that corporate websites are optimised for company brand searches, the company name, and where contact information is easy to find. Hänninen and Karjaluo (2017) agree that websites and

e-mails are the two main digital channels used by industrial companies for their communications due their applicability for both mass and personal communications. Due to the complexity of oil and gas small companies, as they face challenges of limited resources together with the issues of working in an industrial sector, these channels are the most suitable to complement the traditional ways of how these companies operate. Their marketing is quite simple and thus requires DMC channels that will support these approaches rather than undertaking sophisticated DMC campaigns. B2B SMEs use basic forms of DMC channels as they still heavily rely on personal face-to-face relationships. It is evident from the primary data that DMC channels play only a supporting role when it comes to customer acquisition and retention marketing goals. Overall, DMC channels play a supportive role in industrial companies' marketing practices (Karjaluoto, Mustonen and Ulkuniemi, 2015; Hänninen and Karjaluoto, 2017). These channels should be used to support a traditional sales function with face-to-face personal communications, as companies still heavily rely on offline communication tools and channels, meaning that, DMC is not considered a vital part of their marketing communications practices (Karjaluoto, Mustonen and Ulkuniemi, 2015; Taiminen and Karjaluoto, 2015).

Some conflicting results emerge from the primary data that suggests that companies in the oil and gas industry do not see value in DMC, arguing that DMC does not gain new sales, although at the same time no or minimal investment is made towards DMC. At the same time no strategic use and only some tactical approach towards DMC is evident. When DMC does not bring any additional sales, it is then blamed as not being applicable to the industry. Even though, when evidence exists that LinkedIn could be useful to generate sales, this contribution seems to be ignored. Therefore, the findings suggest that SMEs lack knowledge about the benefits of DMC and are not aware of the benefits of digital channels (O'Dwyer, Gilmore and Carson, 2009b; Taiminen and Karjaluoto, 2015; McCann and Barlow, 2015). If these companies were aware about the potential outcomes of DMC strategy, which is the facilitation of new customer acquisition and existing customer retention, oil and gas SMEs might become more interested in DMC. The literature suggest that external bodies should be involved in the education of SMEs on marketing and digital marketing as they have limited knowledge (Reijonen, 2010; Taiminen and Karjaluoto, 2015). More specifically, it is also argued that typically oil and gas SMEs are founded by engineers and scientists, who have limited management knowledge, and thus outside training and education is required (Keogh and Evans, 1999; MacKinnon, Chapman and Cumbers, 2004). If companies were more educated about DMC and its potential, it would then also help to overcome the disinterest in DMC within the oil and gas industry.

#### **7.4. RO4: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR OIL AND GAS SMES**

While the literature suggests various benefits and opportunities associated with the use of DMC as part of marketing practices, the empirical data identifies a number of challenges for oil and gas SMEs. The empirical data revealed several significant barriers for the use of DMC within oil and gas industry SMEs.

These small companies have limited resources, including financial and personnel, and thus they work within limited capacity. Due to limited resources, companies focus on the tactical aspects rather than strategic aspects of DMC use. With their limited marketing knowledge, B2B SMEs face a challenge in understanding how DMC could be used and contribute towards their overall business goals. Therefore, companies questioned the need and applicability of DMC to the oil and gas industry. The findings support Hamill's (2015) findings that there is a significant gap between Scottish SMEs use of digital technologies and the pace of change.

In addition, the oil and gas industry as a market factor seemed to act as a significant barrier for DMC use within the industry. The data shows that the industry has its own traditional ways of doing business, with a strong focus on sales-related activities, such as personal face-to-face meetings, sales calls, trade shows and client entertainment. It was argued that word-of-mouth is how these companies acquire new sales. The whole oil and gas industry was described as an "old boys club" meaning that industry is dominated with older generation males, who have been working years in the industry and had their own ways of working. These people had quite a negative opinion towards DMC use and its applicability as marketing was seen as a supporting activity with sales being the main activity. However, generational differences in the industry were noted between the older and younger generations. The younger generations were more positive about DMC use and saw more opportunities of employing DMC as a part of marketing toolkit. While SMEs typically have limited marketing knowledge, the oil and gas industry also lacked knowledge in general about what benefits marketing could bring to their organisations.

On the other hand, opportunities for using DMC were also identified. It was believed that marketing and digital marketing has its place in oil and gas industry. DMC is useful in playing a supportive role in the traditional way of doing business in the industry. It is also suggested that for the use of DMC channels could be important for companies aiming to internationalise as an existing network is not in place outside the North Sea region. DMC was seen to be advantageous in raising a company's profile. In addition, more opportunities were seen by younger generations as DMC was seen as adding credibility to the company, as it is how people now communicated and thus it was important to be on these DMC channels, even though actual sales might not necessarily be achieved.

## **7.5. RO5: CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS FOR B2B SMES**

The conceptual model of CSFs affecting the use of DMC was created at the end of literature review and identified five groups of factors that influence DMC strategy. The empirical evidence for all five groups of factors was found as having the influence on DMC strategy. However, some dimensions were more significant in influencing DMC strategy than others. The main two groups of factors are internal and external factors. These two major groups influence the marketing strategy factors, which then informs the use of the website and other DMC channels. In addition, there were more relationships between the

factors than previously predicted. The internal and external factors not only influence the marketing strategy, but also has the direct impact on the success of DMC strategy. Marketing strategy factors not only affect the choices on websites and other DMC channels, but also influences the DMC strategy success.

The empirical data shows that key factors in the internal category are the internal culture, resources and the role of sales. In this study, the key factors were found to be: limited resources, the owner-manager, who is also the major decision-maker, and their skillset, plus a strong focus on sales, the influence of company marketing practices and the simplicity or sophistication of DMC practices. In this study, these factors often acted as barriers for the use of DMC. There were limited resources for marketing, owner-managers had limited time and knowledge about DMC and thus questioned its use, plus a strong internal focus on sales activities, and marketing was not seen as being important.

In addition, it is also evident that external factors play a major role as they dictate industry norms about which practices are acceptable. While the conceptual framework consisted of five elements, three new dimensions emerged from the empirical data: industry type, macroeconomic factors (the recession) and competition. These three factors, together with successful relationships, play a significant role in influencing DMC strategy. Though again, instead of supporting DMC use among oil and gas SMEs, they tended to act as a barrier, except for the recession factor, which in this case was a facilitator for DMC use. Due to the recession in the oil and gas industry, companies were changing their traditional practices and searching for a more effective way of promoting their businesses rather than relying on traditional PR, trade shows and client entertainment, which required significant financial resources, though, provided questionable results.

Within the marketing strategy factors, setting the strategic goal and having top management support are the most significant elements. However, there was no actual goal set for marketing as there is limited knowledge about marketing and no expectations are associated with it. Therefore, there was limited or even no top management support for DMC, as the owner-manager was the main decision-maker, which again is identified as a barrier towards DMC.

These factors can serve either as inhibitors or as facilitators for DMC strategy (Karjaluoto and Huhtamäki, 2010; Taiminen and Karjaluoto, 2015), depending on the business situation. If there is top management support for DMC, its use will be successful, and thus this factor will act as an enabler. However, if there is no management support, it will act as a barrier. Likewise, if the industry advocates for DMC use, it will be an enabler for successful DMC use among B2B SMEs, otherwise, it will be a barrier.

From the various DMC channels available, websites were identified as the most important channel. However, because of a number of challenges and barriers, website use was simple. Websites were used as a one-way promotion tool with the focus being on the company rather than being a customer-focused

channel. Based on Kierzkowski *et al.*'s (1996) framework stages, B2B SMEs placed more focus on the first two stages of attracting and engaging/relating with website visitors, with the learn and relate stages being only partly utilised. Thus, the focus was on customer acquisition rather than retention while using websites. However, at the same time, companies did not have any expectation of gaining new customers via websites. Regarding the use of other DMC channels, only limited use of LinkedIn was evidenced. While companies argued that these channels did not bring sales, they did not spend any resources on this presence. LinkedIn profiles were created, but minimal or no use of them was evidenced, with static profiles and pages with no active use. Some use of e-mails was seen, but at a very basic level, more like a personal communication tool than a channel for marketing communications. Thus, the framework stages are not applicable for the DMC channels other than websites as the level of use were low.

## **7.6. RO6: BEST PRACTICE FOR B2B SMES**

Based on the primary and secondary data, recommendations for B2B SMEs are suggested. Due to the highly specific nature of B2B SMEs operating in the oil and gas industry, it is suggested that, in the first place, companies should have a clear expectation of what they aim to achieve out of the use of DMC. In addition, companies need to have a clear understanding that DMC is useful in playing a supporting role in sales leads generation and cannot generate sales directly.

B2B SMEs lack knowledge about marketing and DMC, and thus they require additional support with education and training from outside organisations to fully understand the potential of DMC and how it can be used to support overall business objectives. It is also important that B2B SMEs choose the DMC practices that can best support their traditional ways of doing business.

From the existing DMC channels, companies should focus on the website as the main DMC channel. Content and personnel contact details are the most important element on websites. The importance of personnel and their contact details is because of the strong focus on a personal, one-to-one way of doing business. Also, as a part of the website, the tactic of having the same company name and domain name was noted because brand searches are much more popular than generic searches. In addition, due to the highly specialised and complex products in the industry, additional downloadable resources such as case studies and data sheets are important. Another important aspect is to have various accreditations and associations badges and logos on the website to communicate security and credibility. While the website should be used to communicate company news and be company-focused, it is also important to become more customer-focused in order to use the website as a lead generation tool. Thus, in order to realise the full potential of the website as a DMC channel, more focus is required rather than a traditional brochure-type website. In addition, Google Analytics should be employed to help companies fully understand their customers together with traditional customer surveys.

Additionally, while companies are already gathering potential leads' e-mails, they need to start engaging with prospects by utilising e-mail marketing campaigns. However, these campaigns need to be highly

personalised, one-to-one communication e-mails, which are preferred in the oil and gas industry. From the remaining social media channels, only LinkedIn should be considered. Here, key personnel profiles are of more importance than the company profile because of the importance of personal relationships. It is therefore important to keep these profiles constantly updated and active. In addition, LinkedIn is seen as a client database helping to identify potential leads, who will then be contacted using more traditional methods for communications. LinkedIn could also be used to share company news and updates; however, the interaction will be limited, and two-way dialogues will not be created.

## **7.7. CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE**

The study provides contribution on three levels: theoretical, empirical and practical. With a very limited amount of published academic studies on DMC for B2B SMEs, the entire thesis itself is a theoretical contribution to knowledge about B2B SMEs marketing theory and practice. It also contributes to DMC theory as it shows how B2B SMEs use DMC and what role it plays in their marketing practices. The study also expands the existing theory of DMC channels, as it investigates each channel separately. Most of the existing studies research DMC as a whole or focus on social media channels only. While other studies analyse DMC adoption, this study aims to understand the use and role of DMC as a part of wider marketing practices among B2B SMEs.

Specifically, this thesis adds to the body of knowledge by developing a DMC critical success factors framework. The conceptual framework, based on Eid, Elbeltagi and Zairi (2006), is created at the end of the literature review and subsequently expanded and modified based on empirical data. The result is the creation of a new framework for DMC critical success factors, applicable to B2B SMEs. The framework suggests that DMC strategy success is influenced by five groups of variables as detailed in Figure 6.2. (p.226). The internal and external factors directly influence the marketing strategy factors. The existing marketing strategy factors then influence the choices on the website and other digital channels, which then leads to a successful DMC strategy, that is, one resulting in customer acquisition and retention. In addition, internal, external and marketing strategy factors not only influence choices on websites and other DMC channels, but also has a direct influence on the DMC strategy success.

The empirical data suggests that, within internal factors, internal culture, the role of sales and resources, directly influence marketing strategy and DMC success. In addition, external factors, such as successful relationships, industry type and macroeconomic factors, are also significant in determining the marketing strategy and DMC success. The empirical data also shows that previous studies significantly underestimated the role of external factors within DMC strategy, with three new factors emerging from the data, including competition, industry type, and macroeconomic factors. Within marketing strategy, setting the strategic goal and having top management support are the main factors. These factors are identified as being either enablers or inhibitors for DMC strategy.

The thesis contributes to the B2B knowledge gap and is a response to the strong call for more research in B2B marketing (LaPlaca and Katrichis, 2009; Lilien, 2015; MSI, 2016; LaPlaca, Lindgreen and Vanhamme, 2018). The context for the study is the oil and gas industry, which is a significant contributor to the UK economy with Aberdeen as the industry hub. However, while the industry has been a major contributor to the UK budget, no studies have been identified dealing with marketing and the oil and gas industry. The oil and gas industry is identified as being different and consisting of only three types of companies, the majority of which are SMEs providing highly specialised products and services. It is also highlighted that 99% of all companies in the EU and 98% of companies in Scotland are SMEs and thus they are key in ensuring the economy's competitiveness. Therefore, the empirical contribution is specific to the oil and gas industry and SMEs operating in this industry.

In addition, a methodological contribution includes using a longitudinal observation as part of the case-study design. The longitudinal observation allowed the identification of changes in how companies used DMC channels as part of three-year observation. Instead of just giving a snapshot view, it shows how DMC practices changed during the recession and allowed the macroeconomic factor of recession to be identified as an enabler of DMC use among B2B SMEs. The previous studies on DMC have not acknowledged the importance of macroeconomic factors for DMC among companies.

The study also contributes to practice. It combines both primary and secondary research to offer best-practice recommendations for B2B SMEs regarding DMC strategy. Research shows that SMEs have limited resources, including marketing and financial, and thus they face challenges as they focus on their operational day-to-day activities. At the same time, the oil and gas industry has its own traditional ways of doing business. Therefore, the specific recommendations are made for these SMEs operating in the oil and gas industry on how to use DMC successfully.

## **7.8. LIMITATIONS**

This research study has limitations like any other study. The main criticism could be the nature of the research as it is highly explorative. One of the major issues is that literature about DMC is very scarce and sporadic and there are conflicting definitions within the literature. Therefore, a researcher required much time just to synthesise and clarify the existing knowledge regarding digital marketing.

Due to the nature of exploratory research a qualitative research design was chosen. The literature identifies a number of limitations associated with qualitative case-study research, which are highlighted in the Methodology Chapter. A rigorous case-study practice was followed to minimise these criticisms, and therefore a chain of evidence, use of multiple sources of analysis and a case-study database was created to ensure the validity and reliability of the study. It is thus important to highlight that, instead of statistical generalisation, this study follows analytical generalisation. Moreover, this study is about B2B SMEs, but the context is the oil and gas industry, and therefore the findings might not be applicable to other industries.

In addition, the study was conducted during challenging times for the oil and gas industry due to a major recession. Therefore, there was an additional challenge in finding participants for the study during a time when companies were making employees redundant and at the same time going bankrupt. While the recession was within the oil and gas industry, its impact spread to related industries in the region and not only oil and gas companies were affected. Some marketing agencies went bankrupt, and therefore undertaking the research during different times might have eased access to the participants, and thus different results might have been collected.

The large amount of rich qualitative data and its analysis was also an issue. Since such a large amount of qualitative data was collected, and case studies require rich and thick descriptions, it was challenging to reduce the data to fit the thesis word count as all elements seemed to be important in explaining how B2B SMEs use or not use DMC. This means that potentially important and interesting points might have been excluded. However, a six-stage qualitative data analysis technique was used to ensure rigour and minimise the bias.

## **7.9. FURTHER RESEARCH**

There are many other avenues for further research arising from the current study. This thesis is an exploratory study of the use and role of DMC within B2B SMEs. Thus, this is a qualitative study and the next natural stage would be a quantitative study to test these CSFs in a framework of factors influencing DMC strategy. It would be beneficial to identify how significant each of the factors is in influencing DMC strategy.

Another natural extension would be to investigate the framework and its applicability to other highly specialised heavy industries, such as mining, shipbuilding or steel. It would also be interesting to examine oil and gas industry marketing in other industry hubs, such as Norway (Stavanger), the USA (Houston) or Brazil (Macaé) to compare and contrast DMC use in UK and other countries. Moreover, oil and gas and marketing research is lacking, and therefore research which focused on DMC practices among large B2B companies would also add to the theory. It was highlighted that company size plays a major role in how much marketing is practiced. Moreover, the research could also investigate buyers' perspective on the use of DMC in their purchase journey as this research focuses on SMEs perspective. Therefore, investigating the buyer's (large oil and gas companies) perspective on the use and role of DMC would give the full understanding on the use and role of DMC within oil and gas industry.

In addition, the study emphasised that there are major differences among the younger and older generations and how they use DMC. Thus, it would be another avenue for the research to analyse how similarly or differently DMC is perceived by different age groups of managers. In addition, the oil and gas industry is dominated by men, and thus more female orientated industries might also yield different results towards DMC practices.



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**APPENDICES**

**Appendix 1: Digital Marketing Checklist**

**Company:**

**Date:**

**1. Website Analysis**

Variable	Yes – Used	No – Not Used	Comments / Notes
<b>Attract</b>			
Company name and website address			
Website listed in directories and industry website			
Website address shown on social media sites			
Responsive design			
<b>Engage and Retain</b>			
Website speed			
Interactive functions			
Security and privacy			
News section			
Downloadable resources			
Hyperlinks to social media sites			
Draws/contests/campaigns			
Forums/discussion groups			
<b>Learn</b>			
Information capture about potential customers			
Feedback via online surveys			
Google Analytics			
<b>Relate</b>			
E-mails to update about new products/services			
Customisation/personalisation			
Real-time interactions			
<b>Additional Observations and Comments</b>			

## 2. Search Engine Optimisation Analysis

Site Structure	Comments
Simple to understand URLs (descriptive categories/filenames)	
Easy to navigate from homepage/hierarchy	
Usage of breadcrumbs	
Possibility to remove part of URL	
Sitemap for users (HTML)	
Sitemap for search engines (XML)	
<b>Additional Observations and Comments</b>	

Snippets/Reports	Completed
Website Homepage Snippet	
Website About Us Snippet	
Website Product/Service Snippet	
Website Contact Us Snippet	
Website Speed Test	
SEO Site Checkup Test	
Moz PA and DA Test	

## 3. Social Media Marketing Analysis

### A. Social Media Checklist

Social Media	Number or Yes/No	Comments / Notes
<b>Facebook</b>		
Number of likes (total)		
Number of company posts (per month)		
Number of photographs		
Number of videos		
Number of hyperlinks to corporate website		
Number of hyperlinks to other websites		
Number of company news releases		

Number of customer posts (per month)		
Number of customer likes (per month)		
Number of customer shares (per month)		
Number of customer comments (per month)		
Description of organisation (yes/no)		
Website address (yes/no)		
Contact details (yes/no)		
Company branding		
Corporate logo		
Corporate colours		
Tagline		
Mission and Vision statements		
Value proposition		

<b>Social Media</b>	<b>Number or Yes/No</b>	<b>Comments / Notes</b>
<b>Twitter</b>		
Number of followers (total)		
Number of people/organisations follow back (total)		
Number of company tweets (total)		
Number of company tweets (per month)		
Number of photographs		
Number of videos		
Number of hyperlinks to corporate website		
Number of hyperlinks to other websites		
Number of company news releases		
Number of public messages (start with @)		
Number of hashtags (#) used in tweets		
Number of customer tweets (per month)		
Number of customer likes (per month)		
Number of customer comments (per month)		
Number of retweets (per month)		
Description of organisation (yes/no)		



Website address (yes/no)		
Contact details (yes/no)		
Company branding		
Corporate logo		
Corporate colours		
Tagline		
Mission and Vision statements		
Value proposition		

<b>Social Media</b>	<b>Number or Yes/No</b>	<b>Comments / Notes</b>
<b>LinkedIn</b>		
Company Profile or Company Group		
Total number of followers		
Number of employees on LinkedIn		
Number of company comments (per month)		
Number of photographs		
Number of videos		
Number of hyperlinks to corporate website		
Number of hyperlinks to other websites		
Number of company news releases		
Number of customer comments (per month)		
Number of client likes (per month)		
Number of client comments (per month)		
Description of organisation (yes/no)		
Website address (yes/no)		
Contact details (yes/no)		
Company branding		
Corporate logo		
Corporate colours		
Tagline		
Mission and Vision statements		
Value proposition		

<b>Social Media</b>	<b>Number or Yes/No</b>	<b>Comments / Notes</b>
<b>YouTube</b>		
Number of videos (total)		
Number of comments (total)		
Number of subscribers (total)		
Number of views (total)		
Description of organisation (yes/no)		
Website address (yes/no)		
Contact details (yes/no)		
Company branding		
Corporate logo		
Corporate colours		
Tagline		
Mission and Vision statements		
Value proposition		

### **B. Social Media Posts**

<b>Facebook</b>			
<b>Date</b>	<b>Post</b>	<b>Content</b>	<b>Interaction</b>

<b>Twitter</b>			
<b>Date</b>	<b>Post</b>	<b>Content</b>	<b>Interaction</b>

<b>LinkedIn</b>			
<b>Date</b>	<b>Post</b>	<b>Content</b>	<b>Interaction</b>

## Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet for Interviews



### Digital Marketing and Oil and Gas Industry

#### What is the study about?

This study focuses on digital marketing communications for oil and gas industry B2B SMEs and aims to identify the critical success factors for a digital communications strategy. The study also aims to capture any changes in how companies use digital marketing channels during a challenging time for the oil and gas industry.

#### Who is conducting the research?

The research is being conducted by Justina Setkute, a doctoral researcher and tutor at Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen. Prior to joining the university, Justina worked as a marketing manager for an oil and gas company.

#### Who is the sponsor?

The research has not been sponsored by any commercial or educational organisation, nor has it any commercial affiliation.

#### Why is the study important?

The study aims to answer the questions about successful digital marketing communications that have not been addressed before. Focusing on the oil and gas industry, the study aims to provide useful information for B2B SMEs both within and without the oil and gas industry. In addition, since the study takes place during the current recession within the industry it will also capture the changes and dynamics of digital marketing.

#### What will be done with the study results?

The study results will be presented in a PhD thesis once the data collection and analysis has been completed. The thesis will then be available to anyone who wishes to read it.

It is important to note that all information given to the researcher at any stage of the research will be treated in confidence and all those who contribute to the research will remain anonymous.

#### Researcher:

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Robert Gordon University  
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**Appendix 3: Informed Consent Form for Interviews**



**Informed Consent Form**

**Researcher:**

Justina Setkute  
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Aberdeen Business School  
Robert Gordon University  
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I confirm that the research project *Digital Marketing Communications and Oil & Gas Industry* has been explained to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project and have had these answered satisfactorily.

I consent to the material I contribute being used to generate insights for the research project *Digital Marketing Communications and Oil & Gas Industry*.

I am aware that the researcher might take sound recordings of the sessions. I understand that I can request to stop recordings. I understand that I can ask for the recordings to be deleted.

I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time.

I consent to allow the fully anonymised data to be used for future publications and other scholarly means of disseminating the findings from the research project.

I understand that the information/data acquired will be securely stored by researchers, but that appropriately anonymised data may in future be made available to others for research purposes only.

I understand that I can request any of the data collected from/by me to be deleted.

I agree to take part in the above study *Digital Marketing Communications and Oil & Gas Industry*.

_____	_____	_____
Name of participant	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____
Name of researcher	Date	Signature

#### Appendix 4: Interview Protocol for Interviews with Marketing Agencies



#### Digital Marketing Communications and Oil and Gas Industry

##### Opening Statement:

As you will have gathered from the project information sheet, for this research I am interested in your views and opinions regarding the digital marketing communications and in particular for B2B SMEs and oil and gas industry. I would like to get your thoughts and opinions about these issues and I would encourage you to elaborate as much as possible on each issue to be discussed.

##### Theme 1: Digital marketing communications

- How would you define digital marketing (communications)?
- How important are the following digital marketing channels for digital marketing communications?  
What are the requirements for each of the channel success?
  - For Website and SEO?
  - For Social Media Marketing?
  - For E-mail Marketing?
  - For Mobile Marketing?
- What should a company do (what channels should it choose) to implement successful digital marketing communications strategy? Why?
- What factors determine the overall success of digital marketing communications?
  - What about internal company factors?
  - What about overall marketing strategy factors?
  - What about the website?
  - What about the choice and mix of digital marketing communications channels (e.g. social media sites, mobile, e-mail)?
  - What about external market factors (e.g. industry, type of client (B2B or B2C), and market growth/decline)?

##### Theme 2: Digital marketing communications before oil and gas recession

- From your knowledge, what were oil and gas companies doing in relation to digital marketing communications?
  - For Website and SEO?

- For Social Media Marketing?
- For E-mail Marketing?
- For Mobile Marketing?
- Were there differences how large and small oil and gas companies were implementing their digital marketing?
- In your opinion, how good/bad were these digital marketing communications?
  - Which if any oil and gas company is/was a successful example of digital marketing communications, and why?
  - Which if any oil and gas company is/was a bad example of digital marketing communications, and why?
- Which types of digital marketing communications (channels) were handled in-house as opposed to by agencies?

**Theme 3: Digital marketing communications during oil and gas recession**

- To your knowledge, how has oil and gas companies' digital marketing changed because of the recession in the oil and gas industry?
- What are the most popular digital marketing communications/channels now?
- In your opinion, what digital communication channels should companies focus on with limited resources, and why?
- What is the effect on your business (or other Aberdeen-based company providing similar services) of recession in oil and gas industry?
- From your knowledge, did any agencies go out of business as a direct result of the recession?
- From your knowledge, did oil and gas companies stop using these particular digital marketing channels or did they start managing it in-house?

**Theme 4: Concluding remarks**

- In your opinion, what is the future for digital marketing in oil and gas industry?
- In your opinion, what is the future of digital marketing communications?
- Are there any other issues in the oil and gas industry regarding digital marketing?
- Any other comments or observations?

**Thank you for your time and answers.**

## Appendix 5: Interview Protocol for Interviews with B2B SMEs



### Digital Marketing Communications and Oil & Gas Industry

#### Opening Statement

Since you work in oil and gas industry SME, I would like you to think about your daily activities and how you use digital marketing communication channels. Let's discuss about digital marketing channels and what is important for you and for your company. I would like to get your thoughts and opinions about these issues and I would encourage you to elaborate as much as possible on each question to be discussed.

#### Theme 1: Digital marketing communication channels use in oil and gas industry

- Which marketing communication channels do you use? Why?
- How important are digital communication channels? Why?
  - Websites?
  - Search engines and their listings (e.g. Google search)?
  - Social media channels (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube)?
  - E-mail marketing (e.g. e-mail news and newsletters)?
  - Mobile marketing (mobile apps and mobile-optimised websites)?
- What are the reasons for using digital marketing communication channels?
  - To become a part of local professional networks?
  - To build your own professional brand?
  - For recruitment purposes?
  - For business development?

#### Theme 2: Marketing communication channels use in company

- When you deal with your existing clients, which communication channels are important for you? Why?
- When you look for new clients, which communication channels are important for you? Why?
- How relevant are digital marketing channels for in oil and gas industry?
- How relevant are traditional communication channels for oil and gas industry?

#### Theme 3: Digital marketing communication channels applicability

- How about websites? What is most important for you? Do you have a really good/bad example of the website?

- How important are the following elements on the website? Please rate on a scale from 1 not important at all to 5 very important.

<b>Element</b>	<b>Importance</b> <b>1 – not important</b> <b>5 – very important</b>
<b>Attract</b>	
Website address (the same as company name)	
Listing in web directories, vendor/partner or other industry sites	
Working properly using different Internet browsers	
Website address shown on social media platforms	
<b>Engage and Retain</b>	
Lucky draws/contests/campaigns/games	
Forums/discussion groups	
Rapid information loading time	
Hyperlinks to related sites	
Interactive functions	
Security features and privacy statements	
Hyperlinks to social media sites	
News section	
Downloadable resources/information	
<b>Learn</b>	
Information for potential customers and prospects sign-up	
Feedback via online surveys	
Google Analytics	
Cookies	
<b>Relate</b>	
Customisation/personalisation	
E-mails to update about new products/services	
Real time interactions (Instant Messengers, Live Chat)	

- How about search engines? How important is this channel? What about the advertising on search engines (Google AdWords)? What about search engine optimisation?
- How about social media? How important is this channel? Why? Which social media sites are most preferred?
- How about company e-mail news and newsletters? How important is this channel? Why?
- How about mobile applications? How important is this channel? Why?
- What about mobile-optimised websites? How important is this channel? Why?

#### **Theme 4: Concluding remarks**

- Any other comments or observations?

**Thank you for your time and answers.**



## Appendix 6: Paid and Organic Listings

Google financial consulting

All News Images Maps Videos More Search tools

About 24,200,000 results (0.48 seconds)

**Financial Consultants - Enter Postcode to Find a Local IFA**  
**Ad** [www.localfinancialadvice.co.uk/](http://www.localfinancialadvice.co.uk/) ▼  
4.1 ★★★★★ rating for localfinancialadvice.co.uk  
Quick & Simple - Free Consultation!  
Advisors Local to You · No Hidden Fees! · All IFAs are FCA-Approved  
IFAs in Sheffield IFAs in Birmingham  
IFAs in Glasgow IFAs in Cardiff

**VG Consulting Ltd - Vg-Consulting.co.uk**  
**Ad** [www.vg-consulting.co.uk/](http://www.vg-consulting.co.uk/) ▼  
Planning & Environmental services throughout northeast Scotland  
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## Appendix 7: Nodes for Interviews with Marketing Agencies Analysis

<b>Name</b>	<b>Sources</b>	<b>References</b>
Social media	4	21
Facebook	3	4
Twitter	3	4
LinkedIn	4	7
YouTube	0	0
Websites	5	12
SEO	2	2
Mobile-optimised websites	2	3
Mobile apps	3	7
E-mail marketing	2	3
Digital marketing channels	0	0
Oil and gas marketing	5	44
Oil and gas industry features	4	23
Oil and gas marketing before recession	5	12
Oil and gas marketing during recession	3	19
B2B vs B2C marketing	4	8
B2B marketing	3	4
SME marketing	2	4
Internal factors	4	12
External factors	1	1
Digital marketing strategy	5	59
Digital marketing success	5	12
Digital Vs Traditional marketing	2	6
Online and Offline integration	3	4
Digital marketing communications	4	11
Digital marketing in the future	4	12
Recession impact on the agency	4	19
Agency role	3	4
Digital marketing issues	5	9

## Appendix 8: Nodes for Interviews with B2B SMEs Analysis

Name	Sources	References
Website	5	20
Good website	8	14
Privacy and security statements	9	10
News section	9	14
Downloadable info	8	9
Speed	7	8
Interactive functions	6	7
Cookies	4	5
Links to other sites	6	6
Directories	8	10
Mobile optimisation	8	10
Internet browsers	8	12
Website linked to social media	7	10
Lucky draws and contests	8	15
Discussion groups and forums	6	6
E-mail signup	8	14
Online feedback	8	10
Real time interactions	6	7
Website name	7	12
Facebook	5	8
Twitter	4	5
LinkedIn	9	51
People	0	0
Businesses	0	0
Generation and age	7	18
Networking relationships and WOM	7	19
Traditional sales techniques	0	0
Entertainment	1	2
Visits	1	2
Exhibitions	4	12
Phone calls	1	2
Lunch and learn	1	4
Digital communications channels	8	24
Industry type	0	0
Company size	6	19
Sensitive information	3	11
Resources	4	20
Oil and gas features	7	41
SEO	0	0
Search engines	5	12
Google AdWords	3	11
Social media	7	11
E-mail marketing	6	19
Mobile apps	8	17
Existing and new suppliers	5	16
Industry news	4	4
YouTube	4	9
Marketing agencies	3	8

## Appendix 9: Website Observation

### Website – Observation 1

**Table:** Summary of websites based on digital marketing framework (Observation 1)

Digital Marketing Stage	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
<b>Attract</b>				
Company name and website address	Different	Different	Same	Same
Website listed in directories and industry website	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Website address shown on social media sites	No (YouTube missing)	No (YouTube missing)	Yes	Yes
Responsive design	No	No	Yes	No
<b>Engage/Retain</b>				
Website speed	2.88s	1.34s	1.72s	3.67s
Interactive functions	CV application, global office map, feedback form, client login, webmaster login	Lunch and learn booking form	E-mail enquiry form	Course login, client login, lunch & learn booking form, e-mail enquiry form, FAQs, course app, webinars, basket
Security and privacy	Accreditations, associations, memberships, terms and copyright, FAQs	Terms and conditions	Company in community page, accreditations	Accreditations, associations, memberships, privacy policy, terms of use, company registration info, CSR, FAQs, testimonials
News section	News section (which features quarterly magazine)	News and video section, RSS feed	Live Twitter feed	News section
Downloadable resources	Presentations, datasheets	No	No	Webinars, glossary, brochure
Hyperlinks to social media sites	LinkedIn, YouTube, Flickr (contact us section)	Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube (right hand-side middle of all pages)	Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn (right hand-side top of homepage)	Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube (bottom of all pages)
Draws/contests/campaigns	No	No	No	No
Forums/discussion groups	No	No	No	No
<b>Learn</b>				
Information capture about potential customers	Sign-up for quarterly magazine	Lunch & learn booking form, RSS feed, mail list	No	Lunch & learn booking form, mailing list
Feedback via online surveys	Online customer feedback form	No	No	No

Google Analytics	No	No	Yes	Yes
<b>Relate</b>				
E-mails to update about new products/services	Sign-up for quarterly magazine	Lunch & learn booking form, exhibitions list, mail list	No	Lunch & learn booking form, mailing list
Customisation/personalisation	No	No	No	No
Real-time interactions	No	No	No	No

## Website – Observation 2

**Table:** Summary of websites based on digital marketing framework (Observation 2)

Digital Marketing Stage	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
<b>Attract</b>				
Company name and website address	Different	Different	Same	Same
Website listed in directories and industry website	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Website address shown on social media sites	No (YouTube missing)	No (YouTube missing)	Yes	Yes
Responsive design	Yes	No	Yes	No
<b>Engage and Retain</b>				
Website speed	1.58 s	2.75s	2.68s	3.48s
Interactive functions	Search, feedback form, e-mail form with interactive map, CV application form, webmaster login	Lunch and learn booking form	E-mail enquiry form	Course login, client login, lunch & learn booking form, e-mail enquiry form, FAQs, course app, webinars, basket
Security and privacy	18 years in business badge, accreditations and association, terms and copyright, FAQs	Terms and conditions	Company in community page, accreditations	Accreditations and associations, privacy policy, terms of use, company registration info, CSR, FAQs, testimonials
News section	Group news (which features quarterly magazine) and news in the community	News and video section, RSS feed	Live Twitter feed	News section
Downloadable resources	Case studies, literature downloads, gallery, presentations, quarterly magazine, brand standards and company screensaver	No	No	Webinars, glossary, brochures

Hyperlinks to social media sites	Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Flickr (bottom of homepage)	Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube (right hand-side middle of all pages)	Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn (right hand-side top of homepage)	Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube (bottom of all pages)
Draws/contests/campaigns	No	No	No	No
Forums/discussion groups	No	No	No	No
<b>Learn</b>				
Information capture about potential customers	Sign-up for quarterly magazine	Lunch & learn booking form, exhibitions list, mail list	N/A	Lunch & learn booking form, mailing list
Feedback via online surveys	Online customer feedback form	No	No	No
Google Analytics	No	No	Yes	Yes
<b>Relate</b>				
E-mails to update about new products/services	Sign-up for quarterly magazine	Lunch & learn booking form, exhibitions list, mail list	No	Lunch & learn booking form, mailing list
Customisation/personalisation	No	No	No	No
Real-time interactions	No	No	No	No

### Website – Observation 3

**Table:** Summary of websites based on digital marketing framework (Observation 3)

Digital Marketing Stage	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
<b>Attract</b>				
Company name and website address	Different	Different	Same	Same
Website listed in directories and industry website	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Website address shown on social media sites	No (YouTube missing)	No (YouTube missing)	Yes	Yes
Responsive design	Yes	No	Yes	No
<b>Engage and Retain</b>				
Website speed	1.29s	1.57s	2.36s	2.66s
Interactive functions	Search, feedback form, e-mail form with interactive map, CV application form, webmaster login	Lunch and learn booking form	E-mail enquiry form	Course login, client login, lunch & learn booking form, e-mail enquiry form, FAQs, course app, webinars, basket

Security and privacy	18 years in business badge, accreditations, associations, memberships, terms and copyright, FAQs	Terms and conditions	Company in community page, accreditations	Accreditations, associations, memberships, privacy policy, terms of use, company registration info, CSR, FAQs, testimonials
News section	Group news (which features quarterly magazine) and news in the community	News and video section, RSS feed	Live Twitter feed	News section
Downloadable resources	Case studies, literature downloads, gallery, presentations, quarterly magazine, brand standards and company screensaver	No	No	Webinars, brochures, glossary
Hyperlinks to social media sites	Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Flickr (bottom of homepage)	Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube (right hand-side middle of all pages)	Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn (right hand-side top of homepage)	Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube (bottom of all pages)
Draws/contests/campaigns	No	No	No	No
Forums/discussion groups	No	No	No	No
<b>Learn</b>				
Information capture about potential customers	Sign-up for quarterly magazine	Lunch & learn booking form, exhibitions list, mail list	No	Lunch & learn booking form, mailing list
Feedback via online surveys	Online customer feedback form	No	No	No
Google Analytics	No	No	Yes	Yes
<b>Relate</b>				
E-mails to update about new products/services	Sign-up for quarterly magazine	Lunch & learn booking form, exhibitions list, mail list	No	Lunch & learn booking form, mailing list
Customisation/personalisation	No	No	No	No
Real-time interactions	No	No	No	Live chat function

#### Website – Observation 4

**Table:** Summary of websites based on digital marketing framework (Observation 4)

Digital Marketing Stage	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
<b>Attract</b>				
Company name and website address	Different	Different	Same	Same
Website listed in directories and industry website	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

Website address shown on social media sites	No (YouTube missing)	No (YouTube missing)	Yes	Yes
Responsive design	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
<b>Engage and Retain</b>				
Website speed	1.14s	1.75s	1.60s	1.38s
Interactive functions	Search, feedback form, e-mail form with interactive map, office locations, CV application form, webmaster login	Lunch & learn booking form	E-mail enquiry form	Search, members login, course login, e-mail enquiry form, shopping basket, choosing currency, find a course
Security and privacy	18 years in business badge, accreditations and association, terms and copyright, FAQs	Terms and conditions	Company in community page, accreditations	Accreditations, associations, memberships, privacy policy, terms of use, company registration info, CSR, FAQs, testimonials
News section	Group news and news in the community	News and video section, RSS feed	Live Twitter feed	News section
Downloadable resources	Case studies, literature downloads, gallery, presentations, quarterly magazine, brand standards and company screensaver.	No	No	Case studies, glossary, whitepapers and webinars (registration required)
Hyperlinks to social media sites	Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Flickr (bottom of homepage)	Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube (right hand-side middle of all pages)	Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn (right hand-side top of homepage, but don't work)	Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Google + (bottom of all pages, but YouTube link doesn't work)
Draws/contests/campaigns	No	No	No	No
Forums/discussion groups	No	No	No	No
<b>Learn</b>				
Information capture about potential customers	Sign-up for quarterly magazine	Lunch & learn booking form, exhibitions list, mail list	No	Mailing list (lunch and learn booking form deleted)
Feedback via online surveys	Online customer feedback form	No	No	No
Google Analytics	No	No	Yes	Yes
<b>Relate</b>				
E-mails to update about new products/services	No	Yes	No	Yes
Customisation/personalisation	No	No	No	No
Real-time interactions	No	No	No	Live chat function



## Website – Observation 5

**Table:** Summary of websites based on digital marketing framework (Observation 5)

Digital Marketing Stage	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
<b>Attract</b>				
Company name and website address	Different	Different	Same	Same
Website listed in directories and industry website	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Website address shown on social media sites	No (YouTube missing)	No (YouTube missing)	Yes	Yes
Responsive design	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
<b>Engage and Retain</b>				
Website speed	1.16s	1.83s	4.95s	1.51s
Interactive functions	Search, feedback form, e-mail form with interactive map, office locations, CV application form, webmaster login	Lunch & learn booking form	E-mail enquiry form, website search, Google maps for offices, photo and video gallery	Search, members login, e-mail enquiry form, shopping basket, choosing currency, find a course
Security and privacy	18 years in business badge, accreditations, association, memberships, terms and copyright, FAQs	Terms and conditions	Company in community page, accreditations, associations, memberships, QHSE (Quality, Health, Safety and the Environment) section on website	Accreditations, associations, memberships, privacy policy, terms of use, company registration info, CSR, FAQs, testimonials
News section	Group news and news in the community	News and video section, RSS feed	News section (no news items)	News section
Downloadable resources	Case studies, literature downloads, gallery, presentations, quarterly magazine, brand standards and company screensaver, brochures about company in 7 languages added on the top of the homepage	No	No	Case studies, glossary, Whitepapers and Webinars (but registration required for webinars)
Hyperlinks to social media sites	Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Flickr (bottom of homepage)	Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube (right hand-side middle of all pages)	No links to social media	Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Google + (bottom of all pages, but YouTube link doesn't work)
Draws/contests/campaigns	No	No	No	No

Forums/discussion groups	No	No	No	No
<b>Learn</b>				
Information capture about potential customers	Sign-up for quarterly magazine	Lunch & learn booking form, exhibitions list	No	Mailing list
Feedback via online surveys	Online customer feedback form	No	No	No
Google Analytics	No	No	No	Yes
<b>Relate</b>				
E-mails to update about new products/services	No	Yes	No	Yes
Customisation/personalisation	No	No	No	No
Real-time interactions	No	No	No	Live chat function

### Website – Observation 6

**Table:** Summary of websites based on digital marketing framework (Observation 6)

Digital Marketing Stage	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
<b>Attract</b>				
Company name and website address	Different	N/A	Same	Same
Website listed in directories and industry website	No	N/A	Yes	Yes
Website address shown on social media sites	No (YouTube missing)	N/A	Yes	Yes
Responsive design	Yes	N/A	Yes	Yes
<b>Engage and Retain</b>				
Website speed	1.15s	N/A	567 ms	3.29s
Interactive functions	Search, feedback form, e-mail form with interactive map, office locations map, CV application form, webmaster login	N/A	E-mail news sign-up, gallery, Google maps for office, website search	Search, members login, e-mail enquiry form, shopping basket, choosing currency, find a course
Security and privacy	20 years in business badge, accreditations, associations, memberships, terms and copyright, FAQs	N/A	Accreditations, associations, memberships, QHSE (Quality, Health, Safety and the Environment) section on website	Accreditations, associations, memberships, privacy policy, terms of use, company registration info, CSR, FAQs, testimonials

News section	Group news, news in the community, Twitter news feed	N/A	News section	News section
Downloadable resources	Case studies, literature downloads (corporate brochure and datasheets), gallery, presentations, quarterly magazine, brand standards and company screensaver, brochures about company in 7 languages	N/A	Datasheets	Case studies, glossary, whitepapers and webinars (registration required)
Hyperlinks to social media sites	Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Flickr (bottom of homepage)	N/A	Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn (at the top of all pages)	Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Google + (bottom of all pages, but YouTube link doesn't work)
Draws/contests/campaigns	No	N/A	No	No
Forums/discussion groups	No	N/A	No	No
<b>Learn</b>				
Information capture about potential customers	Sign-up for quarterly magazine	N/A	News sign-up	Mailing list
Feedback via online surveys	Online customer feedback form	N/A	No	No
Google Analytics	No	N/A	No	Yes
<b>Relate</b>				
E-mails to update about new products/services	Sign-up for quarterly magazine	N/A	News sign-up	Mailing list
Customisation/personalisation	No	N/A	No	No
Real-time interactions	No		No	Live chat function

## Appendix 10: Search Engine Optimisation Observation

### Search Engine Optimisation – Observation 1

**Table:** Summary of SEO test (Observation 1)

SEO Tests	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
<b>SEO Score</b>	53/100	55/100	58/100	71/100
<b>Passed</b>	26	26	23	33
<b>Warnings</b>	5	4	9	3
<b>Failed</b>	16	17	15	11
<b>Title tag</b> <70 characters recommended	79	94	94	48
<b>Meta description</b> <160 characters recommended	244	107	188	53
<b>Headings h1, h2</b>	No h1, but h2	Both h1 and h2	Both h1 and h2	Both h1 and h2
<b>Robots.txt test</b>	Passed	Passed	Passed	Passed
<b>Sitemap Test</b>	Passed	Passed	Failed	Passed
<b>Favicon Test</b>	Passed	Passed	Failed	Failed
<b>Page Objects</b>	Total 98, html pages 4, images 62, css files 11, scripts 0, css images 21, video files 0	Total 79, html pages 1, images 39, css files 1, scripts 5, css images 32, video files 1	Total 102, html pages 4, images 62, css files 6, scripts 21, css images 9, video files 0	Total 130, html pages 2, images 42, css files 3, scripts 5, css images 78, video files 0
<b>URL SEO Friendly Test</b>	Passed	Failed	Passed	Failed
<b>Google Analytics Test</b>	Failed	Failed	Passed	Passed
<b>Image Alt Test</b>	38 images out of 57 have alt attribute	16 images out of 22 have alt attribute	40 images out of 60 have alt attribute	10 images out of 11 have alt attribute
<b>Google Preview Test</b>	Passed	Passed	Passed	Passed
<b>Keywords</b>	Keywords used in meta tags	Keywords used in meta tags	Keywords not used in meta tags	Keywords used in meta tags
<b>HTML Page Size Test size &lt;33Kb recommended</b>	44.93Kb	15.83	59.79 Kb	4.83
<b>Site Loading Speed Test &lt;5s recommended</b>	2.174	3.023	2.282	2.801
<b>Responsive Design Test</b>	Failed	Failed	Passed	Failed
<b>Social Media Test</b>	Connected to social media, but no website or url activity identified on social media	Not connected to social media	Connected to social media, but no website or url activity identified on social media	Connected to social media, but no website or url activity identified on social media

**Table:** SEO test from user’s perspective (Observation 1)

Site Structure	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
Simple to understand URLs (descriptive categories/filenames)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Easy to navigate from homepage/hierarchy	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Usage of breadcrumbs	No	No	No	Yes

Possibility to remove part of URL	Yes	No	No	Yes
Sitemap for users (HTML)	Yes	No	No	Yes

## Search Engine Optimisation – Observation 2

**Table:** Summary of SEO test (Observation 2)

SEO Tests	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
<b>SEO Score</b>	53/100	51/100	52/100	69/100
<b>Passed</b>	29	25	25	33
<b>Warnings</b>	3	2	5	2
<b>Failed</b>	17	20	17	12
<b>Title tag</b> <70 characters recommended	106	94	94	56
<b>Meta description</b> <160 characters recommended	287	107	188	167
<b>Headings h1, h2</b>	No h1, but h2	Both h1 and h2	Both h1 and h2	Both h1 and h2
<b>Robots.txt test</b>	Passed	Failed	Passed	Passed
<b>Sitemap Test</b>	Passed	Failed	Failed	Passed
<b>Favicon Test</b>	Passed	Failed	Failed	Passed
<b>Page Objects</b>	Html pages 4, css files 17, scripts 8, images 49, flash files 0.	Html pages 4, css files 1, scripts 5, images 38, flash files 0.	Html pages 5, css files 7, scripts 32, images 122, flash files 0.	Html pages 3, css files 3, scripts 6, images 43, flash files 0.
<b>URL SEO Friendly Test</b>	Passed	URL is SEO friendly, but some pages contain links which are not SEO friendly	Passed URL and all links inside page are SEO friendly	URL is SEO friendly, but some pages contain links which are not SEO friendly
<b>Google Analytics Test</b>	Failed	Failed	Passed	Passed
<b>Image Alt Test</b>	14 images out of 45 do not have alt attribute	6 images out of 22 do not have alt attribute	25 images out of 63 do not have alt attribute	1 image out of 12 do not have alt attribute
<b>Google Preview Test</b>	Passed	Passed	Passed	Passed
<b>Keywords Usage</b>	Keywords used in meta tags	Keywords used in meta tags	Keywords used in meta tags	Keywords used in meta tags
<b>HTML Page Size Test size &lt;33Kb recommended</b>	51.10Kb	16.53 Kb	60.45 Kb	4.85 Kb
<b>Site Loading Speed Test &lt;5s recommended</b>	1.58 s	2.75s	2.68s	3.48s
<b>Responsive Design Test</b>	Passed	Failed	Passed	Failed
<b>Social Media Test</b>	Connected to Twitter, but no website or url activity identified on social media	Connected to Facebook and Twitter, but no website or url activity identified on social media	Connected to Facebook and Twitter, but no website or url activity identified on social media	Connected to Facebook and Twitter, but no website or url activity identified on social media

**Table:** Domain Authority (DA) and Page Authority (PA) (Observation 2)

DA and PA	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
Domain Authority	29	28	18	36
Page Authority	30	40	31	35

**Table:** SEO test from user's perspective (Observation 2)

Site Structure	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
Simple to understand URLs (descriptive categories/filenames)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Easy to navigate from homepage/hierarchy	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Usage of breadcrumbs	No	No	No	Yes
Possibility to remove part of URL	Yes	No	No	Yes
Sitemap for users (HTML)	Yes	No	No	Yes

**Search Engine Optimisation – Observation 3****Table:** Summary of SEO test (Observation 3)

SEO Tests	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
<b>SEO Score</b>	57/100	52/100	59/100	71/100
<b>Passed</b>	28	27	26	33
<b>Warnings</b>	3	2	5	2
<b>Failed</b>	16	20	16	12
<b>Title tag</b> <70 characters recommended	106	94	94	56
<b>Meta description</b> <160 characters recommended	287	107	188	167
<b>Headings h1, h2</b>	No h1, but h2	Both h1 and h2	Both h1 and h2	Both h1 and h2
<b>Robots.txt test</b>	Passed	Failed	Passed	Passed
<b>Sitemap Test</b>	Passed	Failed	Failed	Passed
<b>Favicon Test</b>	Passed	Failed	Failed	Passed
<b>Page Objects</b>	Html pages 5, css files 17, scripts 9, images 64, flash files 0.	Html pages 5, css files 1, scripts 5, images 38, flash files 0.	Html pages 5, css files 7, scripts 30, images 102, flash files 0.	Html pages 4, css files 3, scripts 6, images 43, flash files 0.
<b>URL SEO Friendly Test</b>	Passed URL and all links inside page are SEO friendly	URL is SEO friendly, but some pages contain internal links which are not SEO friendly	Passed URL and all links inside page are SEO friendly	URL is SEO friendly, but some pages contain internal links which are not SEO friendly
<b>Google Analytics Test</b>	Failed	Failed	Passed	Passed
<b>Image Alt Test</b>	Failed 14 images out of 45 do not have alt attribute	6 images out of 22 do not have alt attribute	25 images out of 63 do not have alt attribute	1 image out of 12 do not have alt attribute
<b>Google Preview Test</b>	Passed	Passed	Passed	Passed
<b>Keywords Usage</b>	Keywords used in meta tags	Keywords used in meta tags	Keywords used in meta tags	Keywords used in meta tags

<b>HTML Page Size Test</b> size <33Kb recommended	51.53 Kb	16.59 Kb	58.91 Kb	4.85 Kb
<b>Site Loading Speed Test</b> <5s recommended	1.15 s	1.14 s	1.92 s	2.41 s
<b>Responsive Design Test</b>	Passed	Failed	Passed	Failed
<b>Social Media Test</b>	Connected to Twitter, but no website or url activity identified on social media	Connected to Facebook and Twitter, but no website or url activity identified on social media	Connected to Facebook and Twitter, but no website or url activity identified on social media	Connected to Facebook and Twitter, but no website or url activity identified on social media

**Table:** Domain Authority (DA) and Page Authority (PA) (Observation 3)

DA and PA	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
Domain Authority	29	24	18	30
Page Authority	28	37	31	33

**Table:** SEO test from user's perspective (Observation 3)

Site Structure	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
Simple to understand URLs (descriptive categories/filenames)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Easy to navigate from homepage/hierarchy	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Usage of breadcrumbs	No	No	No	Yes
Possibility to remove part of URL	Yes	No	No	Yes
Sitemap for users (HTML)	Yes	No	No	Yes

#### Search Engine Optimisation – Observation 4

**Table:** Summary of SEO test (Observation 4)

SEO Tests	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
<b>SEO Score</b>	60/100	51/100	64/100	78/100
<b>Passed</b>	31	27	27	33
<b>Warnings</b>	3	3	6	3
<b>Failed</b>	15	19	14	11
<b>Title tag</b> <70 characters recommended	106	94	94	52
<b>Meta description</b> <160 characters recommended	287	107	188	150
<b>Headings h1, h2</b>	No h1, but h2	Both h1 and h2	Both h1 and h2	Both h1 and h2
<b>Robots.txt test</b>	Passed	Failed	Passed	Passed
<b>Sitemap Test</b>	Passed	Failed	Failed	Passed
<b>Favicon Test</b>	Passed	Failed	Failed	Passed
<b>Page Objects</b>	Html pages 6, css files 18, scripts 9, images 65, flash files 0	Html pages 5, css files 1, scripts 4, images 39, flash files 0	Html pages 5, css files 9, scripts 37, images 123, flash files 0	Html pages 5, css files 17, scripts 23, images 40, flash files 0

<b>URL SEO Friendly Test</b>	Failed	Failed	Passed	Passed
<b>Google Analytics Test</b>	Failed	Failed	Passed	Passed
<b>Image Alt Test</b>	Failed 14 images out of 45 do not have alt attribute	Failed 6 images out of 23 do not have alt attribute	Failed 25 images out of 63 do not have alt attribute	Failed 1 images out of 42 do not have alt attribute
<b>Google Preview Test</b>	Passed	Passed	Passed	Passed
<b>Keywords Usage</b>	Keywords used in meta tags	Keywords used in meta tags	Keywords used in meta tags	Keywords not used in meta tags
<b>HTML Page Size Test size &lt;33Kb recommended</b>	41.91Kb	16.59Kb	57.68Kb	9.41Kb
<b>Site Loading Speed Test &lt;5s recommended</b>	3.9 s	6.1 s	3.8 s	3.9 s
<b>Responsive Design Test</b>	Passed	Failed	Passed	Passed
<b>Social Media Test</b>	Connected to Twitter	Connected to Facebook and Twitter	Connected to Facebook and Twitter	Connected to Facebook, Twitter and Google +

**Table:** Domain Authority (DA) and Page Authority (PA) (Observation 4)

<b>DA and PA</b>	<b>Company 1</b>	<b>Company 2</b>	<b>Company 3</b>	<b>Company 4</b>
Domain Authority	32	32	20	36
Page Authority	34	43	33	39

**Table:** SEO test from user's perspective (Observation 4)

<b>Site Structure</b>	<b>Company 1</b>	<b>Company 2</b>	<b>Company 3</b>	<b>Company 4</b>
Simple to understand URLs (descriptive categories/filenames)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Easy to navigate from homepage/hierarchy	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Usage of breadcrumbs	No	No	No	No
Possibility to remove part of URL	Yes	No	No	Yes
Sitemap for users (HTML)	Yes	No	No	Yes

## Search Engine Optimisation – Observation 5

**Table:** Summary of SEO test (Observation 5)

<b>SEO Tests</b>	<b>Company 1</b>	<b>Company 2</b>	<b>Company 3</b>	<b>Company 4</b>
<b>SEO Score</b>	58/100	55/100	50/100	75/100
<b>Passed</b>	29	26	25	33
<b>Warnings</b>	3	3	3	3
<b>Failed</b>	15	18	19	11
<b>Title tag</b> <70 characters recommended	106	94	27	52
<b>Meta description</b> <160 characters recommended	287	107	No meta description	150
<b>Headings h1, h2</b>	No h1, but h2	Both h1 and h2	No h1 but h2	Both h1 and h2



<b>Robots.txt test</b>	Passed	Failed	Passed	Passed
<b>Sitemap Test</b>	Passed	Failed	Failed	Passed
<b>Favicon Test</b>	Passed	Failed	Passed	Passed
<b>Page Objects</b>	Html pages 6, css files 18, scripts 9, images 73, flash files 0	Html pages 5, css files 1, scripts 4, images 39, flash files 0	Html pages 3, css files 15, scripts 27, images 50, flash files 0	Html pages 5, css files 17, scripts 23, images 40, flash files 0
<b>URL SEO Friendly Test</b>	Failed	Failed	Passed	Passed
<b>Google Analytics Test</b>	Failed	Failed	Failed	Passed
<b>Image Alt Test</b>	Failed 21 images out of 55 do not have alt attribute	Failed 6 images out of 23 do not have alt attribute	Failed 20 images out of 43 do not have alt attribute	Failed 1 images out of 42 do not have alt attribute
<b>Google Preview Test</b>	Passed	Passed	Passed	Passed
<b>Keywords Usage</b>	Keywords used in meta tags	Keywords used in meta tags	Keywords used in meta tags	Keywords not used in meta tags
<b>HTML Page Size Test size &lt;33Kb recommended</b>	43.52Kb	16.59Kb	133.48Kb	9.41Kb
<b>Site Loading Speed Test &lt;5s recommended</b>	3.7 s	4.5 s	19.5 s	3.9 s
<b>Responsive Design Test</b>	Passed	Failed	Passed	Passed
<b>Social Media Test</b>	Connected to Twitter	Connected to Facebook and Twitter	Not connected	Connected to Facebook, Twitter and Google +

**Table:** Domain Authority (DA) and Page Authority (PA) (Observation 5)

<b>DA and PA</b>	<b>Company 1</b>	<b>Company 2</b>	<b>Company 3</b>	<b>Company 4</b>
Domain Authority	30	30	16	35
Page Authority	19	41	29	38

**Table:** SEO test from user's perspective (Observation 5)

<b>Site Structure</b>	<b>Company 1</b>	<b>Company 2</b>	<b>Company 3</b>	<b>Company 4</b>
Simple to understand URLs (descriptive categories/filenames)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Easy to navigate from homepage/hierarchy	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Usage of breadcrumbs	No	No	No	No
Possibility to remove part of URL	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Sitemap for users (HTML)	Yes	No	No	Yes

### Search Engine Optimisation – Observation 6

**Table:** Summary of SEO test (Observation 6)

<b>SEO Tests</b>	<b>Company 1</b>	<b>Company 2</b>	<b>Company 3</b>	<b>Company 4</b>
<b>SEO Score</b>	61/100	N/A	68/100	79/100
<b>Passed</b>	33	N/A	33	37
<b>Warnings</b>	3	N/A	4	3
<b>Failed</b>	15	N/A	14	10

<b>Title tag</b> <70 characters recommended	106	N/A	35	52
<b>Meta description</b> <160 characters recommended	287	N/A	149	150
<b>Headings h1, h2</b>	No h1, but h2	N/A	Both h1 and h2	Both h1 and h2
<b>Robots.txt test</b>	Passed	N/A	Failed	Passed
<b>Sitemap Test</b>	Passed	N/A	Failed	Passed
<b>Favicon Test</b>	Passed	N/A	Passed	Passed
<b>Page Objects</b>	Html pages 7, css files 18, scripts 9, images 86, flash files 0	N/A	Html pages 5, css files 16, scripts 6, images 30, flash files 0	Html pages 5, css files 18, scripts 24, images 40, flash files 0
<b>URL SEO Friendly Test</b>	Failed	N/A	Passed	Passed
<b>Google Analytics Test</b>	Failed	N/A	Failed	Passed
<b>Image Alt Test</b>	Failed 22 images out of 55 do not have alt attribute	N/A	Failed 16 images out of 33 do not have alt attribute	Failed 1 images out of 42 do not have alt attribute
<b>Google Preview Test</b>	Passed	N/A	Passed	Passed
<b>Keywords Usage</b>	Keywords used in meta tags	N/A	Keywords used in meta tags	Keywords not used in meta tags
<b>HTML Page Size Test size &lt;33Kb recommended</b>	40.80Kb	N/A	4.71Kb	10.03Kb
<b>Site Loading Speed Test &lt;5s recommended</b>	3.46 s	N/A	3.1 s	5.8 s
<b>Responsive Design Test</b>	Passed	N/A	Passed	Passed
<b>Social Media Test</b>	Connected to Twitter	N/A	Connected to Facebook and Twitter	Connected to Facebook, Twitter and Google +

**Table:** Domain Authority (DA) and Page Authority (PA) (Observation 6)

<b>DA and PA</b>	<b>Company 1</b>	<b>Company 2</b>	<b>Company 3</b>	<b>Company 4</b>
Domain Authority (DA)	32	N/A	21	33
Page Authority (PA)	33	N/A	31	41

**Table:** SEO test from user's perspective (Observation 6)

<b>Site Structure</b>	<b>Company 1</b>	<b>Company 2</b>	<b>Company 3</b>	<b>Company 4</b>
Simple to understand URLs (descriptive categories/filenames)	Yes	N/A	Yes	Yes
Easy to navigate from homepage/hierarchy	No	N/A	Yes	Yes
Usage of breadcrumbs	No	N/A	No	No
Possibility to remove part of URL	Yes	N/A	Yes	Yes
Sitemap for users (HTML)	Yes	N/A	Yes	Yes

## Appendix 11: Facebook Observation

### Facebook – Observation 1

**Table:** Facebook activity (Observation 1)

Facebook	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
Number of likes (total)	N/A	153	827	1543
Description of organisation (yes/no)	N/A	Yes	No	No
Website address (yes/no)	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes
Contact details (yes/no)	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes
Company branding	N/A	Corporate logo, colours, mission and vision, value proposition	Corporate logo, colours, tagline, mission and vision, value proposition	Corporate logo, colours, value proposition
Number of company posts (per month)	N/A	2	22	13
Number of customer likes (per month)	N/A	9	289	6
Number of customer shares (per month)	N/A	0	23	0
Number of customer comments (per month)	N/A	0	22	1

**Table:** Facebook post types (Observation 1)

Type	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
Total posts per month	N/A	2	22	13
Post with link to website	N/A	2	3	10
Post	N/A	0	3	2
Post with photo	N/A	0	15	0
Other (changed cover photo, created an event)	N/A	0	1	1

### Facebook – Observation 2

**Table:** Facebook activity (Observation 2)

Facebook	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
Number of likes (total)	N/A	391	1409	1585
Description of organisation (yes/no)	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes
Website address (yes/no)	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes
Contact details (yes/no)	N/A	No	Yes	Yes
Company branding	N/A	Corporate logo, colours, mission and vision, value proposition	Corporate logo, colours, tagline, mission and vision, value proposition	Corporate logo, colours, value proposition

Number of company posts (per month)	N/A	0	0	0
Number of customer likes (per month)	N/A	0	0	0
Number of customer shares (per month)	N/A	0	0	0
Number of customer comments (per month)	N/A	0	0	0

### Facebook – Observation 3

**Table:** Facebook activity (Observation 3)

Facebook	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
Number of likes (total)	N/A	393	1406	1582
Description of organisation (yes/no)	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes
Website address (yes/no)	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes
Contact details (yes/no)	N/A	No	Yes	Yes
Company branding	N/A	Corporate logo, colours, mission and vision, value proposition	Corporate logo, colours, tagline, mission and vision, value proposition	Corporate logo, colours, value proposition
Number of company posts (per month)	N/A	0	0	0
Number of customer likes (per month)	N/A	0	0	0
Number of customer shares (per month)	N/A	0	0	0
Number of customer comments (per month)	N/A	0	0	0

### Facebook – Observation 4

**Table:** Facebook activity (Observation 4)

Facebook	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
Number of likes (total)	N/A	392	1468	1571
Description of organisation (yes/no)	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes
Website address (yes/no)	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes
Contact details (yes/no)	N/A	No	Yes	Yes

Company branding	N/A	Corporate logo, colours, mission and vision, value proposition	Corporate logo, colours, tagline, mission and vision, value proposition	Corporate logo, colours, value proposition
Number of company posts (per month)	N/A	0	0	0
Number of customer likes (per month)	N/A	0	0	0
Number of customer shares (per month)	N/A	0	0	0
Number of customer comments (per month)	N/A	0	0	0

### Facebook – Observation 5

**Table:** Facebook activity (Observation 5)

Facebook	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
Number of likes (total)	N/A	397	1468	1566
Description of organisation (yes/no)	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes
Website address (yes/no)	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes
Contact details (yes/no)	N/A	No	Yes	Yes
Company branding	N/A	Corporate logo, colours, mission and vision, value proposition	Corporate logo, colours, tagline, mission and vision, value proposition	Corporate logo, colours, value proposition
Number of company posts (per month)	N/A	0	0	0
Number of customer likes (per month)	N/A	0	0	0
Number of customer shares (per month)	N/A	0	0	0
Number of customer comments (per month)	N/A	0	0	0

### Facebook – Observation 6

**Table:** Facebook activity (Observation 6)

Facebook	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
Number of likes (total)	N/A	N/A	1531	1547
Description of organisation (yes/no)	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes

Website address (yes/no)	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes
Contact details (yes/no)	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes
Company branding	N/A	N/A	Corporate logo, colours, tagline, mission and vision, value proposition	Corporate logo, colours, value proposition
Number of company posts (per month)	N/A	N/A	1	0
Number of customer likes (per month)	N/A	N/A	7	0
Number of customer shares (per month)	N/A	N/A	24	0
Number of customer comments (per month)	N/A	N/A	11	0

## Appendix 12: Twitter Observation

### Twitter – Observation 1

**Table:** Twitter activity (Observation 1)

Twitter	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
Number of followers (total)	N/A	374	29	388
Number of following (total)	N/A	31	10	168
Description of organisation	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes
Website address (yes/no)	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes
Contact details (yes/no)	N/A	No	No	Yes
Company branding	N/A	Corporate logo, colours, value proposition	Corporate logo, colours	Corporate logo, colours, tagline
Number of company tweets (total)	N/A	54	41	224
Number of company tweets (per month)	N/A	2	15	16
Number of customer retweets	N/A	1	10	0
Number of customer shares	N/A	0	0	0

**Table:** Twitter tweet types (Observation 1)

Type	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
Total tweets per month	N/A	2	15	16
Tweet with #	N/A	2	7	15
Tweet with link to website	N/A	0	0	0
Tweet with external link	N/A	0	0	0
Retweet	N/A	0	0	1
Reply/mention	N/A	0	8	0

### Twitter – Observation 2

**Table:** Twitter activity (Observation 2)

Twitter	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
Number of followers (total)	5	409	105	544
Number of following (total)	2	32	26	190
Description of organisation	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Website address (yes/no)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Contact details (yes/no)	No	No	No	No
Company branding	Corporate logo, colours	Value proposition	Corporate logo, colours	Corporate logo, colours, tagline
Number of company tweets (total)	21	59	124	322
Number of company tweets (per month)	16	0	0	28
Number of customer retweets	0	0	0	8
Number of customer shares	0	0	0	6

**Table:** Twitter tweet types (Observation 2)

Type	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
Total tweets per month	16	0	0	28
Tweet with #	1	0	0	11
Tweet with link to website	2	0	0	6
Tweet with external link	13	0	0	1
Retweet	0	0	0	0
Reply/mention	0	0	0	10

### Twitter – Observation 3

**Table:** Twitter activity (Observation 3)

Twitter	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
Number of followers (total)	7	408	104	573
Number of following (total)	2	32	26	193
Description of organisation	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Website address (yes/no)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Contact details (yes/no)	No	No	No	No
Company branding	Corporate logo, colours	Value proposition	Corporate logo, colours	Corporate logo, colours, tagline
Number of company tweets (total)	46	59	124	345
Number of company tweets (per month)	8	0	0	14
Number of customer retweets	0	0	0	8
Number of customer favourites	0	0	0	3

**Table:** Twitter tweet types (Observation 3)

Type	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
------	-----------	-----------	-----------	-----------



Total tweets per month	8	0	0	14
Tweet with #	0	0	0	5
Tweet with link to website	0	0	0	6
Tweet with external link	8	0	0	1
Retweet	0	0	0	0
Reply/mention	0	0	0	2

#### Twitter – Observation 4

**Table:** Twitter activity (Observation 4)

Twitter	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
Number of followers (total)	8	414	124	632
Number of following (total)	2	32	26	203
Description of organisation	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Website address (yes/no)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Contact details (yes/no)	No	No	No	No
Company branding	Corporate logo, colours	Value proposition	Corporate logo, colours	Corporate logo, colours, tagline
Number of company tweets (total)	73	63	124	426
Number of company tweets (per month)	0	0	0	1
Number of customer retweets	0	0	0	2
Number of customer favourites	0	0	0	0

#### Twitter – Observation 5

**Table:** Twitter activity (Observation 5)

Twitter	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
Number of followers (total)	9	426	104	632
Number of following (total)	2	32	26	203
Description of organisation	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Website address (yes/no)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Contact details (yes/no)	No	No	No	No
Company branding	Corporate logo, colours	Value proposition	Corporate logo, colours	Corporate logo, colours, tagline
Number of company tweets (total)	73	70	124	426

Number of company tweets (per month)	0	2	0	3
Number of customer retweets	0	3	0	0
Number of customer favourites	0	3	0	0

**Table:** Twitter tweet types (Observation 5)

Type	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
Total tweets per month	0	2	0	3
Tweet with #	0	0	0	0
Tweet with link to website	0	2	0	1
Tweet with external link	0	0	0	0
Retweet	0	0	0	0
Reply/mention	0	0	0	2

### Twitter – Observation 6

**Table:** Twitter activity (Observation 6)

Twitter	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
Number of followers (total)	13	N/A	105	699
Number of following (total)	2	N/A	25	203
Description of organisation	No	N/A	Yes	Yes
Website address (yes/no)	Yes	N/A	Yes	Yes
Contact details (yes/no)	No	N/A	No	No
Company brand	Corporate logo, colours	N/A	Corporate logo, colours	Corporate logo, colours, tagline
Number of company tweets (total)	80	N/A	124	459
Number of company tweets (per month)	0	N/A	0	7
Number of customer retweets	0	N/A	0	3
Number of customer favourites	0	N/A	0	3

**Table:** Twitter tweet types (Observation 6)

Type	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
Total tweets per month	0	0	0	7
Tweet with #	0	0	0	0
Tweet with link to website	0	0	0	7
Tweet with external link	0	0	0	0
Retweet	0	0	0	0
Reply/mention	0	0	0	0

## Appendix 13: LinkedIn Observation

### LinkedIn – Observation 1

**Table:** LinkedIn activity (Observation 1)

<b>LinkedIn</b>	<b>Company 1</b>	<b>Company 2</b>	<b>Company 3</b>	<b>Company 4</b>
Number of followers (total)	75	494	245	2405
Number of employees	10	29	15	66
Description of organisation	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Website address (yes/no)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Contact details (yes/no)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Company branding	Corporate logo, colours, value proposition	Corporate logo, colours, value proposition	Corporate logo, colours, vision and mission, value proposition	Corporate logo, colours, value proposition
Number of company posts (per month)	0	0	0	6
Number of customer likes (per month)	0	0	0	6
Number of customer comments (per month)	0	0	0	0

**Table:** LinkedIn post types (Observation 1)

<b>Type</b>	<b>Company 1</b>	<b>Company 2</b>	<b>Company 3</b>	<b>Company 4</b>
Total posts per month	0	0	0	6
Post	0	0	0	0
Post with link to website	0	0	0	6
Post to external website	0	0	0	0

### LinkedIn – Observation 2

**Table:** LinkedIn activities (Observation 2)

<b>LinkedIn</b>	<b>Company 1</b>	<b>Company 2</b>	<b>Company 3</b>	<b>Company 4</b>
Number of followers (total)	149	901	670	3071
Number of employees	11	30	12	62
Description of organisation	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Website address (yes/no)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Contact details (yes/no)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Company branding	Corporate logo, colours, value proposition	Corporate logo, colours, value proposition	Corporate logo, colours, vision and mission, value proposition	Corporate logo, colours, value proposition
Number of company posts (per month)	2	0	0	8
Number of customer likes (per month)	0	0	0	42
Number of customer comments (per month)	0	0	0	0

**Table:** LinkedIn post types (Observation 2)

Type	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
Total posts per month	2	0	0	8
Post	0	0	0	3
Post with link to website	0	0	0	4
Post to external website	2	0	0	2

### LinkedIn – Observation 3

**Table:** LinkedIn activity (Observation 3)

LinkedIn	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
Number of followers (total)	183	1025	722	3223
Number of employees	11	32	12	67
Description of organisation	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Website address (yes/no)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Contact details (yes/no)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Company branding	Corporate logo, colours, value proposition	Corporate logo, colours, value proposition	Corporate logo, colours, vision and mission, value proposition	Corporate logo, colours, value proposition
Number of company posts (per month)	0	0	0	6
Number of customer likes (per month)	0	0	0	18
Number of customer comments (per month)	0	0	0	0

**Table:** LinkedIn post types (Observation 3)

Type	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
Total posts per month	0	0	0	6

Post	0	0	0	4
Post with link to website	0	0	0	2
Post to external website	0	0	0	0

#### LinkedIn – Observation 4

**Table:** LinkedIn activity (Observation 4)

LinkedIn	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
Number of followers (total)	211	1176	834	3473
Number of employees	19	28	14	89
Description of organisation	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Website address (yes/no)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Contact details (yes/no)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Company branding	Corporate logo, colours, value proposition	Corporate logo, colours, value proposition	Corporate logo, colours, vision and mission, value proposition	Corporate logo, colours, value proposition
Number of company posts (per month)	0	0	0	5
Number of customer likes (per month)	0	0	0	8
Number of customer comments (per month)	0	0	0	0

**Table:** LinkedIn post types (Observation 4)

Type	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
Total posts per month	0	0	0	5
Post	0	0	0	0
Post with link to website	0	0	0	5
Post to external website	0	0	0	0

#### LinkedIn – Observation 5

**Table:** LinkedIn activity (Observation 5)

LinkedIn	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
Number of followers (total)	221	1206	868	3559
Number of employees	19	28	16	89
Description of organisation	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Website address (yes/no)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Contact details (yes/no)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Company branding	Corporate logo, colours, value proposition	Corporate logo, colours, value proposition	Corporate logo, colours, vision and mission, value proposition	Corporate logo, colours, value proposition
Number of company posts (per month)	0	2	0	0
Number of customer likes (per month)	0	14	0	0
Number of customer comments (per month)	0	1	0	0

**Table:** LinkedIn post types (Observation 5)

Type	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
Total posts per month	0	2	0	0
Post	0	0	0	0
Post with link to website	0	2	0	0
Post to external website	0	0	0	0

### LinkedIn – Observation 6

**Table:** LinkedIn activity (Observation 6)

LinkedIn	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
Number of followers (total)	245	N/A	931	3800
Number of employees	22	N/A	19	91
Description of organisation	Yes	N/A	Yes	Yes
Website address (yes/no)	Yes	N/A	Yes	Yes
Contact details (yes/no)	Yes	N/A	Yes	Yes
Company branding	Corporate logo, colours, value proposition	N/A	Corporate logo, colours, vision and mission, value proposition	Corporate logo, colours, value proposition
Number of company posts (per month)	0	N/A	0	7
Number of customer likes (per month)	0	N/A	0	43
Number of customer comments (per month)	0	N/A	0	1

**Table:** LinkedIn post types (Observation 6)

<b>Type</b>	<b>Company 1</b>	<b>Company 2</b>	<b>Company 3</b>	<b>Company 4</b>
Total posts per month	0	N/A	0	7
Post	0	N/A	0	0
Post with link to website	0	N/A	0	7
Post to external website	0	N/A	0	0

## Appendix 14: YouTube Observation

### YouTube – Observation 1

**Table:** YouTube activities (Observation 1)

<b>YouTube</b>	<b>Company 1</b>	<b>Company 2</b>	<b>Company 3</b>	<b>Company 4</b>
Number of videos (total)	2	10	N/A	2
Number of comments (total)	0	0	N/A	4
Number of subscribers (total)	0	12	N/A	71
Number of views (total)	49	3436	N/A	18181
Description of organisation (yes/no)	No	Yes	N/A	No
Website address (yes/no)	No	Yes	N/A	Yes
Contact details (yes/no)	No	No	N/A	No
Company brand	No	Corporate logo, colours, tagline	N/A	Corporate logo

### YouTube – Observation 2

**Table:** YouTube activities (Observation 2)

<b>YouTube</b>	<b>Company 1</b>	<b>Company 2</b>	<b>Company 3</b>	<b>Company 4</b>
Number of videos (total)	4	10	N/A	2
Number of comments (total)	0	0	N/A	4
Number of subscribers (total)	0	14	N/A	83
Number of views (total)	155	3980	N/A	20 347
Description of organisation (yes/no)	No	Yes	N/A	No
Website address (yes/no)	No	Yes	N/A	Yes
Contact details (yes/no)	No	No	N/A	No
Company brand	No	Corporate logo (old), colours, tagline	N/A	Corporate logo

### YouTube – Observation 3

**Table:** YouTube activity (Observation 3)

<b>YouTube</b>	<b>Company 1</b>	<b>Company 2</b>	<b>Company 3</b>	<b>Company 4</b>
Number of videos (total)	2	10	N/A	2



Number of comments (total)	0	0	N/A	4
Number of subscribers (total)	1	14	N/A	84
Number of views (total)	27	4120	N/A	20606
Description of organisation (yes/no)	No	Yes	N/A	No
Website address (yes/no)	No	Yes	N/A	Yes
Contact details (yes/no)	No	No	N/A	No
Company brand	No	Corporate logo (old), colours, tagline	N/A	Corporate logo

#### YouTube – Observation 4

**Table:** YouTube activity (Observation 4)

YouTube	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
Number of videos (total)	2	10	N/A	2
Number of comments (total)	0	0	N/A	4
Number of subscribers (total)	1	14	N/A	84
Number of views (total)	73	4429	N/A	21300
Description of organisation (yes/no)	No	Yes	N/A	No
Website address (yes/no)	No	Yes	N/A	Yes
Contact details (yes/no)	No	No	N/A	No
Company brand	No	Corporate logo (old), colours, tagline	N/A	Corporate logo

#### YouTube – Observation 5

**Table:** YouTube activity (Observation 5)

YouTube	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
Number of videos (total)	2	10	N/A	2
Number of comments (total)	0	0	N/A	4
Number of subscribers (total)	1	16	N/A	84
Number of views (total)	73	4509	N/A	21300
Description of organisation (yes/no)	No	Yes	N/A	No

Website address (yes/no)	No	Yes	N/A	Yes
Contact details (yes/no)	No	No	N/A	No
Company brand	No	Corporate logo (old), colours, tagline	N/A	Corporate logo

### YouTube – Observation 6

**Table:** YouTube activity (Observation 6)

<b>YouTube</b>	<b>Company 1</b>	<b>Company 2</b>	<b>Company 3</b>	<b>Company 4</b>
Number of videos (total)	2	N/A	N/A	2
Number of comments (total)	0	N/A	N/A	4
Number of subscribers (total)	1	N/A	N/A	89
Number of views (total)	156	N/A	N/A	21500
Description of organisation (yes/no)	No	N/A	N/A	No
Website address (yes/no)	No	N/A	N/A	Yes
Contact details (yes/no)	No	N/A	N/A	No
Company brand	No	N/A	N/A	Corporate logo