

# **FACEBOOK CONTENT MARKETING FOR FINNISH PLANT-BASED PROTEIN PRODUCERS**

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**ABSTRACT**

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<p>In Finland, the consumption of plant-based protein products has been increasing. Despite a wide choice of imported plant-based protein products in supermarkets, Finns tend to favor local brands. Moreover, Finnish plant-based protein products are experiencing an improved export potential owing to outstanding technologies. Thus, plant-based protein products were considered a noteworthy trend in consumer behavior in Finland which deserved studying from the digital marketing perspective.</p> <p>Most of the Finnish population are social media users. Specifically, Facebook has been the most popular social network for years. Globally, more companies of any type and size are realizing that digital technologies such as social networks are ineffective without a content marketing approach. In fact, a compelling social media strategy cannot be formulated without a content strategy. The potential benefits of content marketing include improved brand engagement, reinforced brand trust, stronger customer relationships, added value to customer experience, higher search engine rankings, and ultimately increased sales. Therefore, it is important to understand how Finnish plant-based protein producers can leverage content marketing on Facebook to achieve their business goals.</p> <p>Despite the increasing use of content marketing on practice, the academic insight into Facebook content marketing in the plant-based industry is limited. In response to this knowledge gap, this study aimed at contributing to a better understanding of Facebook content marketing of Finnish plant-based protein producers by building on past research and investigating their current Facebook content marketing activities through interviews and collection of Facebook posts. The thematic analysis of the interviews allowed to learn first-hand how the participating Finnish plant protein producers planned, produced, promoted, and measured Facebook content marketing. The content analysis of the collected Facebook posts helped to identify the main content types, goals and priorities of the posts published by the participating companies. In addition, several theoretical findings were found to be applied on practice. Finally, practical recommendations for Finnish plant protein producers were made based on the empirical findings.</p>	
Key words: Social media, Facebook, content marketing, content, plant-based industry, vegan, plant protein	
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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Topic background

Food security for the growing population, particularly the protein supply, is challenged by limited natural resources and climate change (VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland, 2020a). Another factor affecting food security is people's dietary choices, which can also influence other micromarketing issues such as sustainability, quality of life, and market systems (Beverland, 2014). In many industrialized countries the number of plant-based diet followers has significantly increased. Their influence on the food industry is predicted to grow as well (Janssen et al., 2016). A plant-based or vegan diet completely excludes any animal-derived products such as meat, dairy, and eggs (Dinu et al., 2017). Common reasons for adopting a vegan diet are health, environmental, and ethical concerns (Fox & Ward, 2008a). Nutrition studies highlight the importance of faux meat products in mainstreaming plant-based diet as they often contain healthy ingredients which can contribute to public health (Beverland, 2014; Sadler, 2004).

As the consumer demand is shifting, an increasing number of companies are entering the plant-based industry. In Europe, the plant-based meat and dairy market is expected to grow up to €7.5 billion by 2025, while retail sales of vegan meat alternatives are estimated to increase up to €2.5 billion. Currently, the Nordics and Benelux have the highest consumption of plant-based alternatives per capita. (ING, 2020). In particular, Finland is seeing notable growth in plant-based food consumption. Among respondents of a postal survey by Taloustutkimus, vegan diet more than doubled in popularity from 2012 to 2016 (Jallinoja et al., 2019). Interest in vegan products has also grown in Finnish social media (Isotalo et al., 2019). In addition, in 2017 K-food stores reported a 159 percent increase in sales of plant-based protein products in general and a several hundred percent increase in sales of local products such as Nyhtökaura and Härkis (Kesko, 2017; Kesko, 2018). Finns tend to emphasize health and weight control in their reasons for choosing a plant-based diet (Lehikoinen & Salonen, 2019).

Soy and wheat products, such as tofu and seitan, have been dominating the plant protein market (VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland, 2020). Soy meat alternatives include burgers, stir-fry cubes, and minced meat. Tofu, however, is different since it is sold in raw form as well. Some plant-based products resemble the texture of meat and are labeled as instant meat substitutes so consumers can easily locate these alternative protein sources (Schösler et al., 2012). Despite the popularity of soy and wheat products, new solutions are embraced in the rapidly growing plant-based protein industry. For instance, Finland has gained attention by utilizing domestic oats and fava beans as raw materials in meat substitutes.

Moreover, Finnish plant-based food sector is experiencing an improved export potential for vegan animal protein alternatives, ingredients, and technology licensing (VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland, 2020). Accordingly, in June 2020 Finland invested \$2.3 million U.S. dollars into project EXPRO, which aims at developing the national plant-based food industry and strengthening Finland's position in the international market (VegNews, 2020).

In Finland, plant-based products can be found both in large supermarkets and small corner shops. Some stores have a designated product shelf titled "vege" with only vegan foods. Finnish non-vegan food companies such as Apetit, Kaslink, Saarioinen, Hoviruoka, and Valio offer vegan product ranges too and launch new ones regularly. Anamma, Oumph, Wheaty, LikeMeat, Terra, Tzay, and Tofurky are only a few examples of international vegan meat brands available in Finnish stores (Vegaanituotteet, n.d.). However, Finns tend to prefer local brands as they consider the origin of food as important (Lehikoinen & Salonen, 2019). Plant-based foods can also be found in online and specialty shops. For instance, a vegan store chain Vegekauppa offers a wide range of vegan products. Such tools as vegaanituotteet.net website help consumers with grocery shopping by providing lists of plant-based products available in Finnish stores (Vegaanituotteet, n.d.). Consequently, plant-based protein products can be regarded as a current trend in consumer behavior in Finland, which deserves studying from the digital marketing perspective.

## 1.2 Justification of the study

More companies are realizing that digital marketing technologies available today are pointless without a content marketing strategy (Pulizzi, 2012). The declining effectiveness of advertising further strengthens the need for content marketing in social media (Ho, John et al., 2020). Despite the increasing importance of content marketing and active application on practice, the academic insight into this topic is limited yet it is an emerging research area (Ho et al., 2020; Hollebeek & Macky, 2019; Pazeraite & Repoviene, 2016; Taiminen & Ranaweera, 2019). Customer engagement, trusted brand relationships, value-creating processes, and consequences are some of the aspects of content marketing that have been explored by academics (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019; Taiminen & Ranaweera, 2019). Attempts to define and conceptualize content and content marketing have also been made (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019; Holliman & Rowley, 2014). In addition, Reinikainen et al. have highlighted (2018) a lack of academic knowledge on the logic of content creation and content life cycle. Kilgour, Sasser, and Larke (2015) introduced a hierarchy of content marketing that can enhance customer engagement and achieve social media objectives more efficiently. Finally, a recent study by Chen, Xie, Yang and Kim (2019) revealed the positive effect of social media content marketing on brand attitudes, loyalty, and buying intentions. Content marketing in business-to-business contexts has also received some

academic attention recently (Holliman & Rowley, 2014; Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016; Wang et al., 2019).

Nowadays, social media is a centerpiece in the portfolio of communication channels applied by marketing professionals (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). Facebook is especially important as today it is the largest social network worldwide with 2.7 billion active users (Statista, 2020b). It has been one of the most rapidly growing SNSs that has affected how public relations are managed at organizations (McCorkindale, 2010). Managing a business Facebook Page can nurture relationships with the customers and eventually increase profits (Kumar et al., 2016). In Finland, social media users amounted to 80.4 percent of the total population in January 2021 (Kepios, 2021). Among different social networks, Facebook has been holding the most social media market share in Finland since 2009 (StatCounter, 2020). Thus, it is important to understand how Finnish plant protein producers can leverage content marketing on Facebook to achieve their business goals.

### **1.3 Research aim and question**

Even though content marketing is actively practiced, it was discovered that academic literature on this topic is rather scarce. Furthermore, there is not much research about Facebook content marketing for Finnish plant protein producers, which are currently on the rise and would benefit from better insight into this subject. In response to these theoretical and practical knowledge gaps, this study offers a review of relevant academic literature and unique empirical insights into the current Facebook content marketing practices of Finnish plant protein producers. The thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with five representatives of Finnish plant protein producers revealed their current content planning, production, and evaluation practices. In addition, the content analysis of the Facebook posts published by the participating companies helped to identify the main content types, goals, and priorities of their posts. By combining two data collection methods, it was possible to achieve a more profound understanding of the subject and answer the research question more completely. Specifically, the thematic analysis suggested improvements for the coding framework of the content analysis while the content analysis allowed to observe how the participating companies implemented the practices they discussed in the interviews.

The research aim was defined as:

- To investigate current Facebook content marketing activities of Finnish plant-based protein producers.

The following research question was formulated to achieve the research aim:

- How do Finnish plant-based protein producers conduct content marketing on Facebook?

With this question, the author intended to explore the practical side of content marketing and thus expand previous research on the topic.

## **1.4 Structure of the study**

This study consists of four main chapters: "Literature review", "Methodology", "Findings and Discussion", and "Conclusion". The "Literature review" chapter provides theoretical background of the investigated phenomenon, including topics related to public relations, digital marketing, social media, consumer behavior on Facebook, content marketing, and communication with vegan consumers. The "Methodology" chapter justifies the research design used in this study and presents the procedures undertaken in the empirical study. Specifically, data collection and analysis methods are presented. The "Findings and Discussion" chapter presents key empirical findings on the research question. Findings from the thematic analysis of the interviews are presented first, followed by the findings from the content analysis of the Facebook posts collection. The "Conclusion" chapter provides theoretical and practical implications, limitations and evaluation of the study, and suggestions for future research. The list of references is presented after the "Conclusion" chapter. The appendices consist of the interview guide, excerpt from the coding sheet, and coding framework.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, the author overviews major academic developments to evaluate the state of the knowledge on the investigated phenomenon. This literature review is structured thematically, meaning that the discussion is organized in themes that are important to the current research (Saunders et al., 2019). First, broader themes such as digital marketing are examined, and then more specific issues such as social media are brought into focus. The author also attempts to link previous findings with the investigated phenomenon to highlight the research gap that this thesis aims to address. Thus, this literature review is essential for broadening the understanding of the topic and identifying the lacking knowledge (Hair et al., 2015).

### 2.1 Marketing and PR

Marketing is defined as the activity and institutions for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that provide value for various stakeholders (American Marketing Association, 2021). Today's successful organizations are customer-centric and strongly committed to marketing. As a fundamental business function, marketing is about managing profitable customer relationships which allows companies to create value and receive it in return. Marketing aims at bringing new customers using value promises and growing the existing customer base by delivering satisfaction. By knowing the customer needs, developing valuable products, setting up pricing and distribution, marketers can accelerate sales (Kotler, 2013).

One of the main concepts in modern marketing is the marketing mix. The marketing mix consists of tactics that foster the desirable response from the target audience. There are many possible elements in the marketing mix, which can be classified into four groups known as the four Ps: Product, Price, Place, and Promotion. Public relations (PR) is an important element in a firm's marketing mix, specifically in Promotion. The goal of PR is to build positive relations with stakeholders by obtaining favorable publicity, creating a good corporate image, and managing unfortunate events. PR encompasses press releases, sponsorships, special events, and web pages. (Kotler, 2013).

In recent years, PR has shifted from trying to control public opinions to nurturing relationships with stakeholders (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000). One of the determinants in this shift was the introduction of the World Wide Web (WWW). The Web captured the attention of PR practitioners already twenty years ago. It is proved to be an effective tool for disseminating information and establishing dynamic and lasting relationships with the public. Moreover, web

communication can be personalized and thus promote relationships with the target audience (Kent & Taylor, 1998).

The WWW is not the ultimate solution for better relations with the public, though. Building mutually beneficial relationships online is a long-term process that requires commitment. The way in which the Web is utilized determines whether the relationships will flourish or break apart. Thus, strategic use of the WWW along with dialogic communication are considered to be some of the best ways for organizations to develop relationships with their public. (Kent & Taylor, 1998).

Kent and Taylor (1998) suggest that in dialogic communication the communication itself is the goal of the relationships. Specifically, dialogue is characterized by genuineness, accurate empathetic understanding, unconditional positive regard, presentness, spirit of mutual equality, and a supportive psychological climate (Johannesen, 1971). Dialogue is the product of two-way symmetrical communication and entails cooperative relationships. Therefore, effective dialogic relationships on the Web require responding to the public's questions and concerns, providing useful and trustworthy information, maintaining return visits, ease of use, and conservation of visitors (Kent & Taylor, 1998). Dialogue is regarded as one of the most ethical modes of communication since it mitigates power relationships, encourages empathy, and aims to engage the parties in conversation and decision-making (Taylor & Kent, 2014). As a consequence, dialogue promotes two-way relationships with the stakeholders which in turn can enhance organizational effectiveness (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Kent and Taylor's dialogic approach to communication inspired numerous digital marketing studies which determine to what level organizations actually maintain dialogue on social media (Brubaker & Wilson, 2018).

The opposites of dialogue are one-way communication modes such as propaganda and monologue. Social networks, advertising, and other mass media are often used in this manner (Taylor & Kent, 2014). Even though two-way interaction is considered to be a preferable communication mode, one-way communication is still an important method of disseminating information (Devin & Lane, 2014).

Regarding the investigated phenomenon, content marketing promotes two-way communication as it delivers value to the audience. The key principle of content marketing is to be helpful to the audience, which improves consumer engagement, trust, and relationships. For instance, assisting consumers, educating them, and answering queries online contributes to dialogic relationships (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). Thus, the importance of content marketing for successful marketing and PR cannot be overlooked.

## 2.2 Digital marketing

Over the last twenty years, technological innovations have digitalized consumer behavior and hence marketing communications. For instance, social media has enabled consumers to act as brand advocates through word-of-mouth (WOM). This transformation resulted in the growth of digital marketing (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). Especially, today's digital marketing embraces social, inbound, and content marketing (Chaffey & Smith, 2017).

Digital marketing does not replace the traditional one. Actually, they coexist across the customer journey. Traditional marketing such as TV ads is important for raising awareness and interest. As customer-company interaction progresses, digital tools are given more emphasis for stimulating action and advocacy (Kotler et al., 2016). What distinguishes the digital approach is that marketing messages reach the target audience in a direct and personalized manner (Kotler, 2013).

In traditional marketing, organizations try to control brand messages and customer relationships. In other words, consumers play a rather passive role by being message receivers. Today, in the era of interactive media, marketers do not possess as much control over communications due to the dynamic nature of the Web (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010). Contemporary digital marketing is not equal to enhanced direct marketing, as some anticipated. It was predicted that novel digital tools would allow penetrating even deeper into customers' lives than broadcast media. In reality, not only marketers have gained computational power as a result of this marketing transformation. In fact, consumers have obtained countervailing computational power. Unlike uninvolved mass media audiences, now consumers can filter marketing interventions through ad-blocking software, for instance. Therefore, marketing practitioners need to adopt new philosophies as the age of interruptive media fades away and direct marketing is not as effective anymore (Deighton & Kornfeld, 2009).

The evolution of interactive media has begun with video games in the 1970s, continuing with the Arpanet network and computers in the 1980s, and the Internet in the 1990s. Ordinary people had been surfing the Web since the introduction of Mosaic web browser in 1993. Finally, the early 21<sup>st</sup> century witnessed the inception of Web 2.0 (Deighton & Kornfeld, 2009; Neuendorf, 2017). Web 2.0 platforms such as blogs have revolutionized content creation because their interfaces require almost no technical skills. As a result, the general public was empowered to share messages online and professional content producers stopped being the only media outlets. Previously, organizational communications were available and targeted to a limited group of stakeholders whereas today such information as corporate social responsibility statements is often freely accessible online. (Neuendorf, 2017).

It is predicted that 66 percent of the world population (5.3 billion) will have Internet access by 2023 (Cisco, 2020). Global connectivity may be the greatest

transformation in the history of marketing, which has altered major beliefs about customers, products, and brand management. Connectivity also significantly decreases the cost of interaction between companies and customers. As a result, entering new markets becomes easier and brand building speeds up. The world has already seen numerous examples of how connectivity transformed long-established business sectors. For instance, Amazon has disturbed brick-and-mortar bookstores and the publishing industry. However, connectivity should be viewed not only as infrastructure but as a strategic tool for delivering superior customer experience (Kotler et al., 2016).

New media landscape and Web 2.0 introduced two-way communication with consumers which significantly affected business strategies. Brands realized the power of social media for engaging with consumers, generating awareness, promoting, and measuring purchase-related behaviors. For example, developing a Facebook page can nurture relationships with the target audience, increase customer lifetime value, and eventually improve profits. Hence, social media marketing can influence business outcomes and should be embraced in the strategies. (Ahmad et al., 2016; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010; Kumar et al., 2016).

## **2.3 Social media**

By employing mobile and internet-based technologies, social media offers interactive platforms where people share and co-create user-generated content (UGC). These platforms are also called social network sites (SNSs) which can be defined as web services that allow individuals to create profiles and connect with other users (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Social media has already received considerable academic attention (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). In 2010, it was one of the most researched topics in PR. Indeed, social media has greatly impacted communications hence it is necessary to research how organizations use it (McCorkindale, 2010). Social media marketing actively developed in the period from 2005 to 2010, when all types of businesses started using Facebook as a marketing channel. Later, academics began researching consumer behavior on dominating social networks, including Facebook. Finally, researchers addressed firm-generated content such as Facebook posts, which is often referred to as content marketing (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016).

Previously, consumers used the Internet mainly to explore various content, whereas now they engage in content creation and discussion, and interact with corporate SNSs in various ways. For instance, they can comment on the company and its products, support or criticize it, and share about it with their social connections. This shift in online consumer behavior significantly affects the reputation, sales, and even survival of companies (Kietzmann et al., 2011; Men & Tsai, 2013)

More organizations, from government departments to small businesses, agree that social media improves financial, PR, and marketing results so they

actively invest in their social media presence (Macnamara, Jim & Zerfass, 2012; Yoon et al., 2018). In addition, social media provides extensive data about consumers which makes it a powerful market intelligence tool (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). Many marketing activities can be carried out through social media, including customer relationships management, customer service, lead generation, paid advertising, and branding. As a consequence, social media activities can increase brand awareness, customer engagement, loyalty, WOM, and visits to offline brand locations (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Sabate et al., 2014). Thus, corporate SNSs are essential platforms where the public interacts with organizations and meaningful stakeholder relationships are built (Men & Tsai, 2013).

### **2.3.1 Facebook**

Social media has a significant impact on marketing and PR hence it is important to recognize how organizations use the biggest social network in the world – Facebook. As of the fourth quarter of 2020, Facebook had over 2.7 billion monthly active users (Statista, 2020). Facebook is similar to other SNSs in terms of functionality: users can create profiles, connect with others, and publish various content (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). This way, Facebook helps its users to communicate more efficiently by providing technologies that make real-life social connections digital. Facebook was launched in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg when he was a student at Harvard University. In the beginning, Facebook was available only to Harvard students. Eventually, with new capacity and functionality, it extended its reach to anyone over 13 years old (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2012). In 2012, active Facebook users exceeded one billion, making it the first social network ever to achieve this (Statista, 2020). Finally, Facebook became an online tool for businesses to directly connect with customers (Scott, 2015).

Organizations use Facebook for various purposes. Firstly, organizations can implement information dissemination by posting news releases and corporate social responsibility activities. Secondly, comparable to advertising, businesses can promote their content to the News Feeds of people who cannot be reached organically (Mochon et al., 2017). Thirdly, Facebook can be used for engaging with customers in different situations such as responding to product complaints (McCorkindale, 2010). In addition, customers can share their experience with the company and its products on Facebook. Therefore, unlike websites, corporate SNSs foster communities, in which stakeholders can connect with each other and the brand (Men & Tsai, 2013). Finally, on Facebook PR professionals have access to solid measures of the audience's immediate reactions to organizational messages such as numbers of likes, comments, and shares (Kim & Yang, 2017).

#### ***Facebook Page***

Already over a decade ago, organizations started using Facebook Pages to reach, maintain relationships with, and engage both existing and future publics (McCorkindale, 2010). A Facebook Page is a free public web page where organizations can reach their target audience by publishing posts and chatting with consumers. The Page can also include contact details, upcoming events, and open vacancies (Facebook, 2020). It can be compared to a personal Facebook profile but for a brand (Scott, 2015). When someone likes or follows a Page, they start receiving updates from that Page in their News Feed (Facebook, 2020). The followers can interact with the Page's content by liking, sharing, or commenting. These interactions can promote the Page's content to the News Feeds of the followers' friends. As a consequence, the followers can foster content distribution (Sabate et al., 2014).

Facebook Pages allow organizations to achieve specific business goals, build loyalty, stimulate profitable actions, and promote themselves with ads (Facebook, 2020). To stimulate the people's interest in a product, the organizations can share useful information, a background story, and visuals such as images or videos (Reinikainen et al., 2018). The performance of a Page can be analyzed with Insights tool which registers what and how often followers like, comment, or share (Facebook, 2020). In addition, customers can generate WOM by interacting with each other and the company on the Page (Mochon et al., 2017).

The amount of resources available for Facebook varies between organizations. Higher Facebook budgets allow hiring people for managing the Page or purchasing promotion. As a result, more users can be reached via sponsored posts, which in turn may generate more likes or comments. (Kim & Yang, 2017).

Messages published by organizations on Facebook can be divided into two posting types: created and shared. Before social media, companies had to always create messages to communicate with the public online. Now they have an opportunity to post content generated by others on their SNS pages. A shared message can save resources such as time and money. However, its usefulness may be lower in comparison with a created message. The reason behind it is that a created message speaks to the interests and concerns of the public in a more direct manner than a shared message. Thus, a created message will more likely engage the audience. (Kim & Yang, 2017).

### ***Consumer behavior on Facebook***

Today customers actively engage with brands online instead of passively receiving information as it was before (Yoon et al., 2018). In general, social media behavior can be divided into three levels: consuming, contributing, and creating. Consuming is a participative behavior such as watching or reading which requires no input. The next level is contributing which implies interaction with content such as commenting. Creating is the top-level behavior which involves producing and publishing content (Muntinga et al., 2011). Similarly, Facebook's "like", "comment", and "share" represent different levels of involvement. The

consumer's choice of interaction depends on the features of the Facebook post (Kim & Yang, 2017). For example, the question "What are your weekend plans?" is likely to motivate comments than likes (Sabate et al., 2014). "Like" needs the least commitment and time, whereas "comment" requires additional cognitive effort (Kim & Yang, 2017; Sabate et al., 2014; Yoon et al., 2018). The highest commitment is involved in sharing because a shared post constitutes one's self-presentation on Facebook. In other words, when sharing a post, users are evaluating its value more meticulously in relation to self than when commenting (Kim & Yang, 2017).

When customers are more engaged on Facebook, their awareness, attitude, loyalty, and spending are improved. Hence, consumer engagement with Facebook Pages is important because it can influence the business results. In their research, Yoon et al. (2018) found that as the total number of received comments increased, the company revenues also increased. In addition, the positive average tone of comments correlated with improved revenues. Accordingly, social media professionals are recommended to focus on generating engagement to improve business outcomes.

Engagement is important because social media content is more likely to be effective when the audience is engaged (Jiang et al., 2016). Syrdal and Briggs (2018) define engagement in social media as a state of mind that does not necessarily result in interactivity such as likes but rather being absorbed by the content. Sometimes users interact with the content they are not engaged with or have not even consumed yet. Thus, the interaction does not always mean engagement. Nevertheless, generating more Facebook likes is still worthwhile since it can motivate other users to interact as well. When people see brand content has earned endorsement, they are more likely to interact too (Brubaker & Wilson, 2018).

Research shows that the audience reaction and engagement are influenced by the message characteristics of the Facebook post (Brubaker & Wilson, 2018; Kim & Yang, 2017). Combining different message forms such as text, photos, and videos in a single post can improve engagement (Kim & Yang, 2017). Engagement on Facebook is also enabled with shares. When a person clicks "share" on a brand's post, the entire post is published on that person's own wall and in the News Feeds of their friends. Posts that are often shared include videos, sale deals, or the brand's success stories (Malhotra et al., 2013). One of the reasons for sharing is also emotions evoked by the content. It was found that content that stimulates strong positive or negative emotions is more viral (Berger & Milkman, 2012). In addition, content is more likely to be passed along in social networks if it is helpful or allows a person who shared to stand out from the crowd (Ho, Jason Y. C. & Dempsey, 2010). Thus, sharing allows the followers to become brand ambassadors and spread the brand messages in their networks (Malhotra et al., 2013).

Posts that are liked are also often shared. There are numerous ways to increase likes on Facebook posts. Firstly, it is recommended to use photos as they

are personal and quickly communicate the message (Malhotra et al., 2013). Sabate et al. (2014) agree that the inclusion of images and videos increases likes. In a North American survey, HubSpot (2020) found that imagery posts are the most effective for increasing audience engagement.

Secondly, it is important to keep the posts topical by addressing the current events, holidays, and other important happenings. Thirdly, informational posts are likely to receive more likes. These posts can discuss the brand's history, business operations, or product manufacturing. On top of that, humanizing the brand by adding emotions to the posts is important. It is recommended to view Facebook as a personal communication platform rather than a broadcast medium because followers like messages that represent a brand as a living object. Another essential feature that helps increasing likes is humor. Considering that most brand posts are not usually funny, messages that make the audience chuckle are appreciated. Finally, asking the followers to like the post can be effective. However, this should be done in moderation to avoid diminishing returns (Malhotra et al., 2013).

Comments are a place that can encourage the followers to communicate with each other and the brand. These open conversations allow soliciting information, obtaining feedback, and understanding the consumers better. For instance, new product ideas or improvements to current offerings can be created during such Facebook interactions. Facebook's poll feature, which offers a question for the audience with a predetermined set of answers, can be used as an engagement tool as well. Users only need to click on their reply and Facebook will visualize the results. (Malhotra et al., 2013). Thus, by soliciting responses two-way communication can be promoted thru Facebook content (Kim & Yang, 2017).

The research also suggests that links are negatively affecting comments. When a link is attached to a Facebook post, the audience needs to visit that link to be able to say something about it. However, navigating away from the post increases the risk of not coming back for commenting (Sabate et al., 2014).

The timing of a Facebook post may affect the number of comments as well. It is suggested that during business hours when people are in front of a computer, it is easier to leave a comment. Whereas, outside business hours people are usually using Facebook from mobile devices, which makes it more difficult to comment. Thus, Facebook posts that are uploaded during business hours are more likely to get comments (Sabate et al., 2014).

Despite SNSs are an attractive channel for marketers, it is important to remember that brands are intruders on peer-to-peer sites because they were not built for commerce. Thus, marketers must know how to assimilate and communicate properly on social media (Deighton & Kornfeld, 2009). To reap all benefits from a social media strategy, a content strategy is essential (Chaffey & Smith, 2017). Indeed, content is the cornerstone of posting on social media. Therefore, content marketing on social media is key for successful online communications that attract the target audience and keep them engaged (Ahmad et al., 2016).

## 2.4 Content marketing

### 2.4.1 Scale of content marketing

An increasing number of companies are realizing that digital marketing technologies are worthless without a content strategy (Pulizzi, 2012). The limitations of traditional marketing have also contributed to the increased use of content marketing (Baltes, 2015). Businesses of all types are attracted by the effectiveness promised by this marketing approach (Content Marketing Institute, 2021; Pulizzi, 2012). According to Statista (2020a), 91% of organizations worldwide are using content marketing. Content marketing is implemented not only by well-known brands such as Rolex, Nike, Coca-Cola, Procter & Gamble, and Cisco but also by small and medium companies from various industries around the globe (Baltes, 2015; Hollebeek & Macky, 2019; Malthouse et al., 2013). In 2019, a global survey revealed that 46% of companies spent up to 10 thousand U.S. dollars on content marketing that year (Statista, 2020). HubSpot's (2020) international research shows that 70% of companies actively invested in content marketing in 2019.

### 2.4.2 Defining content marketing

In the era of digitalization, companies need to put more effort into content marketing, an essential component of digital marketing. The success of online communications depends on the quality of content marketing (Baltes, 2015). The growing importance of content quality has contributed to content marketing becoming a separate marketing discipline (Pazeraite & Repoviene, 2016). Nevertheless, the term "content marketing" has been rather nebulous (Ho et al., 2020; Holliman & Rowley, 2014; Pazeraite & Repoviene, 2016). Frequently used buzzwords and various perspectives on content marketing have caused confusion (Ho et al., 2020).

Content marketing is generally understood as a strategic marketing approach, which involves creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a defined audience (Content Marketing Institute, 2021). Similarly, Hennig-Thurau et al. (2010) explain content marketing on digital platforms as the creation and dissemination of valuable brand content to current and future customers to improve brand engagement, trust, and relationships. Macnamara (2014) refers to content marketing as the 21<sup>st</sup> century version of corporate publishing, while Baltes (2015) describes it as what organizations create and share to tell their stories and gain consumer trust. Verčič & Verčič (2016) suggest that content marketing is a hybrid form of communication focused on content strategy. Participants of the study by Järvinen and Taiminen (2016) defined content marketing as creating and distributing various content to target consumers in a way that engages them and adds value to their customer experience. In their recent work, Hollebeek and Macky (2019)

conceptualized content marketing as the creation and distribution of relevant, valuable, brand-related content to current and future customers via digital platforms to improve brand engagement, trust, and relationships. They also proposed that digital content marketing has two main components, namely content and marketing. By analyzing these components, they found that relevance and value are at the core of content marketing, which can be delivered to the audience in various forms such as education or entertainment.

The idea of content marketing is based on the Internet's pull mechanics. This mechanics is often associated with inbound marketing, which naturally involves content (Chaffey & Smith, 2013; Halligan & Shah, 2014). Inbound marketing can be defined as sharing relevant and useful content through social networks and search engines to be easily found by consumers. It helps businesses to generate leads by matching how products are marketed with the ways customers learn about and buy products (Halligan & Shah, 2014). Inbound marketing strategies invite companies to collect information on their consumers and improve their customer relationships management as a result (Malthouse et al., 2013). Effective inbound marketing requires time and creativity but not necessarily high financial investments (Halligan & Shah, 2014). In contrast, traditional communications are often called push media because messages are broadcasted by the company and there is little interaction with the stakeholders. In other words, it is outbound or interruptive marketing (Chaffey & Smith, 2013; Halligan & Shah, 2014). For instance, advertising may often be a direct persuasion to buy, which is the opposite of content marketing (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010; Hollebeek & Macky, 2019; Pulizzi, 2012).

### **2.4.3 Confusion about content marketing**

Confusion regarding content marketing partly stems from semantics. Content marketing is sometimes mistaken for marketing of content or marketing using content. Certainly, all marketing uses some content yet using content for marketing purposes is not always content marketing (Ho et al., 2020). Another misleading term is "digital content marketing" which can refer to the marketing of digital products such as games, music, software, and virtual pet (Holliman & Rowley, 2014; Koiso-Kanttila, 2004; Rowley, 2008). Native advertising is also confused with content marketing (Ho et al., 2020). Even though both content marketing and native advertising provide useful content to the customers, they are quite different from each other. The primary focus of content marketing is adding value to the customer experience. For example, a consulting company can educate its customers on relevant topics using whitepapers (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). Whereas, native advertising attempts to resemble the host's content thus misleading the audience alike traditional advertising (Wojdyski & Evans, 2016). Copywriting may be misinterpreted as content marketing too. The goal of content marketing to increase brand awareness and loyalty, while copywriting alike advertising aims at encouraging desired behaviors such as purchasing (Baltes, 2015).

#### **2.4.4 Brief history of content marketing**

The oldest example of content marketing is Benjamin Franklin's yearly Poor Richard's Almanac, which was launched in 1732 for promoting his printing business. One of the most prominent examples, however, is John Deere's magazine *The Furrow*, which was launched in 1895 (Pulizzi, 2016). The magazine's goal was not to sell John Deere's equipment directly but rather to educate farmers on the latest technologies and business practices. As a result, John Deere became an opinion leader among farmers, which stimulated their loyalty. A similar strategy was used by JELL-O at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when they gave away free recipe books to their buyers (Pulizzi, 2012). Eventually, the rapid development of information and communications technologies fostered content marketing and allowed sharing content at almost no cost (Pulizzi, 2012; Verčič & Verčič, 2016). Now companies that are not originally from the media industry can distribute high-quality content alike traditional media (Malthouse et al., 2013).

#### **2.4.5 Content marketing as owned social media**

To better understand content marketing, it is useful to categorize it among owned, earned, and paid media. Owned social media is controlled brand communications shared via own social platforms such as a Facebook Page, while earned social media is not-paid brand-related content shared by other entities such as consumers or influencers. Even though earned media are essentially unpaid, they still require commitment to creating compelling content (Chaffey & Smith, 2013; Colicev et al., 2018). Content marketing is considered to be an owned social media activity aimed at generating earned social media (Ho et al., 2020). Previously, PR used to focus on paid media, which implied purchasing reach and conversions through such instruments as display ad networks or affiliate marketing (Chaffey & Smith, 2013).

#### **2.4.6 Importance of content marketing**

The role of content marketing in marketing strategies, marketing mix, and other marketing functions is growing (Content Marketing Institute, 2021; Ho et al., 2020; Pulizzi, 2012). For example, a social media strategy cannot be formulated without a content strategy (Content Marketing Institute, 2021). Content marketing is not always realized via digital channels yet it is essential in social media since brand-consumer relations are becoming increasingly digitalized (Ho et al., 2020). In other words, content marketing is inherent to marketing and is vital for the future of digital marketing (Baltes, 2015).

Today, consumers are trying to avoid interruptive marketing such as online banners hence the effectiveness of traditional advertising declines and content marketing becomes more important (Ho et al., 2020; Malthouse et al., 2013). Similar to advertising, content marketing aims at improving consumer brand

perception and ultimately sales. However, unlike advertising content marketing achieves that by improving consumer engagement, trust, and relationships, which grow sales indirectly (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). Instead of promoting products, compelling content positions the company as a valuable business partner. As a result, high-quality content can transform prospects into buyers (Scott, 2015). Thus, content marketing is often used in addition to or even as a substitute for traditional advertising (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). As suggested by Pulizzi (2012), the future of marketing is a combination of marketing and publishing.

#### **2.4.7 Purposes of content marketing**

Researchers and practitioners generally agree on the purposes of content marketing (Ho et al., 2020). Among the relationship-related purposes are stimulating profitable customer behavior as well as attracting and retaining the target audience (Content Marketing Institute, 2021; Pulizzi, 2012). Specifically, it is suggested that educating consumers via content is the key contribution of content marketing to building lasting customer relationships and improving brand loyalty (Baltes, 2015). Hollebeek and Macky (2019) agree that content marketing is a promising customer relationship tool that greatly expands relationship marketing. Other major goals of content marketing include fostering brand engagement and maintaining a trusted brand status. This is possible by avoiding explicit selling language (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). Pulizzi (2012) agrees that removing the brand from content promotes trust, credibility, and sharing rate. For example, the short film “Real Beauty Sketches” by Dove serves to educate the buyers and raise appreciation for their bodies without an obvious sales appeal (Ahmad et al., 2016). Finally, content marketing facilitates search engine optimization because search engines rank websites with high-quality content better, which improves business outcomes as a result (Chaffey & Smith, 2017; Content Marketing Institute, 2021; Scott, 2015). For example, an eco-resort in Central America publishes valuable content about the surrounding landmarks and wildlife. Many key phrases that people search for about that area are leading to their website articles. As a result, 80 percent of new bookings come directly from this content marketing activity (Scott, 2015). To conclude, the major purpose of content marketing is to fulfil the audience’s needs and solve their issues, not to advertise the company’s products (Baltes, 2015; Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016; Scott, 2015).

#### **2.4.8 Benefits of content marketing**

Content marketing offers various benefits to organizations. Regarding brand health, it can positively influence brand awareness and loyalty (Chen et al., 2019; Content Marketing Institute, 2021; Holliman & Rowley, 2014). Customers get value from repeated exposure to relevant content. As a result, they form favorable brand attitudes, stronger brand loyalty, and increased purchase

intentions (Chen et al., 2019). Increased sales are another major benefit of content marketing (Content Marketing Institute, 2021; Gagnon, 2014; Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). Specifically, content marketing helps to demonstrate the company's unique selling points and position it as a market leader and preferred seller (Gagnon, 2014). Consequently, content marketing facilitates the lead generation and conversion (Gagnon, 2014; Holliman & Rowley, 2014). High-quality content marketing also triggers audience engagement (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Gagnon, 2014; Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). Finally, content marketing is a way to deliver value to customers, which in turn enables a two-way communication audience (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019; Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016). As was already mentioned, two-way communication is a preferred mode of communication with the stakeholders which can enhance organizational effectiveness (Devin & Lane, 2014; Kent & Taylor, 2002). Therefore, the production and dissemination of valuable content via social media is beneficial in multiple ways.

The key benefits of content marketing found from literature are summarized in the list below:

- Cultivating relationships with the publics and increased engagement (Brubaker & Wilson, 2018)
- Higher search engine rankings (Scott, 2015)
- Promoting sales through thought leadership (Scott, 2015)
- Lead generation and development (Gagnon, 2014)
- Reinforcing positioning on the market (Gagnon, 2014)
- Building positive brand image (Baltes, 2015)
- Engaging and retaining the target audience in the long term (Baltes, 2015)
- Strengthening brand loyalty (Baltes, 2015)
- Building lasting relationships with the target audience (Baltes, 2015)
- Stimulating business growth while acquiring leads at low costs (Chaffey & Smith, 2017)
- Gaining visibility in social media (Chaffey & Smith, 2017)
- Gaining positive online reputation (Scott, 2015)
- Improved brand health and awareness (Ahmad et al., 2016)

Often companies do not prioritize content among other marketing expenses. In his book, David Meerman Scott (2015) recommends perceiving content creation costs in a different manner. A short-term marketing expense such as Google AdWords loses its effect as soon as the company stops paying for it. In contrast, content retains its value beyond a particular month it was paid for and keeps attracting people from search engines. Often, the results outweigh the initial investments, and benefits accumulate with time. Thus, investing in content should be regarded as creating a long-term asset rather than a short-term expense. Pulizzi (2012) agrees that companies do not profit from the content directly but rather in the long run by attracting and retaining customers.

### 2.4.9 Content marketing strategy

A well-thought and skillfully executed content strategy helps to achieve organizational goals by stimulating desirable consumer behavior (Scott, 2015). It can also strengthen relationships with the target audience by constructing a positive brand image (Baltes, 2015). Developing a content marketing strategy is a complex and dynamic process (Pazeraite & Repoviene, 2016). Each organization should have a unique content strategy that includes objectives, types of content marketing used, research of the target audience, promotion, schedule, and evaluation metrics (Baltes, 2015). Before formulating a content strategy, it is essential to clearly define organizational goals so that they steer effective content creation which draws customers into the sales funnel and motivates them to take profitable actions (Scott, 2015).

The success of a content marketing strategy depends on understanding the consumers' expectations, information needs, and social media behavior, which allows matching messages to different audiences thus enhancing their engagement (Kilgour et al., 2015; Reinikainen et al., 2018). In other words, analyzing the target audience's demography, issues, and interests helps to determine valuable content themes and activities which motivate the customers to purchase (Baltes, 2015; Scott, 2015). On practice, companies should examine the audience data, observe their conversations, and define approaches for various customer segments depending on their content needs. For instance, prospective customers should receive medium-weight content that arouses interest in the product, whereas more comprehensive content would suit customers with greater product knowledge (Kilgour et al., 2015). Learning about the target audience's needs is enabled by social media listening, which implies monitoring the audience's engagement with content and responding to their comments (Brubaker & Wilson, 2018; Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016).

The process of learning about consumers and producing content that stimulates purchasing is also known as lead nurturing. More specifically, nurturing refers to attracting, educating, and engaging marketing leads through valuable and timely content, which in turn encourages them to buy. At the early stages of nurturing, a customer might need general content about broader themes. After learning more about the customer, the content can become personalized hence promoting sales (Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016). In addition, creating buyer personas and analyzing the buyer's journey can facilitate learning about the consumers and defining the most productive ways of reaching them (Chaffey & Smith, 2017; Scott, 2015).

Apart from getting familiar with the target audience, organizations should consider the clarity and predictability of content in their strategies. Every day people are navigating through a vast volume of online content. Publishing clear and predictable messages is crucial for retaining the audience and keeping them engaged. Otherwise, they will become confused and lose interest in the brand. (Reinikainen et al., 2018).

As a part of a content marketing strategy, internal staff can be invited to participate in content creation (Pulizzi, 2012). Senior executives usually possess insight into issues and trends in the industry, whereas product development staff can tell about product applications, new product features, or production. The sales and customer support departments also have valuable information on how customers are using and benefitting from the product (Gagnon, 2014). Thus, by interviewing expert employees, marketers can create content out of the conversation (Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016). Assigning a Chief Storyteller or Chief Content Officer can help to coordinate the content inside and outside the company (Pulizzi, 2012).

#### **2.4.10 Measuring content marketing**

Evaluation and measurement are an essential part of any organization's content strategy (Baltes, 2015; Reinikainen et al., 2018). It is also an important starting point for enhancing content marketing (Chaffey & Smith, 2017). However, there are no standardized metrics for all companies (Reinikainen et al., 2018). For instance, Baltes (2015) suggests considering the following metrics: Google Analytics, traffic, open rate, forwards, likes, leads generated, and sales deals. Schamari & Schaefer (2015) state that consumer engagement is one of the main determinants of successful social media activities. To measure content marketing engagement, the number of leads generated is used (Statista, 2020). According to HubSpot (2020), total sales is the most common measurement of success for content marketing. To conclude, it is important to recognize that social media and content marketing are not always easily measurable or showing cause and effect relationships (Chaffey & Smith, 2017). Therefore, evaluation of content marketing should be personalized according to the brand's own targets which are derived from strategic goals (Reinikainen et al., 2018).

#### **2.4.11 Common mistakes in content marketing**

One of the major challenges of content marketing is that even when a company puts much effort into it by regularly producing content, there may be not much output. Often, this may happen due to unnoticed content marketing mistakes such as lack of promotion, overcomplicated content, excessive focus on the brand, and unoriginal content. If content marketing does not yield much result, the problem may lie in the insufficient promotion. Instead of increasing the volume of produced content, companies may need to focus on investing more in promotion. Regarding the style of content, it should be more user-friendly, straightforward, and conversational. The sophisticated texts required in formal settings will not work online. Rather, the text written for social media should be simple, consisting of fewer lines, and using bullet-point or numbered lists for encouraging the audience to read. Another common mistake is posting too much self-promotional content that does not offer any value to the audience. As was already discussed, companies should produce content that is relevant and

valuable to the audience to improve the performance of content marketing. Lastly, it is important to include personality, authenticity, and originality to the company's content. Adding a unique point of view and openly discussing the company's beliefs and values is important for capturing the audience's attention and standing out from the competition. (Roberge, 2018).

## **2.5 Content**

### **2.5.1 Defining content**

The term "content" originates from the publishing industry and refers to words, images, and motion graphics, which have to be interesting enough for the target audience to maintain their attention (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). In today's digital landscape, content can be described as a mix of static media such as web pages and dynamic rich media that promote interaction. Content can also be compared with the glue that connects digital platforms and digital media, which customers consume on their way to purchase (Chaffey & Smith, 2017). Another definition is suggested by Gagnon (2014), who described content as a base of substantive and reasonably objective information created by the company or for it.

### **2.5.2 Purposes of content**

Traditionally, marketing professionals used content to provide value expectations. In contrast, today the content itself becomes the value for the consumers (Ho et al., 2020). Specifically, content helps with favorable positioning on the market by allowing the company to demonstrate thought leadership hence engaging the customers and promoting purchases (Gagnon, 2014; Pazeraite & Repoviene, 2016). Instead of direct promotion, thought leadership content addresses the customers' needs without explicitly mentioning the brand hence contributing to the company's positive reputation and trusted brand status. For instance, a catering company can produce useful videos about planning parties instead of directly promoting its services. This way, the caterer earns a competitive advantage by educating the potential customers about their problems. When the time comes, this caterer is more likely to be hired owing to demonstrated expertise and thought leadership (Scott, 2015).

### **2.5.3 UGC, USC, and IMO**

Content can be distinguished into user-generated content (UGC), user-selected content (USC), and interactive media output (IMO) (Neuendorf, 2017). UGC includes product reviews, blogs, tweets, photos, videos, and stories shared by users (Men & Tsai, 2013; Neuendorf, 2017). UGC can be generated while

customers are interacting with each other. For instance, when a customer posts a question and another one replies (Malthouse et al., 2013). Companies are recommended to carefully monitor and timely respond to UGC (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). UGC is especially important for interaction. In fact, to reap the full benefits of social media, it is essential to include interaction in the content strategies. For example, contests can increase UGC, enhance the community dynamics, enrich the content of the company's social media profile, and strengthen engagement (Men & Tsai, 2013). USC entails existing media that are posted, collected, and shared via SNSs. Curated content is a type of USC that implies selecting content that meets the audience's needs instead of being reposted for one's enjoyment. For instance, users of Pinterest and Tumblr accumulate hand-picked content collections meant for others. Thus, USC reflects the message choices of a person rather than content creation. The term "viral" actually refers to the ability to repost content such as photos and videos on Web 2.0 platforms. Another type of online content is IMO such as web-surfing patterns, which is generated as media consumers use interactive media (Neuendorf, 2017).

#### **2.5.4 Types of content**

Content marketing programs require accumulating a wide base of different content in various formats (Gagnon, 2014). Some of the major types of content used by brands appear to be images, infographics, videos, webinars, podcasts, blogs, white papers, e-books, and newsletters (Chaffey & Smith, 2017; Gagnon, 2014; Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016; Pulizzi, 2012; Scott, 2015). Other possible content types are corporate magazines, brochures, case studies, reports, trade publications, articles, executive speeches, FAQs, Q&As, software, and mobile applications (Chaffey & Smith, 2017; Gagnon, 2014; Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016; Pulizzi, 2012; Scott, 2015).

Images have become a widely used PR asset and an essential component of content marketing. All marketing content should include images or a combination of images with texts or videos (Scott, 2015). When posted on social media, images attract the audience's attention hence promoting engagement in the form of likes and comments (Sabate et al., 2014). It is recommended to use originally created images as they are more effective for storytelling and communication with the consumers. Whereas, stock images do not allow sharing the uniqueness of the products and may appear uncaring (Scott, 2015).

Information graphics, or infographics, is another important visual marketing asset. Essentially, it is a graphical representation of complex data or knowledge, which explains processes or tells stories. Often, it is easier to understand a visual representation rather than columns of data. Marketers are increasingly using an infographic to deliver complex data in a useful way, which is valued by the audience. (Scott, 2015).

Videos are a popular PR and marketing tool and a powerful way to demonstrate thought leadership (Scott, 2015). Global research shows that videos are the primary form of media used in content strategies (HubSpot, 2020). Video

content requires the same approach as other content, meaning a video needs to provide buyer personas with valuable information and address their problems. Producing videos may require investment in cameras, microphones, and editing software yet today smartphones can shoot appealing videos too (Scott, 2015).

Companies often turn to webinars to educate the consumers about a problem they can solve for them. A webinar is essentially an online seminar that may include audio, video, and presentation slides. Alike traditional seminars, webinars are a way to gain thought leadership. For example, HubSpot has been hosting webinar series with various guest speakers. Owing to these free webinars and other valuable content, HubSpot has become a trusted resource and a thought leader in inbound marketing, which motivates consumers to learn more about their services. (Scott, 2015).

Podcasts are audio-only content which is usually delivered through a feed service such as Apple Podcasts or other applications. Even though now the medium does not require an iPod, the word “podcast” was derived from iPod. People listen to podcasts while commuting, working out, or doing chores. The podcasting business model is different from radio. Radio stations broadcast to different audiences with different interests within a limited geographical range. In addition, radio broadcasters need many listeners and advertisements to support the business. In contrast, online podcasts can be produced with minimal costs and affordable equipment yet potentially reach a global audience. With podcasts, people are now able to listen to content based on their interests, not on what is mainstreamed. (Scott, 2015).

Blogs are already a mainstream tool for businesses to share their expertise, gain thought leadership and search engine traffic. Blogs should not purely advertise the company’s products, though. Instead, they should cover topics that are specific and relevant to the target audience. It is therefore essential to understand for whom the blog is written for to address their needs. The challenge with blogs is that there are thousands of other blogs so the competition is high. However, if the company’s blog is dedicated to a narrow topic, then it is not competing with many other blogs. Writing about a niche topic might mean that the readership will be rather small yet truly engaged (Scott, 2015).

White papers are a common format for providing specific solutions to business problems (Gagnon, 2014; Scott, 2015). Typically, they introduce technology innovations and products without promoting a particular brand. White papers are an influential marketing instrument that helps decision-makers to justify potential solutions. White papers are often provided for free but with a registration form so the authors can collect the contact details of people who downloaded them (Scott, 2015). The contact list helps to predict what type of content customers might be interested in (Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016).

E-books are usually PDF files that provide useful information and solutions to the consumers’ issues. In comparison with white papers, e-books are written in a lighter style so they are less formal and dense. It is recommended to offer e-books for free without registration. (Scott, 2015).

Email newsletters allow distributing content in small but regular portions. Instead of using emails as another advertising tool, companies should solve the audience's problems alike in other content. (Scott, 2015).

### **2.5.5 Characteristics of high-quality content**

The most important consideration in digital marketing is the quality of content as it affects the levels of interaction and engagement (Baltes, 2015; Brubaker & Wilson, 2018; Pazeraite & Repoviene, 2016). High-quality content can alternatively be described as valuable. Whether a piece of content is valuable is defined by the current information needs and interests of the audience (Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016; Pazeraite & Repoviene, 2016). In other words, valuable content is relevant, useful, and timely (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). Pazeraite and Repoviene (2016) add that high-quality content should also be emotional and unique. Similarly, Reinikainen et al. (2018) propose that high-quality content is informative, unbiased, interesting, meaningful, and entertaining. Naturally, truthfulness is another important characteristic of high-quality content as unreliable information will make content appear negligible (Pazeraite & Repoviene, 2016).

As was previously mentioned, engaging content becomes more important in marketing. An engaged audience stays present and interacts with the company in real-time hence social media content is more likely to be effective (Jiang et al., 2016). Content engages people due to various reasons. Syrdal and Briggs (2018) suggest that engaging content is humorous, entertaining, newsworthy, authentic, and utilitarian. For instance, content can help with decision-making or accomplishing a goal (Chen et al., 2019). Such utilitarian or useful content can also demonstrate the company's knowledge, which helps to stand out from the competition. For example, a company can share its experience in the field, the expertise of the team members, or manufacturing. Such thought leadership content creates a more positive impression in the minds of potential buyers than traditional marketing tools (Gagnon, 2014). As a consequence, informative and useful content can improve brand loyalty (Chen et al., 2019). Content can also provide multiple experiences at a time. For instance, a single online magazine can have articles that are intrinsically enjoyable, such as travel stories, and utilitarian, which provide useful advice about certain destinations (Calder et al., 2009).

Today customers are more selective in the media they consume as the choice of online content may be overwhelming. Companies should therefore obtain a thorough knowledge of the target audience to better satisfy their needs and effectively personalize and promote content according to interests or locations of different consumer groups (Baltes, 2015; Reinikainen et al., 2018). When consumers find the content personally relevant and interesting, they will likely seek, consume, and engage with it (Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2017). Otherwise, flawed knowledge of the audience can result in erroneous content (Baltes, 2015).

Despite offering high-quality content, new brands may face challenges with attracting attention because previous brand experiences influence the perception of content. For instance, people will likely use a recipe from a reliable food brand rather than from an unknown one. Therefore, building trustworthy relationships with the audience is key to successful content. If the business keeps its promises and offers superior products then the content is likely to be evaluated more positively (Reinikainen et al., 2018).

## 2.6 Content marketing aimed at vegan consumers

Mainstreaming plant-based diets has been researched by business and public health academics (Beverland, 2014; Fuentes & Fuentes, 2017; Lea et al., 2006). These studies are important for the current research as they highlight what is effective in communications about a plant-based lifestyle. By understanding the psychology of consumers interested in plant-based meat alternatives, it is possible to identify their content needs and therefore improve the results of content marketing (Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016; Scott, 2015). In the following paragraphs, the author is reviewing several relevant studies, which suggest content for Facebook posts of Finnish plant protein producers.

Traditionally, mostly vegetarians have been consuming meat alternatives. However, today such products appeal to wider audiences, including non-vegetarians (Sadler, 2004). Research suggests that health vegetarians are the ultimate target group for mainstreaming plant-based diets (Beverland, 2014). Lea et al. (2006) also report that followers of a plant-based diet recognize benefits related to self-interest such as weight the most. Health vegetarians base their dietary choice on improving health and avoiding diseases, while ethical vegetarians stand for animal rights and self-denial (Fox & Ward, 2008b). Therefore, Finnish plant protein producers can try using messages related to health improvement in their Facebook posts. For example, a post can present the health benefits of the product using an infographic.

In comparison with vegetarians, vegans tend to have stronger beliefs about consuming meat, animal welfare, and the environment. Ethically-motivated vegans claim more empathy for the suffering of humans and animals. They also display a stronger response in empathy-related brain areas when looking at the animal or human suffering scenes (Ruby, 2012). Thus, in addition to health benefits, Facebook posts of Finnish plant protein producers can discuss the environmental and animal welfare issues.

In general, vegan substitutes are marketed as different from and simultaneously similar to traditional meat and dairy. In other words, marketers are trying to integrate vegan products into established routines of shopping, cooking, and eating. Accordingly, marketing of vegan substitutes is usually aimed at reaching broader segments, growing the customer base, and building a

mass market for these products (Fuentes & Fuentes, 2017). Hence, Finnish plant protein producers can demonstrate how their products can be integrated into typical situations in their Facebook posts. For instance, a post can suggest cooking the usual family dinner with meatballs made from oats instead of the traditional ones by providing a recipe.

According to research, communication messages can be targeted according to the consumer's current phase in adopting a plant-based lifestyle. For instance, advice on obtaining sufficient protein on a vegan diet can help contemplators to progress (Lea et al., 2006). Thus, Finnish plant protein producers can target people with different vegan diet adoption levels with different Facebook posts by discussing topics that are currently important for them.

Beverland (2014) suggests that apart from personal health, communications should also include cosmopolitanism, ethnic cuisines, and global equity. Studies from the Netherlands agree with this and suggest that meat substitutes should not rely only on ecological or health claims (Hoek et al., 2004). Therefore, recipes posted on Facebook by Finnish plant protein producers can feature international dishes such as Asian woks or Indian curries.

Often vegan and vegetarian organizations employ sportsmen and adventures in their messages to oppose the idea that meat is essential for vigor, especially among young men. This way, communications help in providing emotional support and counteracting identity issues associated with a plant-based lifestyle (Beverland, 2014). Thus, the Facebook content of Finnish plant protein producers can include influencer marketing in the form of collaborations with physically active opinion leaders. The theme of adventures can be supported with inspiring photos and videos featuring the company's products in outdoor activities, traveling, and nature.

Finally, vegan brands are advised to learn from bloggers. By analyzing fifteen vegan blogs, Napoli and Ouschan (2020) have discovered the moral foundations of vegan ideology, which are the sanctity of life, authentic self, and freedom. Recognizing these moral foundations allow marketers to better understand vegans, which in turn helps to develop meaningful brand stories. Brand stories revolving around important moral principles can make marketing communications more persuasive and relatable. In other words, storytelling can help with influencing attitudes towards brands. Thus, Finnish plant protein are recommended to learn from stories told by vegan bloggers to obtain a better understanding of their consumers and strengthen relationships with them.

To summarize, effective Facebook content of Finnish plant protein producers can include the following:

- Environment and animal welfare (Ruby, 2012)
- Health benefits (Fox & Ward, 2008)
- Routine situations (Fuentes & Fuentes, 2017)

- Topics personalized according to different stages of adoption of a plant-based diet (Lea et al., 2006)
- Cosmopolitanism (Beverland, 2014)
- Ethnic cuisines (Beverland, 2014)
- Influencer marketing collaborations with physically active opinion leaders (Beverland, 2014)
- Outdoor activities, adventures, travelling, and nature (Beverland, 2014).
- Stories learnt from vegan bloggers (Napoli & Ouschan, 2020)
- Vegan ideology, sanctity of life, authentic self, freedom (Napoli & Ouschan, 2020)

### 3 METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the author justifies the methodology which guided the current research. After an individual study of methodological literature and completion of research methodology courses, the author developed a research design that seemed optimal for achieving the research aim. This chapter presents the research aim and question, methods for data collection and analysis, limitations, and other methodological considerations.

Before discussing the methodology, it is important to explain a few major terms used in this research. Data corpus concerns all data gathered for a research project, while data set means all the data from the corpus that is used for certain analysis. A data item is an individual piece of data, such as a single interview in this study. Lastly, a data extract is an already coded data item (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As the research was focused on collecting data about organizations, the unit of analysis in this study was a single company (Adams et al., 2014).

#### 3.1 Methods

To achieve greater coherency of the study, the research philosophy had to be specified. The research philosophy can be defined as a system of beliefs and assumptions about knowledge development, which inevitably influence methodological choices. This research adopts the philosophy of pragmatism, which perceives research findings in the way how they can support action. In other words, this research seeks applicable solutions for future practices. Pragmatism also recognizes that the world can be interpreted in many different ways and no single point of view can entirely explain a phenomenon. (Saunders et al., 2019).

Regarding research paradigms, subjective ontology and interpretivist epistemology were chosen. Ontology deals with the nature of reality, which is commonly believed to be subjective in social sciences. Subjective reality means it is multiple and shaped by each individual's perceptions, which is appropriate for this study. The nature of the research topic also suggested that it is best to be studied considering various perspectives. Therefore, the subjective ontology was decided to be the most useful to observe the phenomenon. (O'Gorman & MacIntosh, 2014).

Epistemology concerns what constitutes reliable knowledge. According to the literature, subjective ontology tends to be linked with interpretivist epistemology. Also, such features of interpretivism as the contextual understanding of collected data and establishing different views of the investigated phenomenon were deemed helpful for answering the research

question. Thus, the epistemological position used in this study is interpretivism. (O'Gorman & MacIntosh, 2014).

To properly answer the research question, qualitative research was employed, which is often associated with pragmatism. This research methodology aims at understanding subjective and socially constructed meanings about a phenomenon, which was suitable for this study. Qualitative research deals with non-numerical data such as interviews, text, and visuals, which were all a part of the empirical study. (Saunders et al., 2019).

On the contrary, quantitative research examines numeric variables. Despite the difference, quantitative and qualitative elements can be combined in single research if answering the research question so requires (Saunders et al., 2019). The author experienced this when quantification was needed for data analysis.

The time horizon for this study was cross-sectional which meant studying the phenomenon at a particular moment in time instead of its development over longer periods. (Saunders et al., 2019).

## **3.2 Empirical context**

### **3.2.1 Soy and wheat products**

The security of the protein supply for the growing population is challenged by limited natural resources and climate change. Soy and wheat products, such as tofu and seitan, have been dominating the plant protein market yet there is room for new products (VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland, 2020). As consumer demand is growing, more companies are entering the plant-based market. In Europe, the retail sales of meat and dairy alternatives have increased by almost 10% per year between 2010 and 2020. By 2025, the retail sales of plant-based meat alternatives are expected to grow up to €2.5 billion. Despite the rise, plant-based products still represent only 0.7% of the meat market and 2.5% of the dairy market (ING, 2020).

### **3.2.2 Finnish plant protein market**

Finland has attracted attention by utilizing domestic oats and fava beans as raw materials in meat alternatives. The export potential for Finnish plant-based meat alternatives, ingredients, and technology licensing is significantly improving (VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland, 2020). In Finland, the plant protein market has grown at about 7% a year and is expected to remain as high in the near future. The development and business of national plant protein is a priority for the national Food and Beyond ecosystem (VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland, 2020b). Even non-vegan Finnish food producers such as Apetit, Kaslink, Saarioinen, Hoviruoka, and Valio offer plant-based product ranges and launch new products regularly (Vegaanituotteet, n.d.).

In June 2020, the government agency Business Finland invested \$2.3 million U.S. dollars into project EXPRO, which is aimed at developing national plant-based industry and strengthening Finland's position in the international markets. The project is led by the nonprofit VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland and the University of Helsinki. EXPRO will cooperate with various organizations, from crop producers to vegan food brands, to develop sustainable and appealing products (VegNews, 2020). The project aspires to build an ecosystem that will involve the entire production chain, from product development and raw materials to market and consumer research. Thus, by valorizing Finnish crops into comprehensive use in food products, the ecosystem will improve its position on the global plant-based market (VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland, 2020).

One of EXPRO's partners is Gold&Green, a producer of vegan meat substitutes from oats and legumes. Currently, Gold&Green's pulled oats are available in the U.S. foodservice sector and are planned to expand to retail (VegNews, 2020). In 2019, Gold&Green's oat meat was featured in Taco Bell's menu at select locations across the United Kingdom and Spain (VegNews, 2019). Later, in January 2021, Taco Bell added Gold&Green's oat meat to all 53 locations across the United Kingdom (Gold&Green, 2021).

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, the Finnish Cereal Committee, and VTT have also launched a joint project aimed at accelerating the development and production of domestic plant protein products. This cooperation will be contributing to the efficiency of the entire value chain. The project is a part of the Climate Food Programme, which is included in the government's policy programme. (VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland, 2020).

Thus, Finnish plant protein production is a noteworthy industry with strong international growth perspectives and governmental support. As any other business, Finnish plant protein producers would benefit from using content marketing to generate publicity, foster consumers' trust and loyalty, stimulate profitable customer actions, increase sales, and ultimately realize their vision.

Traditionally, mostly vegetarians have been consuming meat alternatives. However, today these products appeal to wider audiences, including non-vegetarians who may be simply trying to eat less meat or those who wish to eat a more varied and interesting diet. As a result, meat alternatives products have become more available in mainstream retailers. (Sadler, 2004).

In total, 15 plant protein producers were found. All subjects are plant protein producers which operate on the Finnish market. Some of them are engaged in international operations as well. Most of the subjects are fairly new brands of small and medium sizes. Nonetheless, they have already achieved some business success and mass media coverage.

### 3.3 Data collection

This study used two data collection methods to achieve the research aim: semi-structured interviews with company representatives and collection of Facebook posts of the interviewed companies. The posts were always collected right after the interviews. This order of data collection allowed a more profound understanding of the posts' content and its context. The interview data also suggested improvements for the coding framework of the content analysis. In general, the data collection and analysis were guided by methodological literature and the study by Ho, Pang, and Choy (2020). Even though this research is qualitative, quantification was needed during the analysis of the Facebook posts collection (Neuendorf, 2017).

The population for this study was defined using two methods. Primarily, the subjects were specifically chosen based on their relevance to the research topic, which is known as non-probability or purposive sampling. At the start of the study, a preliminary list of potential subjects was compiled by scanning mass media, browsing social networks, and exploring products in supermarkets. To ensure the list of potential subjects is thorough, a snowball type of non-probability sampling was used (Adams et al., 2014; O'Gorman & MacIntosh, 2014). The researcher organized a Zoom meeting with a leading member of the Finnish plant protein cluster to get an understanding of this network and suggestions of whom to contact.

#### 3.3.1 Interviews

Interviews are commonly used for the efficient collection of primary data in qualitative business studies. Semi-structured interviews seemed the most appropriate as they are sufficiently systematic yet still quite informal. Thus, the participants were able to communicate their responses using natural language (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). The goal of the interviews was to learn first-hand how Finnish plant protein producers had been implementing Facebook content marketing. The discussion included various topics such as content production and evaluation. As a reminder, the research question was the following: "How do Finnish plant-based protein producers conduct content marketing on Facebook?".

Before the interview invitations were sent, Facebook Pages of the potential subjects were checked for sufficient quantity and frequency of posts for examination. After the qualification, 12 companies were invited via email to participate in a Zoom interview, out of which only five agreed to participate. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, only online interviews were possible. Five subjects were considered satisfactory for obtaining desired knowledge and manageable in terms of workload. Due to a busy schedule, one of the subjects answered a

written interview form. Most of the subjects preferred to stay anonymous hence the author decided to keep all companies anonymous.

Designing semi-structured interviews involved creating an interview guide with topics and sample questions, which can be found in appendix 1. The interview questions were formulated based on the study by Ho, Pang, and Choy (2020). The following list presents examples of the asked questions:

- Do you have a separate strategy for Facebook content? If yes, how do you formulate it?
- What are the objectives of posting Facebook content?
- How much of your marketing budget is allocated to Facebook content production and posting?
- Do you have a schedule for publishing Facebook content? If yes, why it is so?
- How do you evaluate the effectiveness of your Facebook content?
- What types of content are the most effective on your Facebook Page and why?

The interview guide helped to cover the key topics while the general tone of the interviews was conversational (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008; O'Gorman & MacIntosh, 2014). It was also useful for keeping up the pace when the conversation got stuck or redirecting it back when there was a sense of digression (Arsel, 2017). Thus, the author was proactive with learning about the phenomenon and modified each individual interview to acquire better insight.

In total, five representatives of five different companies were interviewed, which is equal to one-third of known Finnish producers of plant protein. Some of the interviewees were responsible for business administration and product management while others were marketing specialists. Despite the small sample size, qualitative interviews provided a significant volume of in-depth information (Adams et al., 2014). The challenge with qualitative data is that it may have multiple or unclear meanings so clarification from the participants was sought when needed (Saunders et al., 2019).

Various research practices were considered while formulating the interview questions. Firstly, it was necessary to connect emic with etic by translating the research question into natural language. On their own, research questions are an etic abstraction that outlines relations between concepts, while interview questions are a tool for understanding the subjective expression of those concepts (Arsel, 2017).

Several interview question types were used to obtain different responses. Open questions were utilized to encourage detailed answers, whereas closed questions produced more specific information. In general, questions were kept short and simple to make it easier for the interviewees to reply. The wording of the questions was also neutral to avoid preconceived ideas in the answers. Finally,

secondary questions were used in addition to the primary ones to elaborate the responses when needed. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

The interview guide was pre-tested with colleagues and friends to reveal errors. The author considered how comprehensive the list of questions is, whether the language is appropriate and whether there are double meanings or multiple issues in a single question. Evaluating whether the interview motivated the participants to answer was also important. (Adams et al., 2014).

In business studies, interviews usually take no longer than an hour and no less than 20 minutes. Therefore, the duration of the interviews was planned to be approximately 25 minutes depending on each interviewee's preference and availability. With the permission of the participants, the interviews were recorded using computer software. Thus, the author was able to concentrate more on the interview process. (Adams et al., 2014).

A research notification and privacy notice were compiled according to the University of Jyväskylä guidelines and sent to each participant before the interview. The research notification briefly described the research, while the privacy notice explained the processing of personal data.

The first spoken interview was held on 30 November 2020, the second interview was held on 15 January 2021, the third interview was held on 15 February 2021, and the fourth interview was held on 18 March 2021. The written interview was received on 12 January 2021. Thus, five interviews were done in the course of three and a half months. The first spoken interview lasted approximately 22 minutes, the second spoken interview lasted approximately 27 minutes, the third spoken interview lasted approximately 26 minutes, the fourth spoken interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. Therefore, the spoken interviews lasted on average 26 minutes. In total, the spoken interviews accounted for approximately 105 minutes. A summary of the interview process is presented in table 1.

TABLE 1 Summary of the interview process

Interview #	Date	Duration (minutes)
#1	30.11.2020	22
#2	15.01.2021	27
#3 (written)	12.01.2021 (received)	-
#4	15.02.2021	26
#5	18.03.2021	30
	Total spoken interviews time	105

### 3.3.2 Facebook posts

To complement the interview data and answer the research question more completely, a sample of Facebook posts published by the participating

companies was collected. The posts were collected right after every interview. The collection helped to see how the companies implemented the strategies discussed in the interviews.

The content collection followed the procedures from the study by Ho, Pang, and Choy (2020). Screenshots of the posts along with publishing dates and links were collected straight to the coding sheet made in Excel, which was later used for data analysis (Adams et al., 2014). In the coding sheet, the posts were divided according to the publishing company and sorted according to the date of publishing starting from the earliest date. Each post had its own row and the accompanying data was presented in columns. Thus, this Excel coding sheet served as a customizable and systematic tool to easily store, organize, and analyze the posts. An excerpt from the coding sheet is attached in appendix 2.

The content collection included all posts published by the companies from 1 December 2020 to 28 February 2021. This timeframe was chosen because of the suitability for the author's thesis writing schedule. Three months' worth of posts also seemed a manageable and sufficient volume of data for the current research. In total, 112 posts were collected with an average of 22 posts per company. The summary of the posts collection is presented in table 2.

TABLE 2 Posts collected per company and in total

Company	Number of collected posts
#1	27
#2	20
#3	24
#4	14
#5	27
Total	112

### 3.4 Thematic analysis

Before analysis, the interview recordings were manually transcribed into Word documents. Despite being time-consuming and laborious, verbatim transcripts informed the early analysis and provided a better understanding of the data. (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The total number of pages of transcribed interviews was 15. For the transcripts, Book Antiqua font in size 12 and 1,0 line spacing were used.

The six phases of thematic analysis from the article by Braun and Clarke (2006) were employed for analyzing the interview transcripts. It is a widely used method in qualitative studies which is accessible for researchers with little

experience. In general, thematic analysis entails identifying, analyzing, and reporting recurrent themes within a data set. However, simply describing apparent themes is not enough. The author actively looked for themes that capture important meanings relevant to the research question.

A single theme depicts patterned responses within a data set. The themes were identified based on prevalence and inductive and semantic approaches. The prevalence of a theme was determined using the number of instances across each data item and the entire data set. The significance of a theme is not necessarily defined by quantification, though. The researcher's judgement and creativity were necessary for recognizing what is an important theme in relation to the research question. The inductive approach means the author did not try to fit in the codes in any preconceptions but rather utilized the originality of the data and created unique codes. Finally, the semantic approach implied identifying themes that exist on the explicit level of the data without interpreting its underlying meanings. (Braun & Clarke, 2006).



FIGURE 1 The interview analysis process

### 3.4.1 Familiarizing with the data

The first phase of thematic analysis was familiarizing with the data. The author immersed herself in the interview transcripts by reading them repeatedly and searching for initial meanings and patterns. Each transcript was read at least five times, which was time-consuming yet necessary for getting familiar with the content. Early ideas for the upcoming coding were recorded during this phase as well. (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

### 3.4.2 Generating initial codes

The second phase of thematic analysis involved generating initial codes from the data. Essentially, codes identify interesting features of the data that form the basis for themes. The author highlighted potential codes with different colors in Word while repeatedly reading the interview transcripts. It was essential to give equal attention to each data item to detect repeated patterns.

The list of initial codes and their meanings can be found in table 3. Most of the codes were created while reading the first transcript for the first time. Then the codes found their application in the rest of the transcripts.

The author tried to code inclusively, meaning each data extract was coded together with some of the surrounding data to preserve the context. Some data extracts were coded only once, while others fit into multiple codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For example, the phrase "We have an outsourced content specialist" fitted "1. Context" and "7. Tools" codes. Similarly, some data extracts were coded

both as “5. Goals” and “6. Challenges” because the description of the current challenges could be translated into future goals. For example, if a small budget is a current challenge, then a bigger budget may be an aspiration for the future.

TABLE 3 The list of initial codes and their meaning

Initial code name	Meaning	Data example
<b>“1. Context”</b>	External and internal factors affecting Facebook content marketing activities.	“We are such a small company so we do not have any particular marketing people or department. That is why it is easier to give it to people who know what to do and how to do it.”
<b>“2. Procedures”</b>	Description of specific steps and processes involved in Facebook content marketing.	“Very simply put: planning ahead according to content theme, cooperating with influencers, scheduling, briefing creative agency, publishing.”
<b>“3. Content of the posts”</b>	Description and categorization of content for Facebook posts	“Recipes is the biggest of the [content] pools we make. Then we talk a lot about our raw ingredient which is the [raw ingredient name].”
<b>“4. Effective content”</b>	Types of content which are considered to be effective	“Usually [effective posts] those are posts with photos of people, those are the most liked ones.”
<b>“5. Goals”</b>	Targets and aspirations to be achieved with Facebook content marketing	“The targets are the main objectives for everything we do: building awareness, build the brand.”
<b>“6. Challenges”</b>	Difficulties of Facebook content marketing	“With Facebook or Instagram, I think [challenge] it is differentiating yourself from the competitors.”
<b>“7. Tools”</b>	Instruments and other help used for Facebook content marketing	“We are using this tool between us and our media agency called Falcon, where they manage the whole process of posting.”
<b>“8. Experience”</b>	Learnings and observations from practicing Facebook content marketing	“Facebook is something that we find very necessary and useful as a marketing platform.”
<b>“9. Branding”</b>	The general information about branding	“This is something we are focusing on: how to create content that is so interesting

		that we would gather more people around our brand.”
“10. Other”	Miscellaneous or random discussions	“And this Google marketing. In Finnish it is called hakusanamarkkinointi but I have no idea what that means.”

The results of the initial coding were transferred to an Excel file to collate the data extracts within each code. The author created a separate Excel sheet for each of the initial codes and copied corresponding data extracts to it (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Lastly, the number of instances of each code across the data set was counted. Figure 2 shows how many times each code was applied, which helped to visualize the main topics across the interviews.

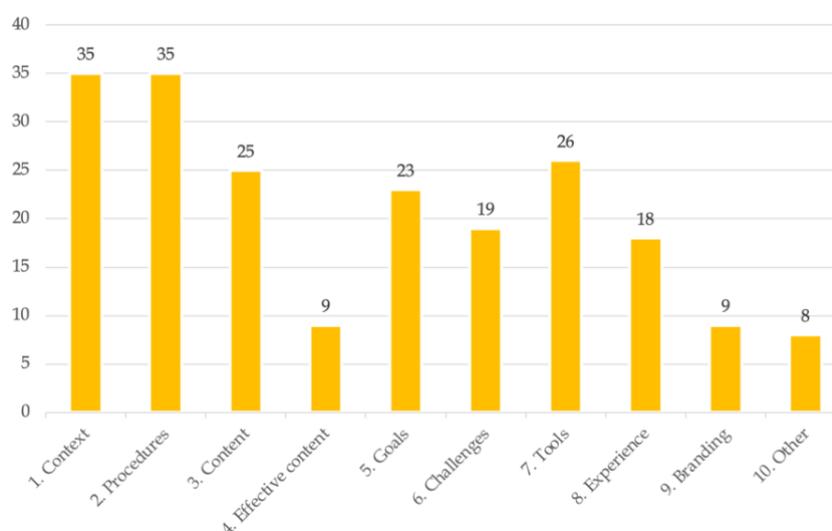


FIGURE 2 The number of instances of each code across the data set

### 3.4.3 Searching for themes

In phase three, the initial codes were collated into three initial themes based on the numeric prevalence and importance: “Situation”, “Strategy”, and “Miscellaneous”. Themes can be considered broader units of analysis whereas codes were more basic instruments for indicating interesting features of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The initial themes with their meaning and composition are presented in table 4.

The first theme “Situation” was formed from the initial codes “1. Context”, “5. Goals”, “6. Challenges”, and “8. Experience”. This theme was derived from the impression that the aforementioned codes represented the unique factors that had contributed to the current situation with the company’s Facebook content marketing. For instance, the code “6. Challenges” demonstrated the ongoing difficulties the company was experiencing with Facebook content marketing at

that particular moment. These difficulties varied between the companies. Similarly, most of the companies had different goals for Facebook content marketing hence the same logic applied to the code "5. Goals". As for the "1. Context" code, its meaning is similar to the word "situation" so it was natural to add it to this theme. The "8. Experience" code was included in the "Situation" theme because it illustrated the companies' learnings about Facebook content marketing which mostly were unique to each company. In other words, the learnings depended on the situation so it seemed reasonable to add the "8. Experience" code to the "Situation" theme.

The second theme "Strategy" was formed from "2. Procedures", "3. Content", "4. Effective content", and "7. Tools" codes. This theme was based on the observation that the aforementioned codes illustrated the strategies and tactics applied by the companies. In contrast with the "Situation" theme, the "Strategy" theme brought attention to the aspects of the companies' Facebook content marketing that can be generalized and potentially applied by other companies. Whereas, the "Situation" theme focused more on the specific circumstances which are not necessarily transferrable to another context. For example, Finnish plant protein producers appeared to have different challenges or experiences with Facebook content marketing. Therefore, the "6. Challenges" and "8. Experience" were assigned to the "Situation" theme which mostly represented the variability of Facebook content marketing across the companies. On the other hand, some Finnish plant protein producers had similarities in their approaches to Facebook content marketing, which can be observed within the "Strategy" theme. For example, it was common among the companies to cooperate with media agencies or plan the Facebook content. If these tactics were common then it may be reasonable to recommend trying it to other Finnish plant protein producers. Therefore, the "2. Procedures" and "7. Tools" were assigned to the "Strategy" theme which mostly represented the similarities in Facebook content marketing activities across the companies. The codes "3. Content" and "4. Effective content" were added to this theme because they suggested the common types of content and effective content that may be used by Finnish plant protein producers in their Facebook posts.

The third theme "Miscellaneous" was formed from the codes which did not quite fit the first two themes, which were "9. Branding" and "10. Other". The "9. Branding" code mostly contained different data related to the company's branding in general that did not necessarily affect Facebook content marketing. On its own, branding is a broad topic that is not the focus of this research and deserves a separate investigation. Hence, it was decided to place the "9. Branding" code in the "Miscellaneous" theme. The "10. Other" code was assigned to this theme as it represented miscellaneous discussions irrelevant to this research.

In relation to the research question, the "Situation" and "Strategy" themes were useful for organizing the insight on the current Facebook content marketing of Finnish plant protein producers. Specifically, the "Situation" theme helped to understand various situational factors that may have an effect on Facebook

content marketing. Whereas, the “Strategy” theme highlighted specific procedures, tools, and other input commonly used by Finnish plant protein producers in their Facebook content marketing.

TABLE 4 The list of initial themes and their meaning

Initial themes	Meaning	Codes merged	Data example
“Situation”	This theme reflected situational factors that may influence the company’s Facebook content marketing practices.	“1. Context”, “5. Goals”, “6. Challenges”, “8. Experience”	“We are not doing content marketing by ourselves. We have a company that making all content in social media.”
“Strategy”	This theme indicated strategical aspects of the company’s Facebook content marketing which can be applied in other contexts.	“2. Procedures”, “3. Content”, “4. Effective content”, “7. Tools”	“We have a social media strategy which includes the content pool that we include in our sites. We have selected themes that we try to utilize when we create content. It is more of a general social media strategy which includes content.”
“Miscellaneous”	This theme contains codes that did not seem to belong to the main themes.	“9. Branding”, “10. Other”	“I think the Facebook world is changing. If we want to reach our target groups, we need to use other channels than Facebook. Maybe younger people are not on Facebook anymore. I do not know, maybe it is just my imagination. Maybe there are going to be more important channels than Facebook in the near future.”

An initial thematic map is presented in figure 3. In the figure, the main themes are ovals, the sub-themes are rectangles with round edges, and the important and interesting meanings within the sub-themes are rectangles with sharp edges. The initial thematic map was drawn to facilitate sorting the initial codes into themes. It also helped to start understanding the relationships between the codes and themes, and the significance of each theme. In addition, the initial thematic map illustrated the diversity of the interview responses. During the process of

drawing, several sub-themes were created within the main themes. Sub-theme are smaller themes helpful for structuring complex themes and organizing the hierarchy of meanings within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Within the "Situation" theme, sub-themes named "Goals", "Changes", "Limitations", and "Challenges" came up. These sub-themes helped to organize important and popular discussion points within the "Situation" theme. Similar to the "5. Goals" code, the "Goals" sub-theme highlighted the main objectives the companies identified for Facebook content marketing. The "Changes" sub-theme focused on the changing business circumstances that influenced the implementation of Facebook content marketing. The "Limitations" sub-theme underlined the factors that were limiting the scope of Facebook content marketing activities. Lastly, the "Challenges" sub-theme indicated the difficulties and problems of practicing Facebook content marketing, similar to the "6. Challenges" code.

Within the "Strategy" theme, sub-themes named "Promotion", "Production", "Content types", "Planning", "Cooperation", "Content pool", "Effective content", and "Evaluation" emerged. These sub-themes helped to structure the interesting and important observations within the "Strategy" theme. The "Promotion" sub-theme underlined the ways the participating companies advertised their Facebook content. The "Production" sub-theme established the common practices of creating Facebook content. The "Content types" sub-theme focused on the main types of content the companies created for Facebook posts. The "Planning" sub-theme highlighted the major issues in organizing and scheduling future Facebook content. The "Cooperation" sub-theme was composed of the discussions on what types of teamwork or collaboration is involved in Facebook content marketing. The "Content pool" sub-theme covered the major considerations in creating a pool of content. The "Effective content" sub-theme was formed from the interviewees' observations regarding what content is well-received by the audience and hence effective. Finally, the "Evaluation" sub-theme comprised the methods of assessing the effectiveness of Facebook content marketing efforts.

Within the "Miscellaneous" theme, sub-themes "Interviewee's background", "Interviewee's understanding of content marketing", and "Alignment with branding" emerged. The "Interviewee's background" sub-theme became apparent because some interviewees would explain the current state of the company's Facebook content marketing with their insufficient expertise in this domain. The "Interviewee's understanding of content marketing" sub-theme developed based on the numerous moments when the interviewees explained how they understand content marketing in general. Actually, the very first question in the interview guide produced most of the data inside this sub-theme. The "Alignment with branding" sub-theme was created to group the data related to how the company's branding is connected with Facebook content marketing.

The logic of creating the sub-themes was that they helped to structure data within the main themes that initially appeared to be important and interesting in relation to the research question. They were also useful for visualizing the depth and structure of each theme, which in turn helped to refine the thematic map in the end.

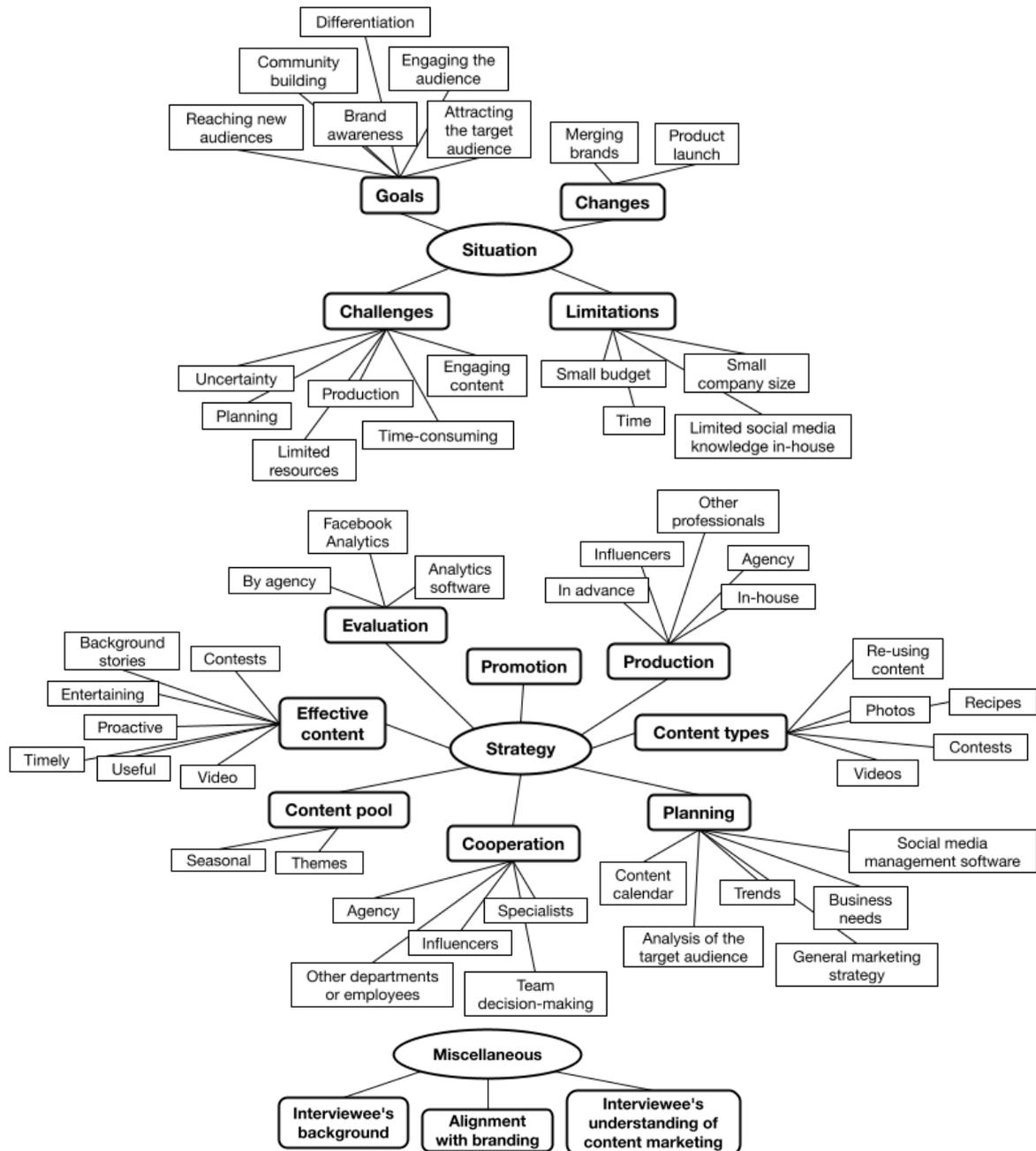
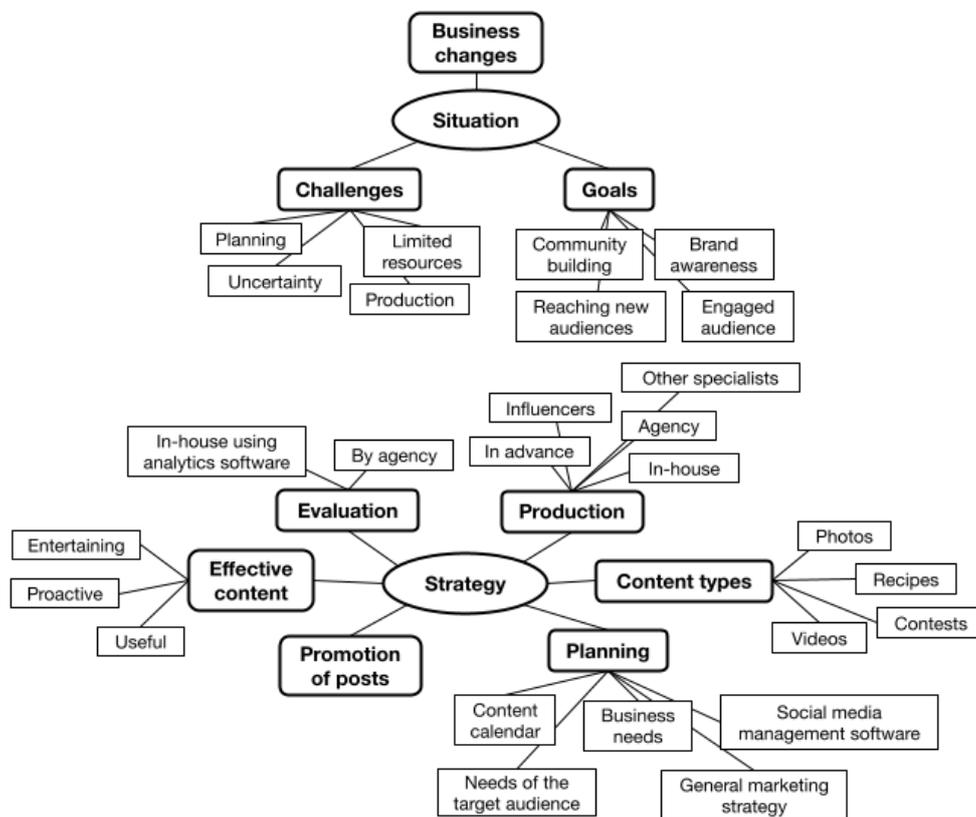


FIGURE 3 Initial thematic map, showing three main themes and fifteen sub-themes

### 3.4.4 Reviewing the themes

In phase four, the initial themes were refined to ensure they are distinctive and coherent. In addition, five data extracts were re-coded during this phase as they did not quite fit their initial theme. At the first level of reviewing, a separate Excel sheet was created for each theme. Then, the data extracts were collated under each theme to ensure they form a coherent pattern. As a result, the initial themes appeared to be coherent and adequately representing the coded data. (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

At the second level of reviewing, the validity of each individual theme in relation to the entire data set was evaluated. The initial thematic map was also reviewed to check if it accurately displays the meanings emerging from the data set. The more developed thematic map is shown in figure 4. As a result, some themes turned out to be not as significant as thought at the beginning since there was not enough data to support them. In addition, some themes were combined into one as they seemed to duplicate each other. The sub-theme “Changes” was renamed to “Business changes” to better reflect its content. The sub-theme “Limitations” was merged with “Challenges” as they contain similar data. The “Content pool” sub-theme was discarded as it was mentioned by only one participant and did not have as much significance as the tools discussed by others. The “Cooperation” theme was discarded too as it duplicated some of the data extracts within the “Production” theme. The review was finished when the refinements stopped adding substantial value. (Braun & Clarke, 2006).



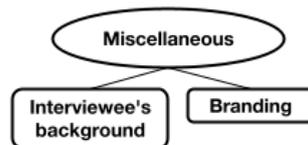


FIGURE 4 Developed thematic map, showing three main themes and eleven sub-themes

### 3.4.5 Defining the themes

In phase five, the final thematic map was formed by further refining and defining the themes and analyzing the data within them. The final thematic map is presented in figure 5. As can be seen, the “Interviewee’s background” and “Branding” sub-themes were removed because they did not add much value for answering the research question. For example, in the “Production” theme, the sub-themes “Influencers”, “Agency”, “Other specialists”, and “In advance” were merged into a single sub-theme called “Outsourced”.

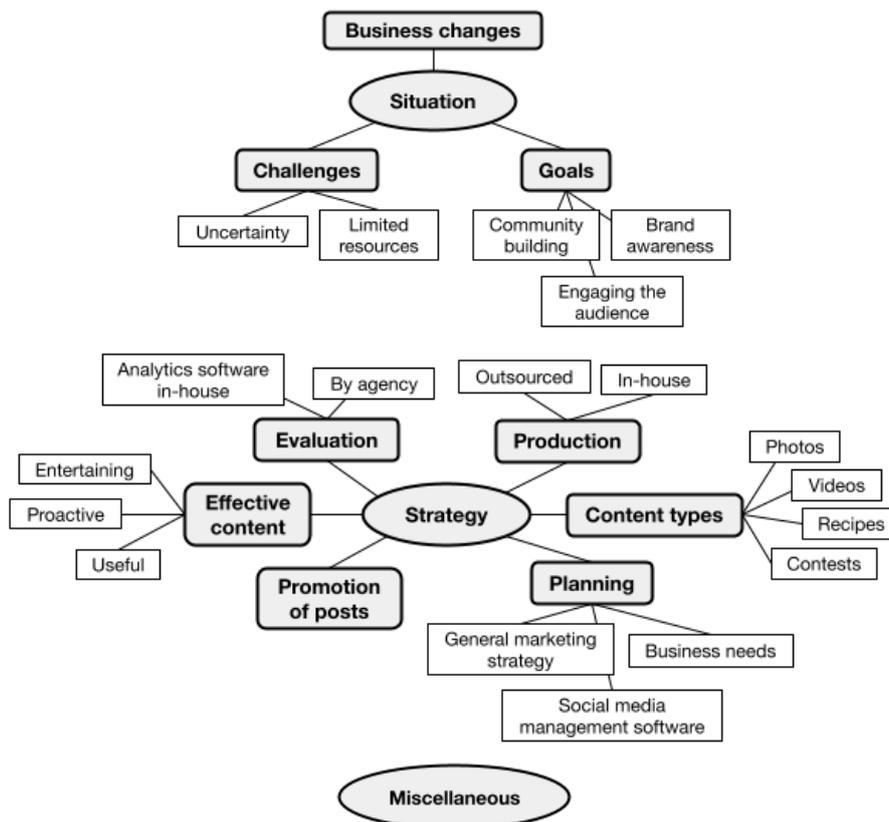


FIGURE 5 The final thematic map

To define the themes, an analysis was written for each theme to define its core essence and aspects of the data it highlights. As a result, the scope and content of each theme were identified and presented in table 5. (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The analysis of the “Situation” theme suggested that it may be defined as the junction of data extracts that identify the context of the company’s Facebook content marketing. This context includes the business environment, individual challenges, and unique goals of each company. The data in this theme is quite diverse yet it does not disturb the coherency of this theme. The key value of this theme is the variety of different contexts in which Facebook content marketing exists.

The analysis of the “Strategy” theme suggested that it may be defined as a representation of different activities and ideas that constitute Facebook content marketing strategies of Finnish plant protein producers. Specifically, this theme captured various tools, collaboration modes, and content characteristics. This theme may be viewed as a set of guidelines for Facebook content marketing of Finnish plant protein producers as the data extracts demonstrate what the subjects found effective for Facebook content marketing.

The analysis of the “Miscellaneous” theme suggested that it may be defined as a collection of the data extracts which were not directly relevant to the research question. Mainly, the data extracts within this theme are related to branding and the interviewee’s personal experiences about content or social media in general. Despite being not as pertinent to the research question, this theme allowed capturing some interesting secondary aspects behind Facebook content marketing of Finnish plant protein producers.

This analysis helped to ensure the themes are distinctive and not overlapping or too broad. At this point, the author also started to construct the story of each individual theme. The way these stories fit the overall narrative about the data in relation to the research question was considered as well. (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

TABLE 5 Analysis of the themes

Themes	Definition	Aspect of the data captured
“Situation”	This theme links together all data extracts that identify the context of the company’s Facebook content marketing. This context includes the business environment, individual challenges, and unique goals of each company.	The data in this theme is quite diverse yet it does not disturb the coherency of this theme. The key value of this theme is the variety of different context in which Facebook content marketing exists.
“Strategy”	This theme represents different activities and ideas which constitute Facebook content marketing strategy of Finnish plant protein producers. Specifically, this theme captured various tools, collaboration modes, and	The data in this theme is rather diverse as well. In other words, some Finnish plant protein producers share the way they approach Facebook content marketing while others have their own distinctive methods based on the situation.

	content characteristics. This theme may be viewed as a set of guidelines for Facebook content marketing of Finnish plant protein producers as the data extracts essentially convey what the subjects found effective for Facebook content marketing.	
<b>“Miscellaneous”</b>	This theme identifies the data extracts which were not considered as directly relevant to the research question.	Mainly, the data extracts within this theme are related to branding and the interviewee’s personal experiences about content or social media in general. Despite being not as pertinent to the research question, this theme allowed capturing some interesting secondary aspects behind Facebook content marketing of Finnish plant protein producers.

### 3.4.6 Interpretation

The final phase involved interpreting the data from the perspective of the research question and reporting the results in the “Thematic analysis findings” sub-chapter. Essentially, the author looked for a concise and interesting story about the data within and across the final themes. Quotations from the interviewees’ speeches were embedded into the report to illustrate the analytic narrative. (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

## 3.5 Content analysis of Facebook posts

Following the study by Ho, Pang, and Choy (2020), the collected posts were examined using the content analysis method. Content analysis is widely applied for preexisting qualitative information such as web pages. The purpose of this method is to systematically describe and explore the meanings of data through categorization and coding (Adams et al., 2014; Hair et al., 2015).

The coding framework from the study by Ho, Pang, and Choy (2020) guided the content analysis. It contained “Content type”, “Content communication characteristics”, “Communication triggers and exchanges”, and “Content centrality” categories and codes for each category. These categories were deemed relevant to the investigated phenomenon and mutually exclusive. Prior to coding, each category was defined to clarify the data features that inform the author which code to apply (Adams et al., 2014). The coding framework for this study is attached in appendix 3.

After defining the categories, each collected post was assigned a single code within each category. A coding sheet made in Excel helped with analyzing each post systematically and assigning codes more efficiently (Adams et al., 2014). Afterwards, the number of appearances of codes within each category was tabulated using Excel formulas. Here, quantification was needed even though the issue under investigation was qualitative in nature (Neuendorf, 2017).

The timeframe of the Facebook posts collection affected the collected content in several ways. First of all, the period from December to March is quite festive and Finns are celebrating various occasions such as Finland's Independence Day, Christmas, and Valentine's Day. As a consequence, the posts were often connected with the ongoing celebrations and included relevant recipes to promote sales. As holidays are the time to share positivity and kindness, some of the companies run special campaigns and shared about their charitable and sustainable efforts. In addition, some companies launched new products hence they educated the consumers on their applications. Thus, the posts in this time period were influenced by the season, holidays, and product launches.

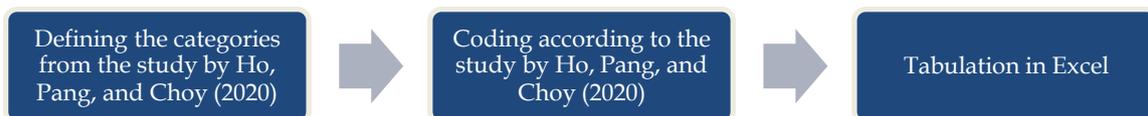


FIGURE 6 The content analysis process

### 3.5.1 "Content types" category

In their study, Ho, Pang, and Choy (2020) identified 23 main types of content assets Singaporean companies were using to accompany their social media posts. These types of content assets were translated into corresponding codes in the "Content type" category: "Events", "Videos", "Blogs", "Cases", "White papers", "e-Newsletters", "Articles", "Illustrations", "GIFs", "Photos", "Webcasts", "Infographics", "Presentations", "Microsites/Landing Pages/Hashtags", "Reports", "e-Magazines", "Apps", "e-Conferences", "Games", "Contests", "Challenges", "e-Books", and "Others". The "Microsites/Landing Pages/Hashtags" code was renamed to "Landing" for clarity because microsites or hashtags were not used as the main content for posts.

Additional codes named "Recipes" and "Product news" had to be created to better represent the content assets used by Finnish plant protein producers. The "Recipes" code indicated posts that instructed how to use the company's products in cooking various dishes. The "Product news" code identified posts that used news about the company's products as the main content asset. These additional codes highlighted the important types of content which were not initially available in the coding framework but discussed by the interviewees. The definitions for all codes can be found in the coding framework in appendix 3.

Assigning the codes was not always straightforward as Facebook posts of Finnish plant protein producers tended to contain multiple types of accompanying content. For example, some posts included a photo and a website link, which suggested that both the “Landing” and “Photos” codes could be applicable. However, the idea was to assign a single code that best represented the main content asset accompanying the post. Despite occasional uncertainty, the author’s intuition and social media expertise allowed successful completion of the coding process. The intercoder reliability test was useful for validating the coding as well.

As a result, each collected post was assigned a single code from the “Content type” category to identify the main types of content used by the participating companies in their Facebook posts. The results of the final tabulation are presented in table 6. As can be seen, the most frequent codes were “Landing”, “Photos”, “Illustrations”, and “Other”. The “Blogs”, “Cases”, “White papers”, “e-Newsletters”, “Articles”, “Presentations”, “Reports”, “e-Magazines”, “Apps”, “e-Conferences”, “Games”, “Challenges”, and “e-Books” codes did not have instances at all.

TABLE 6 Number of appearances of codes per company and in total within the “Content type” category

	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4	Company 5	
Code name	Count	Count	Count	Count	Count	Total
“Events”	0	0	0	0	1	1
“Videos”	2	0	0	0	1	3
“Blogs”	0	0	0	0	0	0
“Cases”	0	0	0	0	0	0
“White papers”	0	0	0	0	0	0
“e-Newsletters”	0	0	0	0	0	0
“Articles”	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>“Illustrations”</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>12</b>
“GIFs”	1	0	0	0	0	1
<b>“Photos”</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>19</b>
“Webcasts”	1	0	0	0	1	2
“Infographics”	1	0	0	0	0	1
“Presentations”	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>“Landing”</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>52</b>
“Reports”	0	0	0	0	0	0
“e-Magazines”	0	0	0	0	1	1
“Apps”	0	0	0	0	0	0
“e-Conferences”	0	0	0	0	0	0
“Games”	0	0	0	0	0	0
“Contests”	0	0	5	0	0	5
“Challenges”	0	0	0	0	0	0
“e-Books”	0	0	0	0	0	0
“Recipes”	1	1	0	1	2	5
“Product news”	1	0	0	2	0	3
<b>“Other”</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>

Total	27	20	24	14	27	112
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### 3.5.2 “Content communication characteristics” category

In the “Content communication characteristics” category, Ho, Pang, and Choy (2020) used “Publicity”, “Educational”, and “Sales” codes. These codes referred to the features of content that could affect the consumers’ reception. The “Publicity” code meant that the primary aim of the post was to make the company, its products, services, or staff appear more admirable for reputable gain through positive publicity. The goal of the posts coded as “Educational” was to provide useful or educational information for the consumers. The “Sales” code identified promotional posts which aimed at selling or advertising a sales offer. The definitions for all codes can be found in the coding framework in appendix 3.

As a result, this category helped to analyze the communication goals the participating companies tried to achieve with their Facebook posts. The results of the final tabulation are presented in table 7. The most frequent code was “Educational”, followed by the “Publicity” and “Sales” codes.

TABLE 7 Number of appearances of codes per company and in total within the “Content communication characteristics” category

	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4	Company 5	
Code name	Count	Count	Count	Count	Count	Total
“Publicity”	7	0	11	7	8	33
“Educational”	17	19	0	1	16	53
“Sales”	3	1	13	6	3	26
Total	27	20	24	14	27	112

### 3.5.3 “Communication triggers and exchanges” category

The “Communication triggers and exchanges” category contained “Two-way asymmetrical” and “Two-way symmetrical” codes which referred to the communication design of the posts’ content. Posts coded as “Two-way asymmetrical” aimed at triggering profitable actions and guiding the stakeholders to desirable behavior. Posts coded as “Two-way symmetrical” aimed at fostering communication between the company and its stakeholders by allowing idea-sharing and discussions (Ho et al., 2020). The definitions for these codes can be found in the coding framework in appendix 3.

Thus, this category was useful for identifying the type of relationships the participating companies promoted with their Facebook posts. As can be seen from table 8, the “Two-way asymmetrical” code prevailed over the “Two-way symmetrical” code.

TABLE 8 Number of appearances of codes per company and in total within the “Communication triggers and exchanges” category

	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4	Company 5	
Code name	Count	Count	Count	Count	Count	Total
“Two-way asymmetrical”	23	20	13	12	25	93
“Two-way symmetrical”	4	0	11	2	2	19
Total	27	20	24	14	27	112

### 3.5.4 “Content centrality” category

The last category called “Content centrality” consisted of “Brand-centric”, “Product-centric”, “Consumer-centric”, and “Neutral” codes. These codes helped to determine whether the post emphasized the company, its products, interaction with the consumers, or neither of the above (Ho et al., 2020). The definitions for these codes can be found in the coding framework in appendix 3.

This category helped to establish the priorities of the participating companies in their Facebook posts. The results of the final tabulation are presented in table 9. The most frequent code was “Product-centric”, followed by “Brand-centric” and “Neutral”. The “Consumer-centric” code was not applied to any post.

TABLE 9 Number of appearances of codes per company and in total within the “Content centrality” category

	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4	Company 5	
Code name	Count	Count	Count	Count	Count	Total
“Brand-centric”	4	0	4	6	4	18
“Product-centric”	20	20	20	8	23	91
“Consumer-centric”	0	0	0	0	0	0
“Neutral”	3	0	0	0	0	3
Total	27	20	24	14	27	112

### 3.5.5 Intercoder reliability test

The reliability of the categories and codes was ensured with the help of a fellow student. The author shared the collection of Facebook posts and the coding framework to check if the fellow student would code the posts in the same way. (Adams et al., 2014). As a result, the coding framework was verified to be appropriate and reliable as no disagreements were found.

## 4 FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Thematic analysis findings

In this subchapter, the key findings from the thematic analysis of the interviews are discussed and illustrated with the interviewees' quotes. The findings are organized according to the sub-themes from the thematic map. The "Miscellaneous" theme is not discussed as it did not provide much valuable information related to the research question.

#### 4.1.1 Business changes

The overall business circumstances of the participating companies inevitably affected the ways how Facebook content marketing was implemented. Specifically, various organizational events such as product launches, changes in business such as brand merging influenced the content of the posts. As one interviewee said:

R4: "At the moment, we are bringing out [new product name] in Finland. We should post something related to them."

Uncertain or changing business conditions were also the reasons some interviewees justified their insufficient Facebook content marketing with. Here is how two interviewees illustrated this:

R4: "There has not been any specific budget [for Facebook content marketing] because there have been so many changes in our growth."

R5: "We just moved to a new place so we had to put a lot of money to that. We did not have that much money for marketing."

#### 4.1.2 Goals

The goals set for Facebook content marketing varied from one participating company to another. The current level of the company's Facebook content marketing seemed to affect the goals for it. In other words, the participating companies with less developed Facebook content marketing wished to achieve more basic goals such as starting to collect recipes for future posts, fixing technical errors in the Facebook Page, and involving content professionals. As one interviewee put it:

R4: "During this year one big thing we need to do is that I have to start collecting recipes."

The participating companies with more developed Facebook content marketing focused on more sophisticated goals such as reaching new audiences, maintaining interest in the current audiences, gaining brand advocates, differentiating from competitors, attaining the key performance indicators (KPIs), and educating about the product uses. As two interviewees said:

R3: "We follow certain set KPIs in all social media activities."

R5: "We have thought about who are our customers, what kind of customers we want to get next, their profiles, where are they living, what kind of interests they have."

Regardless of the scope of Facebook content marketing, all companies appeared to be interested in increasing brand awareness and engaging the target audiences. Here are excerpts from one interviewee illustrating this:

R1: "The targets are the main objectives for everything we do: building awareness, build the brand."

R1: "What would need to be in the content so that a person would decide to become a follower or even an advocate?"

As was mentioned in the literature review, the major goals of content marketing are growing sales indirectly by attracting and retaining the target audience, improving consumer engagement, trust, and relationships (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019; Holliman & Rowley, 2014; Pulizzi, 2012). Educating consumers via content is especially important for building lasting customer relationships and improving brand loyalty (Baltes, 2015). Thus, the goals Finnish plant protein producers set for Facebook content marketing appeared to correspond to the academic literature.

#### **4.1.3 Challenges**

Challenges faced by the participating companies in implementing Facebook content marketing mostly were dissimilar. Often, financial capabilities defined the company's challenges. For example, companies with lower budgets had difficulties with content production and managing the Page in general. As one interviewee said:

R4: "We should have a person whose thing is only Facebook marketing. Many places usually have but we do not have money for that."

On the contrary, companies with higher spend on Facebook content marketing were challenged by differentiation or community building. As one interviewee put it:

R1: "With Facebook or Instagram, I think [challenge] it is differentiating yourself from the competitors."

Thus, the amount of budget Finnish plant protein producers allocate to Facebook content marketing may play a crucial role in its effectiveness and scope.

#### 4.1.4 Production

All participating companies to some extent cooperated with internal or external partners on implementing Facebook content marketing. The internal partners included the company's own staff and teammates, while external partners could be professional content creators, media agencies, the joint venture's marketing department, and influencers. These cooperations were either one-time such as influencer marketing campaigns or long-term such as partnerships with media agencies. Some interviewees illustrated this in the following way:

R3: "We have a responsible for all social media publishing and moderating, but content production and advertising is handled externally by an agency."

R2: "I am not doing any photos, or [a colleague's name], or anybody. [The joint venture's marketing department] They are doing everything."

The range and scope of cooperations naturally depended on budget and in-house expertise in Facebook content marketing. The more budget the company had, the more cooperations it could organize. Companies with little expertise but sufficient budget often delegated some of the Facebook content marketing tasks to content specialists. As one interviewee commented on this:

R1: "But [Facebook] this is something that we do not have the best knowledge about in-house so it is good to have collaborations and partners that know the best."

Companies with both little knowledge and budget had to manage the Page by themselves which was often challenging and unproductive. Here is an excerpt from an interviewee illustrating this:

R4: "I am not so good in seeing things which would be best for sales. That is where I usually need help from professionals who understand the laws of business and selling."

R4: "This year is supposed to be the year we increase people's knowledge about us. But I know I cannot do it by myself. That is why I am dreaming about hiring someone."

The advantages of cooperations included re-purposing already made content, decreased Facebook content marketing workload, and improved quality of Facebook content marketing. As one interviewee put it:

R5: "Sometimes we already have photos in our photo bank and I just use those. Or I can post a recipe we already have on our website. Sometimes [Facebook content] it needs more work, sometimes it is easy because the content is already there so I just need to make a post and write something."

There are downsides of cooperating with others on Facebook content marketing as well. As was already mentioned, cooperations usually required financial investments, which is not an option for some companies. Apart from monetary expenditures, the cooperations also required organization which is essentially an investment of efforts and time. As one interviewee said:

R5: "If we have a professional photographer that takes a lot of money and work from me because I need to organize everything. That is why we do not use that so often, like a couple of times per year."

R5: "Sometimes I can do [Facebook content] it right away, sometimes I need some help. For example, if I want to use people in photos, I need to organize that."

It can therefore be concluded that teamwork and financial investments are likely to increase the productivity of Facebook content marketing of Finnish plant protein producers. The absence of resources does not make Facebook content marketing impossible yet it may significantly impair its productivity.

#### **4.1.5 Content types**

Recipes was one of the major content types used by the participating companies in their Facebook posts. The main advantage of recipe content was demonstrating the products uses. As some interviewees said:

R1: "We are trying to give some inspiration for what to have with your family or friends."

R1: "Recipes is the biggest of the [content] pools we make."

R5: "We try to inspire people, tell them how our products can be used."

As was discussed in the literature review, vegan meat substitutes are often marketed as a part of established routines of cooking. In addition, marketing messages are recommended to be targeted according to the consumer's stage in adopting a plant-based diet (Fuentes & Fuentes, 2017; Lea et al., 2006). Tailoring content according to interests of different audiences is essential to better satisfy their needs and hence increase engagement (Reinikainen et al., 2018; Taiminen &

Karjaluoto, 2017). Based on this, recipes seem to be a logical way of introducing the products to familiar cooking routines and helpful for new vegans. Therefore, the participating companies seemed to understand the needs and interests of their target audiences.

#### 4.1.6 Planning

Interestingly, the participating companies did not have a separate Facebook content marketing strategy. Instead, their Facebook content marketing activities relied on a general marketing strategy which usually included multiple digital media channels, goals, content themes, and target audiences. As two interviewees put it:

R3: "Our content strategy includes more channels than just Facebook. It takes into account all digital channels, including website and social media."

R1: "We have selected themes that we try to utilize when we create content. So [strategy] it is more of a general social media strategy which includes content."

These marketing strategies were similar to the ones suggested by the literature. As was previously mentioned, a successful content marketing strategy should include the research on the target audience's information needs, objectives, types of content marketing used, promotion, schedule, and evaluation metrics (Baltes, 2015; Kilgour et al., 2015; Reinikainen et al., 2018). Thus, Finnish plant protein producers may not need to develop a separate content strategy for Facebook as despite the absence of a specific strategy all participating companies referred to Facebook as a valuable and cost-effective tool.

The participating companies were also unanimous in their forward-thinking approach to Facebook content marketing. They tried to create content beforehand and plan publishing using various software tools such as content calendars and social media management applications. Specifically, content calendars were helpful for planning content themes and production in advance. Here are excerpts from two interviewees illustrating this:

R3: "We have a content calendar which we stick to. It helps with planning and also works as a cooperation tool with external partners."

R1: "One month in advance we create a calendar which is adjusted weekly, if needed."

Social media management platforms Falcon and Buffer were used for general management of publishing and collaborating with partners. For example, on Falcon companies can accept and adjust the posts planned by the agency thus simplifying the cooperation. As two interviewees illustrated this:

R1: “We are using [Falcon] this tool between us and our media agency, where they manage the whole process of posting.”

R5: “I have a calendar, then I use this social media management tool called Buffer. I can put posts there in advance so that is a calendar at the same time.”

The benefits of planning Facebook posts also include alignment with upcoming business needs such as product launches and smooth cooperation with involved parties. As one interviewee shared:

R1: “We have monthly planning going on, whether it is via email or meetings. It is throwing ideas about what are the business needs, whether there are products that need lifting up, whether there is competition going on in the market that we need to react to with our products, whether some themes are going on, whether some novelties are launched, and other upcoming needs for that month.”

If the available resources do not allow purchasing special social media management software, some of their functionality such as a content calendar can be replicated for free in Excel. As one interviewee said:

R5: “I am keeping an Excel as well.”

Hence, planning content in advance using available tools and software can be recommended for other Finnish plant protein producers to facilitate their Facebook content marketing activities in various ways.

#### **4.1.7 Promotion of posts**

All participating companies advertised their posts with Facebook promotion tools also known as “boosted posts”. According to literature, promoting posts is essential as if the company’s content is not visible then the effectiveness of content marketing is decreased (Chaffey & Smith, 2017). Depending on the available finances, some companies promoted every post while others did not do it as regularly. As two interviewees shared:

R1: “We promote I think all of the posts we create.”

R3: “Yes, we advertise certain posts.”

One of the main purposes of boosting posts was to attract customers. As one interviewee said:

R5: “If we do Facebook marketing and we put money on that, the idea is to gain customers.”

For some companies, media agencies were responsible for analyzing and reporting on the “boosted posts”. As one interviewee put it:

R3: “We have a responsible for all social media publishing and moderating, but content production and advertising is handled externally by an agency.”

Most participating companies expressed satisfaction with promoting posts on Facebook. Specifically, “boosted posts” were described as affordable yet effective. As two interviewees illustrated this:

R1: “[Boosted posts] That is one of the major marketing tools we have, it is quite cost-effective in terms of reaching large audiences.”

R3: “[Facebook] It is an important channel, especially for advertising purposes.”

“Boosted posts” was one of the few Facebook content marketing tools that is used by every participating company hence it can be recommended for other Finnish plant protein producers as well. Overall, Facebook was regarded by the interviewees as an affordable yet effective marketing tool. As some of the interviewees put it:

R1: “Facebook is something that we find very necessary and useful as a marketing platform.”

R2: “Facebook or whatever social media channels are very effective, fast, and cheap from the company’s point of view. You can reach a lot of people.”

R4: “From the beginning of [company name], we have never had much money for marketing. That is the reason why Facebook is such a good way for us to market.”

#### **4.1.8 Effective content**

Most participating companies were unanimous in the opinion that effective is proactive, useful, and entertaining. As two interviewees said:

R5: “The idea [of content] is always to, for example, arouse their [customers’] emotions and interest. It can be informative or funny.”

R3: “[Content marketing] It is an approach to marketing which focuses on attracting your target audience with useful and valuable content. Inbound instead of outbound.”

According to one of the interviewees, proactive content is the one aligned with the current interests of the audience, which may depend on the season or weekday, for example. Here is an excerpt from one interviewee illustrating this:

R1: "We mainly do two posts per week - one on Monday or Tuesday and one on Thursday or Friday. I think those are days when people are considering what to eat. This is the guideline for the schedule, especially the weekend one."

All companies also tried to keep up with both global and local events. As two interviewees shared:

R4: "I have written down all major days like this Valentine's Day and Laskiainen."

R5: "I try to get inspiration from the season or if there is some kind of special day coming. I try to think about those in advance, that is why I have the calendar for the posts."

The time of the year could be an inspiration as well. As one of the interviewees said:

R4: "When summer comes, people like to grill in Finland so that is what we have to put there [on Facebook]."

Proactive content also meant following the current information needs of the audience which may be defined by the current trends in society. As one of the interviewees shared:

R1: "We are also trying to be relatively active in terms of if we have any ad hoc needs or active discussions. For example, if we see gnocchi recipes are popular, we will try to follow that. We are trying to be proactive with our discussion points with the consumers."

Thus, the participating companies seemed to understand the importance of being proactive and aligning the content with the current consumer needs as appropriate and valuable content stimulates purchasing (Scott, 2015). Keeping the posts topical by addressing the current events was also recommended by Malhotra et al. (2013).

Regarding useful content, all companies tried to educate the consumers on how the products can be used by offering recipes. Information on what the products are made from can also be important for consumers, as stated by one of the interviewees. This is in line with the recommendation by Malhotra et al. (2013) to use informational posts about the brand's history, business operations, or product manufacturing to increase likes. As one interviewee put it:

R1: "In terms of the analysis we have done, I think the [raw ingredient name] are something that people are interested in, the raw ingredient itself."

The research suggests that entertaining and humorous content increases likes and hence improves engagement (Malhotra et al., 2013; Syrdal & Briggs, 2018). Therefore, it is reasonable that the interviewees regarded entertaining content as

effective. According to the interviewees, videos and contests were used for entertaining. In addition to entertaining, videos can stimulate the customers' interest in the product and increase shares (Malhotra et al., 2013; Reinikainen et al., 2018; Sabate et al., 2014). As one interviewee said:

R2: "I think the most efficient are the videos. Also, competition posts."

Contests were recommended by Men and Tsai (2013) to enhance the community dynamics, enrich the content of the SNS page, and strengthen engagement. As one interviewee commented:

R4: "We have had a couple of contests, they were good."

One interviewee also noted that photos of the company members were effective, which agrees with the research by Malhotra et al. (2013) which suggested that humanizing the brand by adding emotions to the posts is important. Here is an excerpt from the interviewee explaining this:

R5: "Sometimes I try to put photos of people because usually those arouse interest in our customers because the story of our company is nice and touching."

#### **4.1.9 Evaluation**

All participating companies except one evaluated the effectiveness of their Facebook content marketing efforts using various approaches. According to research, evaluation and measurement should be an essential part of any content marketing strategy (Baltes, 2015; Reinikainen et al., 2018). The one company that did not evaluate did so due to the absence of expertise and resources to hire a specialist. As the interviewee said:

R4: "It is a waste of money when we do not know the effect [of Facebook content marketing]. I do not know how to do that and I have not had any time to go to courses."

Among the companies that did the evaluation, some evaluated by themselves while others delegated this task to outsourced specialists. If the evaluation was done in-house, analytics software was usually used to follow various metrics for audience reaction such as likes and shares. The literature suggests considering these sharing metrics too (Baltes, 2015). Regarding software used for evaluation, the interviewees mentioned Falcon, Google Analytics, Data Studio, and Facebook Analytics. Here are excerpts from the interviewees commenting on this:

R5: "We do not have separate analytics because on Facebook you can already see quite well how many people are reached, how many reactions, comments, and shares."

R3: "We compare performance against set KPIs."

R3: "We use for example Google Analytics and Data Studio."

If the evaluation was carried out by external partners, the company received regular reports on Facebook content marketing performance. As one interviewee shared:

R1: "Falcon is more or less a posting tool that also helps with analyzing. The analysis is mainly done by the media agency. But the metrics we follow are likes, reach, commitment."

Thus, it may be considered essential for Finnish plant protein producers to evaluate their Facebook content marketing results with either internal or external means, depending on the available expertise and resources.

## 4.2 Content analysis findings

In this subchapter, the key findings from the content analysis of the Facebook posts collection are discussed and visualized with pie charts. The findings are organized according to the coding framework, starting with the content type used in the collected posts. Then, the content communication characteristics of the collected posts are discussed, followed by communication triggers and exchanges of the collected posts. Finally, findings regarding the content centrality of the collected posts are presented. Unfortunately, it was not possible to insert screenshots of the posts as they would make the participating companies recognizable.

### 4.2.1 The main content types used in the posts

The pie chart in figure 7 illustrates the distribution of main content types used in the collected Facebook posts. The following codes were removed from the pie chart as they were not applied to any post: "Blogs", "Cases", "White papers", "e-Newsletters", "Articles", "Presentations", "Reports", "e-Magazines", "Apps", "e-Conferences", "Games", "Challenges", and "e-Books".

#### Landing pages

Almost half (46%) of the collected posts used website links as the main content asset to accompany a Facebook post, making them the most commonly used content asset across the participating companies. The reason for posting predominantly links may be associated with decreased production and costs because such posts essentially re-used the website content. The linked website

content often was recipes. On one hand, this finding may recommend linking website content in Facebook posts for more efficient use of resources. On the other hand, the literature suggests that when the audience visits links, the risk of them not coming back for commenting increases (Sabate et al., 2014). As links can decrease comments, they can impair the audience's engagement level with Facebook posts. It can therefore be suggested that the usage of links as the main content asset in Facebook posts of Finnish plant protein producers needs further investigation.

### **Photos**

At 17% of the collected posts, photos were the second most used content type for accompanying Facebook posts. This finding was expected because images have become an essential component of content marketing (Scott, 2015). One of the most important benefits of adding photos to Facebook posts is improved engagement (Malhotra et al., 2013; Sabate et al., 2014). In the collected posts, photos were always combined with text which is likely to engage the audience even more (Kim & Yang, 2017). It is also important to note that the participating companies aimed at producing original photos. As mentioned in the literature review, original photos are effective for communicating with the consumers and sharing the uniqueness of the products (Scott, 2015). Thus, this finding confirms that photos are a valuable asset in content marketing and are actively used by Finnish plant protein producers in Facebook posts.

### **Illustrations**

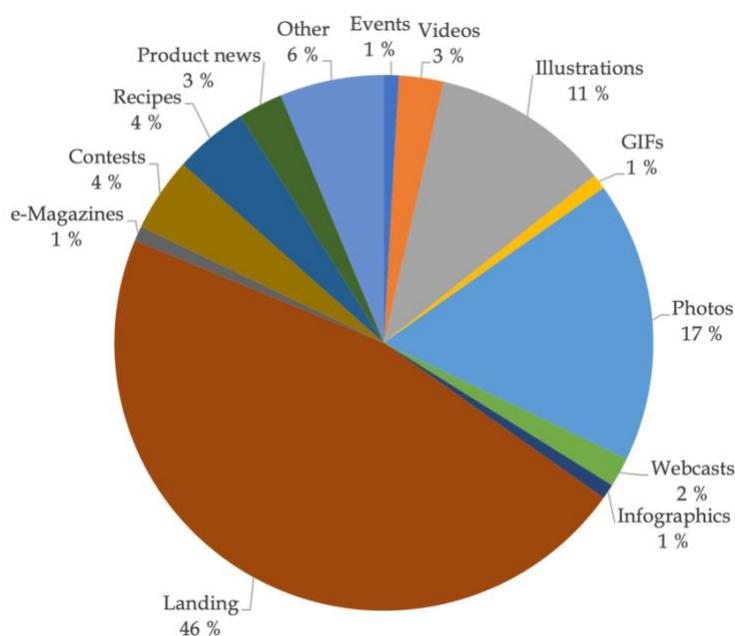
Illustrations represented 11% of the collected posts, which makes them the third most used content type for accompanying Facebook posts. A possible explanation for this might be that illustrations can be easier to create than original photos. Usually, a computer or even a smartphone with often free graphic design application is all that is needed for creating an illustration. In addition, illustrations can help to communicate the marketing messages effectively using graphic design. As was observed during the content collection, the illustrations were usually aimed at entertaining the audience by using humor, for example. As was discussed in the literature review, entertaining and humorous content increases likes and hence improves engagement (Malhotra et al., 2013; Syrdal & Briggs, 2018). In the interviews, most participating companies did agree that effective content is entertaining. Therefore, this finding confirms that illustrations are an essential content asset for Facebook posts of Finnish plant protein producers that improves engagement.

### **Recipes**

As was discussed in the interviews, recipes are an important content asset even though on practice they represented only 4% of the accompanying content. The

recipes were published in two ways. Mostly, recipes were posted as website links so the actual recipe was not in the post but in the attached link. Hence, even though the post was coded as “Landing” in fact it contained a recipe but in the website link format. The advantage of re-publishing the recipe from the website is reduced content production efforts. However, as was mentioned earlier, links attached to Facebook posts may decrease engagement (Sabate et al., 2014). Another way of posting recipes was providing the actual recipe in the text of the post yet this method was used less. An implication of this finding is that Finnish plant protein producers have the flexibility of posting recipes using two different methods. However, links should be used with caution.

FIGURE 7 Types of content used to accompany Facebook posts across the participating companies



#### 4.2.2 Communication characteristics of the posts

##### Educational

As shown in figure 8, almost half (47%) of the collected posts were educational while at 11% the least promoted sales. This result may suggest that the participating companies shifted from pushy self-promotional content to more consumer-focused content that stimulates sales through delivering value (Ho et al., 2020; Scott, 2015). In other words, the participating companies likely understood that traditional interruptive marketing is not effective anymore and new content marketing approach that grows sales indirectly by improving consumer engagement and relationships is needed (Deighton & Kornfeld, 2009; Halligan & Shah, 2014; Ho et al., 2020; Hollebeek & Macky, 2019; Malthouse et al., 2013). In the interviews, it also was apparent that the companies tried to

educate the audience about their products and how they can be used. The literature suggests that educating consumers via content is the key contribution of content marketing to building lasting customer relationships and improving brand loyalty (Baltes, 2015). Thus, Finnish plant protein producers should be shifting to a content marketing mindset to build stronger customer relationships and brand loyalty.

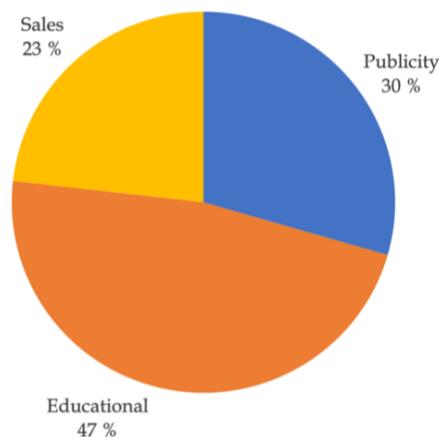
### Publicity

At 30%, the next biggest share of the collected posts was aimed at making the company appear more admirable for gaining positive publicity (Ho et al., 2020). As was previously mentioned, the posts were collected in the period from December to March, which is a time full of various celebrations in Finland. As a consequence, the posts often included congratulations with holidays, special campaigns, charitable actions, and sustainable efforts. Gaining positive publicity is one of the ways how PR professionals build favorable relationships with the stakeholders, which important for promotion (Kotler, 2013). Thus, this finding may indicate that the participating companies recognized the importance of gaining positive publicity and keeping the posts topical for promotion and improved interaction (Kotler, 2013; Malhotra et al., 2013).

### Sales

As was already mentioned, at 23% the least of the posts promoted sales. This finding can be seen as a positive tendency as an explicit selling language should be avoided if brand engagement, trust, credibility, and sharing rates are wished to be improved (Holliman & Rowley, 2014; Pulizzi, 2012).

FIGURE 8 Communication characteristics of the Facebook posts across the participating companies



### 4.2.3 Communication triggers and exchanges of the posts

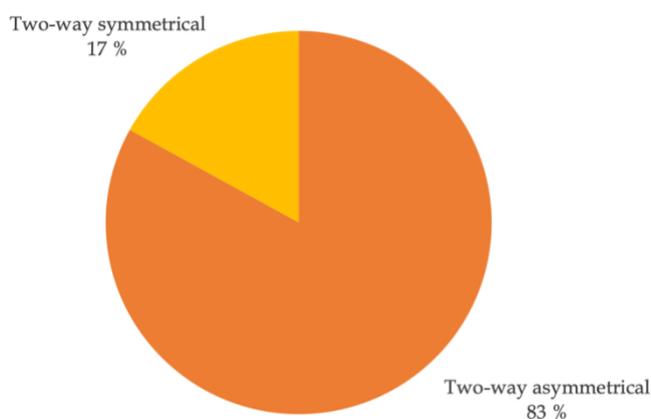
#### Two-way asymmetrical

As shown in figure 9, at 83% most of the posts were two-way asymmetrical, meaning they aimed at guiding the audience to profitable behavior (Ho et al., 2020). The asymmetrical or also known as one-way communication style can be an important method of disseminating information for organizations (Devin & Lane, 2014; Taylor & Kent, 2014). However, content marketing is believed to promote two-way communication because it delivers value to the audience (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). If the posts were considered asymmetrical, it may mean that the participating companies did not follow principles of dialogic communication or provide enough value in their posts to be regarded as two-way symmetrical. As a consequence, the effectiveness of such posts and their contribution to two-way communication may be questioned. Thus, the participating companies tended to promote one-way communication with their Facebook posts, even though two-way symmetrical communication is preferable (Devin & Lane, 2014).

#### Two-way symmetrical

At 17%, the rest of the posts were two-way symmetrical, meaning they aimed at fostering a more balanced communication between the company and its audience by encouraging discussions and sharing of ideas (Ho et al., 2020). As was already mentioned, two-way symmetrical is considered to be a preferable communication mode (Devin & Lane, 2014). Despite this, the participating companies had a surprisingly low share of two-way symmetrical posts. For the future, it may be recommended to increase the portion of two-way symmetrical posts to potentially improve organizational effectiveness as suggested by the literature (Kent & Taylor, 2002).

FIGURE 9 Communication triggers and exchanges of the Facebook posts across the participating companies



#### **4.2.4 Content centrality of the posts**

##### **Product-centric**

At 81%, the majority of the collected posts were product-centric, meaning they mainly promoted the products. This type of content should not be viewed negatively as it helps with generating sales prospects and influencing purchase intent (Ho et al., 2020). However, it is important to avoid direct selling language for maintaining a trusted brand status and fostering brand engagement (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). Hence, Finnish plant protein producers may be advised to educate the buyers without an obvious sales appeal in the product-centric posts (Ahmad et al., 2016).

##### **Brand-centric**

At 16%, the next biggest share of the collected posts was brand-centric. Such posts tried to promote the company while deemphasizing the selling of products (Ho et al., 2020). A smaller percentage of brand-centric posts may be considered as a positive tendency because trust, credibility, and sharing rate are promoted when the brand is removed from the content (Pulizzi, 2012). Therefore, Finnish plant protein producers may be recommended to minimize brand-centric content and instead aim at increasing consumer-centric posts to improve interaction, foster content distribution, and build meaningful stakeholder relationships (Men & Tsai, 2013; Sabate et al., 2014).

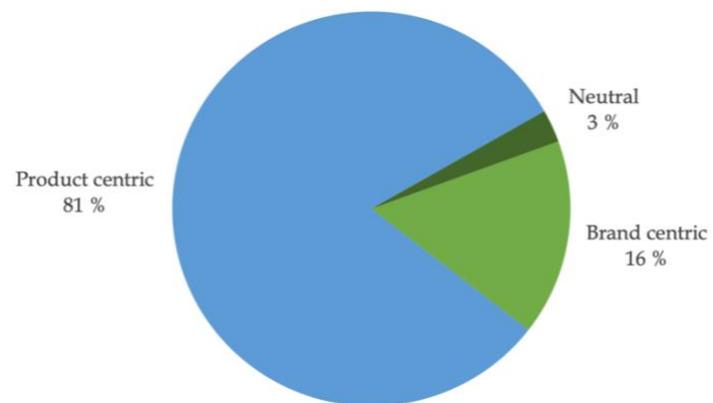
##### **Neutral**

At 3%, the rest of the collected posts were neutral, meaning they were neither about the products, the company, or the consumers (Ho et al., 2020). For example, one of the neutral posts discussed Meat Saturday, which is a trend that suggests eating sustainably produced meat only on Saturdays. It was not explicitly about the brand or its products but rather about the current social discussion.

##### **Consumer-centric**

No consumer-centric posts were found therefore this kind of posts was removed from the pie chart in figure 10. Consumer-centric posts aim at inviting the stakeholders to participate (Ho et al., 2020). The absence of consumer-centric posts may be undesirable because when the audience interacts with content, this content is promoted to the News Feeds of the audience's friends hence interaction fosters content distribution (Sabate et al., 2014). In addition, when the publics are interacting with organizations on their social media pages, meaningful stakeholder relationships can be built (Men & Tsai, 2013). Thus, it may be suggested that Finnish plant protein producers should aim at increasing the number of consumer-centric posts on Facebook.

FIGURE 10 Content centrality of the Facebook posts across the participating companies



## 5 CONCLUSION

This master's thesis focused on Facebook content marketing for Finnish plant-based protein producers. Despite content marketing is actively practiced, academic insight into this topic was found to be relatively scarce. In response to this knowledge gap, this study aimed at contributing to a better understanding of Facebook content marketing for Finnish plant protein producers by building on past research and investigating their current Facebook content marketing activities. Before commencing an empirical study, a review of the academic literature was conducted for exploring the theoretical background of the topic. It also helped to link the empirical findings with the previous academic developments at the end of this study.

Following the methods used by Ho, Pang, and Choy (2020) in their research, the empirical study involved two data collection methods: five semi-structured interviews with representatives of Finnish plant protein producers (one in written format) and a sample of their Facebook posts published over a period of three months. Combining these two data collection methods allowed a deeper understanding of the topic and answering the research question more completely. The thematic analysis of the interview data suggested improvements for the coding framework of the content analysis while the content analysis of the collected posts helped to see how the participating companies implemented the practices they shared in the interviews.

The goal of the interviews was to learn first-hand how Finnish plant protein producers had been implementing Facebook content marketing. The interview transcripts were analyzed using the six phases of thematic analysis from the article by Braun and Clarke (2006). The thematic analysis revealed the details of how the participating companies planned, produced, promoted, and measured Facebook content marketing. When it comes to planning, the companies shared a forward-thinking approach, meaning they tried to produce content in advance and plan publishing with software such as content calendars and social media management platforms. Regarding production, outsourcing content creation services was found to be increasing the production quality while decreasing the workload. In terms of goals, the companies with less mature Facebook content marketing wished to achieve basic goals such as starting a collection of recipes, whereas companies with more mature Facebook content marketing focused on advanced goals such as cultivating brand advocates. All participating companies aimed at increasing brand awareness and engaging the target audiences regardless of the level of their Facebook content marketing. Speaking of promotion, "boosted posts" were used by all participating companies to advertise their posts as regularly as the budget allowed. Overall, "boosted posts" were deemed an affordable yet effective promotion tool. When it comes to effective content, most participating companies defined it as proactive, useful, and entertaining. Proactive meant aligning content with the current needs of the

audience while useful content usually educated on the product uses. For entertaining, the companies used videos and contests. Finally, evaluating the effectiveness of Facebook content marketing with either internal or external means appeared to be essential for the participating companies. Some companies did the evaluation by themselves using analytics software to measure audience reaction. Other companies hired outsourced specialists, who regularly reported on Facebook content marketing performance.

In total, 112 Facebook posts were collected, with an average of 22 posts per company. The posts were analyzed using the content analysis method and the coding framework from the study by Ho, Pang, and Choy (2020). The goal of the content analysis was to systematically describe and categorize the posts to better explore their characteristics (Adams et al., 2014). As a result, the content analysis helped to identify the main content types, goals, and priorities of the Facebook posts published by the participating companies. The most used content types were website links, photos, and illustrations. Regarding communication goals, the majority of the posts were educational while the least were promoting sales. Speaking of the communication triggers and exchanges, most posts were two-way asymmetrical even though two-way symmetrical communication is preferable (Devin & Lane, 2014). As for the content's focus, the majority of the posts were product-centric and brand-centric.

## 5.1 Theoretical implications

Several findings from the literature were found to be applied on practice by the participating companies. Firstly, some of the goals set by the companies for their Facebook content marketing corresponded to earlier research by Hollebeek and Macky (2019), Holliman and Rowley (2014), and Pulizzi (2012). Secondly, the active use of recipes was found to be appropriate for integrating the products into eating routines and helpful for new vegans, as recommended by Fuentes and Fuentes (2017) and Lea et al. (2006). Thirdly, the general marketing strategies, which the participating companies based their Facebook content marketing on, appeared to be in line with the previous research by Baltes (2015), Kilgour et al. (2015), and Reinikainen et al. (2018). Further, promoting the posts agreed with the recommendations by Chaffey and Smith (2017). Regarding the content of the posts, the participating companies seemed to understand the importance of relevant and valuable content which is aligned with the current events and consumer needs (Malhotra et al., 2013; Scott, 2015). The companies also tried to educate the consumers via content, which is recommended by the literature for building lasting customer relationships and improving brand loyalty (Baltes, 2015). On top of that, the companies used entertaining content such as videos and contests, which the research recommends for enhancing the community dynamics, enriching the content of the SNS page, and improving engagement (Malhotra et al., 2013; Men & Tsai, 2013; Syrdal & Briggs, 2018). Lastly, most

participating companies evaluated their Facebook content marketing efforts, which is suggested to be an essential component of content marketing strategies (Baltes, 2015; Reinikainen et al., 2018).

## 5.2 Practical implications

In general, the participating companies seemed to recognize the importance of improving consumer engagement and relationships within the content marketing approach (Deighton & Kornfeld, 2009; Halligan & Shah, 2014; Ho et al., 2020; Hollebeek & Macky, 2019; Malthouse et al., 2013). Nevertheless, several practical recommendations can be made based on the empirical findings of this study.

It was found that the business conditions, budget, and expertise of Finnish plant protein producers play an important role in the implementation of Facebook content marketing. Therefore, Finnish plant protein producers may be recommended to aim at attaining favorable business conditions, increasing investments in Facebook, and obtaining access to professional expertise to potentially improve the outcomes of Facebook content marketing. It is also important to cooperate either with internal staff or external content specialists for improving the content quality and decreasing the workload. Further, it was discovered that developing a separate Facebook content strategy is not necessary. Instead, Facebook content marketing can rely on the general marketing strategy. Regarding planning, it can be recommended to produce content beforehand and prepare a publishing schedule using software such as Falcon or Buffer. In addition, Finnish plant protein producers are advised to promote their Facebook content with “boosted posts” as the interviewees considered it an affordable yet effective promotion tool. Finally, evaluating the effectiveness of Facebook content marketing efforts with help of software or outsourced specialists is essential.

Concerning the content of Facebook posts, it was found that website links, photos, illustrations, and recipes were among the main content assets of the participating Finnish plant protein producers. However, website links should be used with caution as the literature suggests that they may decrease engagement (Sabate et al., 2014). To potentially increase the effectiveness of content, the posts should be proactive, useful, and entertaining. Finnish plant protein producers should also increase two-way symmetrical posts to improve consumer engagement and organizational effectiveness (Ho et al., 2020; Kent & Taylor, 2002). Lastly, it may be advised to minimize brand-centric posts and increase consumer-centric posts to improve interaction, foster content distribution, and build meaningful relationships (Men & Tsai, 2013; Sabate et al., 2014).

### **5.3 Evaluation of the study**

Reliability and validity are essential research qualities that need to be discussed in the evaluation of this study. Reliability is associated with replication and consistency of the research results while validity refers to the appropriateness of the methods for achieving the research aim. It has to be admitted that it is impossible to conduct perfectly reliable research. Moreover, qualitative research is not necessarily intended for replication since it reflects socially constructed concepts at a particular time. Nevertheless, the author attempted to decrease the possibility of producing flawed knowledge by carefully developing the research design and committing to following it. The author was also aware of such threats to reliability as participant error and researcher error and bias. Participant error happens when the participant's performance is impaired due to such factors as fatigue. Researcher error refers to factors affecting the researcher's interpretation such as misunderstanding, while researcher bias concerns the subjective recording of the responses. To minimize the risk of these threats, the author tried to conduct the interviews in the morning hours when the interviewees are not yet tired. The author also tried to avoid misunderstandings in the interviews by asking for clarification when needed. Objective registration of the interview responses was possible with audio recording. The reliability of the content analysis was ensured by completing an intercoder reliability test with a fellow student. To improve validity, the author occasionally re-assessed whether the interviews and content collection measured what they were meant to. (Saunders et al., 2019).

### **5.4 Limitations of the study**

There are several limitations of the current study to be addressed. Firstly, content marketing is a progressive field in which new technologies are often being introduced. It has to be admitted that content strategies and tools discussed in this thesis may suddenly become outdated. Therefore, the readers are advised to complement their reading with further online research on the latest innovations in the field. Secondly, this study focused on Finland and Facebook yet could potentially be extended to more countries and social networks to see how content marketing is perceived by foreign plant protein producers with different cultural backgrounds. Thirdly, this study was limited to only observing the current practices in Facebook content marketing in the Finnish plant protein sector without measuring their effectiveness. Further, all interviews were planned to be spoken yet one interview was conducted in written format due to the interviewee's busy schedule. The written interview did not allow obtaining the same richness of the data thus can be considered a limitation. Another suggestion would be to aim at conducting longer interviews and asking more specific

questions than in the interview guide of this study, which was not possible due to the busy schedules of interviewees. Naturally, conducting more interviews would be beneficial for the extensiveness of data yet it was hard to get even five participants. Also, the requirement of the participating companies to stay anonymous did not allow to insert examples of Facebook content which would be helpful for illustrating the findings. Finally, there was a slight language barrier present during the data collection as all participating companies published their Facebook posts in Finnish. The author does not speak Finnish well yet her basic Finnish language skills and the help of online translators were sufficient to conduct the content analysis of the posts. However, this study could have been more thorough if the data analyst spoke Finnish.

## **5.5 Suggestions for future research**

Future research on this topic can involve a quantitative study of the audience's reaction to the posts, which could provide a better understanding of the effects of Facebook content marketing of Finnish plant protein producers. Even though this study has provided much valuable information, more details about cooperations with content specialists, the use of entertaining content, differentiation from competitors via Facebook content, and conducting Facebook content marketing without external help were wished for. The content collection could be collected over a longer time period to obtain an even fuller picture of Facebook content of Finnish plant protein producers. In addition, the content collection could be done on other social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, or LinkedIn. Conducting similar research on LinkedIn would be especially interesting as it would offer a business-to-business perspective on content marketing in the Finnish plant protein industry.

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## APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE

### 1. Introduction

- What do you understand by “content marketing”?

### 2. General

- Do you have a separate strategy for Facebook content? If yes, how do you formulate it (e.g. what factors have an impact)?
- What are the objectives of posting Facebook content?
- What part does the Facebook content play in the overall digital marketing strategy (e.g. is it a priority or not)?

### 3. Budget and human resources

- How much of your marketing budget is allocated to Facebook content production and posting?
- Do you have a special person responsible for Facebook content production and posting?
- Do you outsource Facebook content production?
- What element of Facebook content production and posting takes up the most resources?

### 4. Distribution of content

- Do you have a schedule for publishing Facebook content? If yes, why is it so?

### 5. Content creation

- Briefly describe the process of creating content for Facebook.
- What are the main types of content you produce for Facebook?
- Which content types are the most effective on Facebook? Why?
- What are the challenges of Facebook content marketing? How do you overcome them?

### 6. Promotion of content

- Do you promote Facebook content? If yes, how?

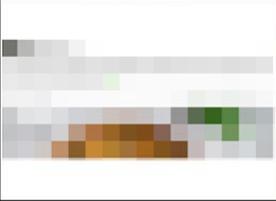
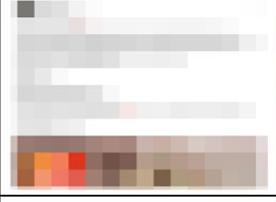
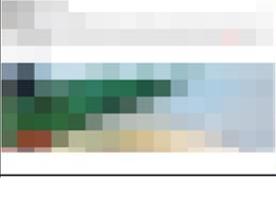
### 7. Evaluation

- How do you evaluate the effectiveness of your Facebook posts?
- Do you use any analytics software?

### 8. End

- Is there anything else you want to add?

## APPENDIX 2: EXCERPT FROM THE CODING SHEET

Post #	Screenshot	Link	Date	Type	Characteristics	Triggers & exchanges	Centrality
1			1.12.2020	Landing	Educational	Two-way asymmetrical	Product-centric
2			3.12.2020	Photos	Publicity	Two-way asymmetrical	Brand-centric
3			6.12.2020	Photos	Publicity	Two-way asymmetrical	Neutral
4			8.12.2020	Landing	Educational	Two-way asymmetrical	Product-centric
5			11.12.2020	Videos	Educational	Two-way asymmetrical	Product-centric
6			15.12.2020	Landing	Educational	Two-way asymmetrical	Product-centric

## APPENDIX 3: CODING FRAMEWORK

### Category: “Content type”

Code	Definition
Events	Activities or occasions (e.g. pop-up food truck)
Videos	Video recordings
Blogs	Reference to articles or bloggers
Cases	Reference to case studies
White papers	Reference to white papers or research reports
Newsletters	Reference to company-produced newsletters
Articles	Company-produced or user-generated articles
Illustrations	Images created using graphic design
GIFs	Short animated clips
Photos	Photographs
Webcasts	Company-produced or user-generated webcasts (e.g. podcasts)
Infographics	Company-produced or user-generated visual representations of factual information
Presentations	Company-produced slides in PDF or PowerPoint format
Landing	Hyperlinks which reference websites, landing pages, or hashtags from other social networks
Reports	Reference to company-produced or user-generated reports
E-Magazines	Reproduced or reference to company-produced or user-generated electronic magazines
Apps	Reference to company-produced or company-affiliated apps (e.g. e-commerce apps)
E-Conferences	Reference to company-organized online conferences
Games	Company-produced online games
Contests	Company-produced, time-limited audience-participation events with prizes, without judgements
Challenges	Company-produced, time-limited audience-participation events with or without prizes, with judgement and quality criteria
E-Books	Company-produced or company-affiliated e-books
Recipes	Recipes featuring the company’s products
Product news	News related to the company’s products (e.g. launches)
Other	Miscellaneous content types

### Category: “Content communication characteristics”

Code	Definition
Publicity	The goal is to make the company, its products, services, or staff appear more admirable for reputable gain through positive publicity
Educational	The goal is to provide useful or educational information

Sales	The goal is to sell or promote a sales offer
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**Category: "Communication triggers and exchanges"**

Code	Definition
Two-way asymmetrical	The goal is to overtly guide the stakeholders to effect transactional behavior
Two-way symmetrical	The goal is to achieve mutual understanding with the stakeholders by allowing them to share ideas and discuss with each other

**Category: "Content centrality"**

Code	Definition
Brand-centric	Content promotes the company and de-emphasizes selling of products
Product-centric	Content promotes products and services
Consumer-centric	Content invites stakeholder participation
Neutral	Neither of the above