Content Marketing: New Opportunities for Building Strong Brands Online

Authors: Atina Georgieva & Alexandra Djoukanova

MSc. International Marketing & Brand Management
Lund University

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Abstract

***Title**:* Content marketing: new opportunities for building strong brands online

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Authors: Atina Georgieva and Alexandra Djoukanova

Supervisor: Veronika Tarnovskaya

Keywords: Digital content, content marketing, online branding, brand equity online

Thesis purpose: The purpose of this thesis is to illustrate the opportunities that digital content creates for companies to strengthen their online brands. The present research takes a managerial perspective on the content marketing process and explores how digital content can be used to build brand equity online.

Methodology: A social constructionist ontological position and an interpretivist epistemological stance of the authors of this thesis guided the adoption of a qualitative strategy and abductive approach. This research is based on an exploratory single-case study research design.

Theoretical perspective: The thesis used and built upon existing theories in the fields of content marketing, online branding and brand equity online. The Simmons' (2007) 'Four Pillars of i-Branding' framework served as a basis for empirical data collection and analysis, hence aided in answering the research question.

Empirical data: Two data collection methods have been applied within the research design. First, five semi-structured interviews with three representatives from the selected company were conducted. Second, virtual observation of the digital content on the company website and social media was performed.

Findings: Three phases of the content marketing process were identified, namely planning, creation and distribution. The strategic decisions and activities in each phase of the process revealed how digital content can be used as a tool to build brand equity. First, the brand equity building process is triggered in the content distribution phase when different distribution tactics cause branding effects, such as increased brand visibility online, favorable user experience, greater personalization, leadership associations, increased user interaction and enhanced brand message. In turn, these effects can increase brand awareness and create positive brand associations. Second, the ongoing segmentation based on the users' needs and the continuous delivery of relevant and valuable content favor a genuine relationship between the brand and its audience. This creates opportunities to establish brand trust and brand loyalty, hence leveraging brand equity in the long run.

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Lund, 26 May 2014

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

In 2014, when the Internet is celebrating its 25th year of existence, its impact on organizations and consumers led to remarkable transformation of the marketing and branding disciplines. From just an occasional entertainment tool, the Internet has now become the main channel for communications, leisure and work. People now spend more than five hours a day on a digital device (eMarketer, 2013), and companies responded to this change by rapidly increasing the expenditures in digital channels, where in 2013 they represent on average 25% of the total marketing budget (Gartner, 2013). The new digital brandscape forced companies to reconsider their marketing approaches (Wind, 2008; Varadarajan & Yadav, 2009; Christodoulides, 2009; Erdoğmuş & Çiçek, 2012), branding strategies (Christodoulides, 2009; de Chernatony & Christodoulides, 2004; Ibeh, Luo & Dinnie, 2005; Rowley, 2004a; Bergstrom, 2000) and communication activities (Hutter et al., 2013).

The evolution of the Internet environment and the rise of the computer-mediated communications resulted in a high degree of digitization of information products (Varadarajan & Yadav, 2009) and immense opportunities to create and distribute digital content (Feng, Guo & Chiang, 2009; Oestreicher-Singer & Zalmanson, 2013). The realization that consumers had more control over their exposure to content on the Internet soon brought marketers to the conventional wisdom that content is king. Moreover, content marketing became a buzzword among practitioners (Mashable, 2014). In 2014, 93% of the B2B companies are using content marketing in their online strategies (Content Marketing Institute, 2014a) and 11.6% of digital marketing budgets are allocated to content creation and management (Gartner, 2013). Although practitioners have not agreed on a common definition of the term 'content marketing', the emphasis is placed on creating and distributing valuable, consistent and relevant content to deliver consumer value, nurture relationships with customers and bring measurable success for brands (Content Marketing Institute, 2014b; Content Marketing Association, 2014).

In practice, content marketing can be implemented in various forms, such as white papers, webinars, blog articles, etc. (Content Marketing Institute, 2013). Branded content is a frequently used term and it refers to content, complementary to a product or a service (Branded Content Marketing Association, 2014; Content Marketing Association, 2014). For example, branded content are the articles on the GE's Ecomagination website that reflect on topics such as innovation and science, familiarizing the audiences with the company's business (Content Marketing Institute, 2013). However, some companies go a step further in their content marketing activities, instead of speaking merely about their products or services. For instance, Barclays established an online portal, where rich content is published in the form of educational material for business skills (Barclays, 2014). Another interesting example is the IBM Institute for Business Value that frequently distributes industry insights free of charge to business executives (IBM, 2014). It is noteworthy to question how such activities impact the customer perceptions of brands. The results of a recent research by IPG Media Lap show that 28% of the users, exposed to content published by brands, are more likely to have favorable view of the brand (Adweek, 2013). Hence, practitioners seem to have widely embraced content marketing in different forms and the recognition of its importance to online branding is growing.

Online branding has gained significant attention in the academic literature. Early studies on Internet markets found that well-recognized brands online were able to charge up to 12% higher prices for commodity products compared to lesser-known brands (Brynjolfsson & Smith, 2000). The transparent, fast-paced digital environment with low entry barriers led to severe competition in every industry. Both pure online and bricks-and-clicks companies consider online branding as very important for their business (Ibeh, Luo & Dinnie, 2005; Ind & Riondino, 2001) and rely on e-branding strategies to stand out from the competition and engage with their customers (Kenney & Curry, 1999). Although bricks-and-clicks companies rely on both online and offline activities to manage their brands, pure online brands depend entirely on e-branding tools. This raises the important question of what e-branding tools can be used to build strong online brands.

How companies create brand equity has been a central issue in branding, regardless the environment. Yet, building strong online brands in a fast-paced and interactive environment represents a greater challenge for marketers. Brand managers are equipped with many tools

for e-branding, however, the road to success is not straight. As Rios and Riquelme (2008) state "it is not only difficult to create brand equity on the Internet, but there are different ways to create it" (p.720). Therefore, it is compelling to understand how different e-branding tools and strategies impact brand equity online.

1.2. Problem formulation

1.2.1. Content: beyond the website

The importance of digital content for e-branding resides in the dynamic Internet-enabled environment that significantly altered the brand communications (Winer, 2009; Hutter et al., 2013; Fournier & Avery, 2011), enhancing real-time interaction and content creation among users and communities (Dennhardt, 2012; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). In this regard, content on the Internet is either user-generated or firm-generated. On the one hand, the branding literature extensively explores user-generated content in its interconnection with social media marketing (Dennhardt, 2012; Brown, Broderick & Lee, 2007; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). On the other hand, content marketing, related to creating and distributing firm-generated content, seems to be an overlooked area. Although the importance of content marketing is recognized by practitioners, it is still a highly unexplored dimension of the growing online branding field in academia. In order to address this knowledge gap, the focus of this research paper is placed on firm-generated content and its applicability as an e-branding tool.

Some researchers discuss content in relation to customized information that companies deliver to the consumer and mention the importance of providing relevant content (Christodoulides & de Chernatony, 2004). In addition, more recent studies on online branding recognize the fundamental role of content and explore its relation to understanding consumers, marketing communications and interaction (Simmons, 2007; Simmons, Thomas & Truong, 2010). However, the problem is that these studies mainly relate content to the website design, providing certain functionality features that enable users to search for content keywords, locate content of interest and navigate easily (Christodoulides & de Chernatony, 2004; Simmons, 2007; Simmons, Thomas & Truong, 2010). In this regard, understanding about content so far has been limited to designing interactive and quality websites and organizing and grouping the content in order to facilitate navigation. However,

to the best of the authors' knowledge, no extant study on e-branding explores content as a piece of valuable information nor its usefulness for online branding. Therefore, the present research focuses on digital content that forms part of companies' online branding strategies to deliver consistent and relevant information to consumers.

Digital content exists in different forms, but the emphasis seems to be placed on how it is delivered to the consumer (EContent, 2011). The literature extensively explores cases, in which suppliers distribute digital content for e-commerce and e-business purposes and they charge for it (Amit & Zott, 2001; Boyer, Hallowell & Roth, 2002; Feng, Guo & Chiang, 2009). Hence, content is seen as a central e-business block, an object of trade and it is often referred to as 'transaction content', that is any information being exchanged and the resources required to enable this exchange (Amit & Zott, 2001). Moreover, some researchers discuss digital content in relation to 'freemium' e-business models, in which certain amount of information is offered to customers for free and other is restricted to subscription (Rowley, 2008a; Oestreicher-Singer & Zalmanson, 2013; Mounier, 2011). While digital content is not something new, it is compelling to understand how it is now evolving. These studies do not explore content delivered for free, but they introduce the idea that some information might not be an object of monetary trade.

The possibility to deliver content free of charge for users and the impact that this strategy has on branding is still an unexplored area in academia. In some cases, free digital content is discussed in terms of an added-value feature for customers. De Chernatony & Christodoulides (2004) refer to companies such as Colgate and Durex that respectively provide online oral care and sexual health information as "differential reward" (p.245) to attract users to their websites with useful advices. Although the examples illustrate a product-related information that only supports the core businesses, it is noteworthy that there is a growing user demand for such content. Hence, the present thesis is looking into firm-generated digital content as an information product that is consistent, valuable and free of charge for the end-consumer, but that requires significant resources from the supplier.

Interestingly, Swatman, Krueger and van der Beek (2006) state that "the Internet consumer is accustomed to free information" (p.64). A prominent example is the huge number of users, benefiting from Coursera's educational platform. The platform provides an unlimited

and free access to diverse online courses and advanced certifications by the world's top-rated universities (Coursera, 2014). However, enrollment in these universities or attendance to courses on-campus is subject to substantial tuition fees. In addition, referring to webinars as a popular format of digital content, Voigt (2010) states that this educational type of digital interaction brings marketers closer to their potential customers, while at the same time generates confidence in the brand. Therefore, as brand strategies and marketing communications are constantly adapting to the new environment, questions arise whether online companies can benefit from delivering more digital content than they used to do before.

This raises expectations that the next big thing to come is to distribute valuable digital content completely for free. Indeed, there are some companies that have already adopted this approach. For instance, HubSpot delivers relevant inbound marketing content through an online platform. The users are granted a free access to a rich marketing library and a possibility to attend virtual academia and gain expertise (HubSpot, 2014). Digging into these and many more cases from practice, it becomes clear that distributing information and digital content for free is an existing and already quite common practice that creates a competitive advantage for many online brands. More importantly, the presented examples illustrate that companies distribute relevant and valuable content and thus, are able to nurture the communication and the interaction with their audiences. This common knowledge from practice, however, seems to be an overlooked area in academia and there is a lack of solid support about the opportunities that digital content creates for online branding.

1.2.2. A missing link: digital content and brand equity online

Despite the plentiful discussions on brand equity in academic literature, few studies actually explore brand equity building in a digital environment (Page & Lepkowska-White, 2002; Simmons, Thomas & Truong, 2010; Rios & Riquelme, 2008; Christodoulides & de Chernatony, 2004). Even though most discussions on brand equity online take the customer-based perspective (Keller, 2003; Aaker, 1991), a general agreement about the sources of brand equity seems to be missing. However, studies on brand equity online depart from traditional brand equity research. In addition, existing studies on online retail and service industry (Christodoulides et al., 2006), e-commerce and online companies (Chen, 2012; Rios

& Riquelme, 2008; Page & Lepkowska-White, 2002) have tried to identify elements and variables that influence brand equity in a digital context. Moreover, these studies discuss specific online branding tools that impact the sources of brand equity online, however, only few relate directly digital content to online brand equity (Simmons, Thomas & Truong, 2010).

As the previous discussion suggests, digital content is seen to have implications on online brand equity, which brings the authors of this thesis to existing gaps in the literature. First, even though in the last decade several e-branding frameworks for creating brand equity online have been developed (Page & Lepkowska-White, 2002; Christodoulides & de Chernatony, 2004; Simmons, 2007), they explore content in terms of technical functionalities of the website such as website search, web-page flow, locating and grouping the content, design, graphics, etc. The authors of this thesis are, however, convinced that with respect to brand equity online, content is not limited to website-specific features, but instead it should be further developed and related to specific content marketing strategies.

Second, to the best of the authors' knowledge, the content marketing literature and its relation to the e-branding literature is still a vastly unexplored area in the academic field. The aforementioned examples prove that practitioners often use digital content as a branding tool and illustrate that content serves as an association and differentiation tool for many online brands, thus contributing to their brand equity (Aaker, 1991). However, no previous study investigates content marketing in reference to e-branding, neither the relation between digital content and brand equity online. Therefore, these reasons justify the need to explore digital content and its relation to e-branding and online brand equity.

To conclude, the discussion problematized digital content in the context of online branding and brand equity online. It presented evidence that two major gaps in the literature exist. First, examples from practice illustrate that the importance of digital content is growing, however, there is a lack of theoretical understanding what digital content is. Second, an additional problem is that the relation between digital content, as a piece of valuable information, and brand equity online has been overlooked in academia. In the rare cases when content has been related to online branding and in particular to brand equity in a digital environment, it has only been limited to website-specific and technical features.

Evidence from practice, however, proves that content can contribute to building strong online brands. Thus, further research that addresses these knowledge gaps is needed.

1.3. Research question and purpose

This thesis intends to provide understanding about digital content and the content marketing process in a branding context. In particular, the purpose of this thesis is to illustrate the opportunities that content marketing creates for companies to strengthen their online brands. The present research will take the company's perspective to analyze the managerial decisions related to the content marketing process and will explore how digital content can be used to build brand equity. Thus, the following research question is formulated:

How online brands use digital content as a tool to build brand equity?

The question will be answered through analyzing the content marketing process on a strategic and tactical level. This will allow to uncover specific content characteristics and will raise the understanding about the opportunities that digital content creates for online branding. Hence, two derived sub-questions are formulated:

- *What are the strategic objectives, underlying the content marketing process?*
- *What tactical decisions are taken throughout the content marketing process?*

The first sub-question analyzes the strategic objectives embedded in the content marketing process, whereas the second question is concerned with the specific activities that support the long-term strategic goals. Uncovering the strategic and tactical decisions, will allow the authors of this thesis to examine them in the scope of the brand equity building process, hence answering the main research question.

The importance to further investigate digital content in an online branding context is significant from both theoretical and practical standpoint. From a theoretical perspective, the research contribution is twofold. First, the study will explore the digital content phenomenon and position it within the online branding literature. In addition, this paper will extend the knowledge about specific digital content characteristics, which until now have only been related to the website functionalities and information about a product. Second,

the study will bring clarity to the relation between content marketing and online branding, which is currently overlooked in the academic literature. Exploring these concepts from different angles, the present thesis will raise understanding about the usefulness of digital content as a tool to build and reinforce brand equity.

From a practical standpoint, building strong brands in the dynamic digital environment is at the heart of companies' day-to-day struggle to stay competitive and maintain lasting relationships with their customers. Therefore, finding an answer to the formulated research question will contribute in discovering best practices for businesses to develop and optimize their content marketing strategies. The results will clarify the content marketing process and provide recommendations at organizational level about how digital content can be used to leverage brand equity online.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Online branding

This section first introduces the concepts of brand and branding that are relevant to the purpose of this study. Thereafter, the concept of online branding is discussed and defined. The discussion focuses on different perspectives of online branding, outlining the importance and opportunities for organizations. Finally, this section addresses the existing tools for online branding debated in the academic literature.

2.1.1. Branding basics

There is no commonly accepted definition among scholars of what a brand is and the term can be defined either from customer perspective, where the focus is on the relationships customers have with a brand, or legal perspective, that emphasizes the protection of a brand from infringements (Kapferer, 2012). As Kapferer (2012) states, a brand is not only a product with a name. Further, Melin (2002) adds that brands are unique, cannot be copied and they influence consumers' purchase decisions. For the purpose of this paper, brands are defined according to Kapferer's (2012) definition as:

> A brand is a name that symbolizes a long-term engagement, crusade or commitment to a unique set of values, embedded into products, services and behaviors, which make the organization, person or product stand apart or stand out (p.12).

Creating a brand is not enough to maintain competitive advantage and differentiate from competition in a long run. Building and managing the brand is a dynamic process (Kapferer, 2012), that has to be managed carefully in order to bridge together the company's brand objectives with customer perceptions. Branding has been well-defined as a process of creating value by providing a compelling and consistent offer and customer experience that will satisfy customers and keep them coming back (Aaker, 1991; de Chernatony & McDonald, 1992). In addition, Kapferer (2012) argues that branding transforms the product category and entails organizational long-term commitment.

Branding has become a central organizational objective due to the decreasing product life-cycle and the difficulties associated with developing new brands (Melin, 2002). Also, Keller (2006) explains that competition can easily copy the manufacturing process and the product characteristics, but cannot duplicate the customer perceptions of the brand. Hence, for the purpose of this paper, the branding process is referred to as the sum of the organizational activities and efforts to differentiate the brand from its competitors and influence customer perceptions of that brand.

2.1.2. Defining online branding

Although scholars discuss the importance of online branding (or e-branding, i-branding, digital branding, internet branding as it has been labeled) and how it has transformed the brand management discipline, there seems to be a lack of strong and consistent agreement on what is online branding. Some scholars refer to the term 'online branding' as branding in a digital environment (de Chernatony, 2001; de Chernatony & Christodoulides, 2004; Bergstrom, 2000). Others, separate online branding from traditional branding activities due to the fundamental differences between online and offline branding strategies and approaches (Chen, 2001; Ibeh, Luo & Dinnie, 2005; Rowley, 2008a). Raff (2008) summarizes three distinctive characteristics of online branding; (1) the two-way customized communications that nurture the relationships with active and powerful consumers; (2) the low entry barriers for competitors and; (3) the increased importance of trust and brand experience online compared to offline branding. Hence, for the purpose of this study, online branding is recognized as part of the companies' branding activities. However, the characteristics of the Internet environment require the usage of different tools, approaches and strategies compared to offline branding.

Rowley (2008a) recognizes the fragmentation of online branding literature and the lack of agreement among scholars on what online branding stands for and defines it as "how online channels are used to support brands" (p.349). The authors of this thesis support Rowley's (2008a) definition of online branding, where the emphasis is placed on the tools that the Internet provides for branding activities. Raff (2008) suggests a simple and clear definition, in alignment with Rowley's (2008a) perspective: "the activity of creating differentiation by means of the Internet" (p.30). Acknowledging both Rowley's (2008a) and Raff's (2008) definitions, in this research paper, online branding is discussed in terms of branding activities

and efforts in digital environment, that aim at influencing customer's or other stakeholder's perceptions of the brand and differentiating it from the competition.

2.1.3. The importance of online branding

There are two divergent viewpoints in the academic literature about the importance of online branding. On the one hand, scholars question the importance of online branding due to the ease of access to rich information via search engines (Sinha, 2000). On the other, online branding plays even greater role in the highly competitive and transparent markets (de Chernatony & Christodoulides, 2004; Rowley, 2004a; Ibeh, Luo & Dinnie, 2005; Bergstrom, 2000; Ward & Lee, 2000). The vital importance of online branding has been supported with several arguments. Ward and Lee (2000) state that brands online save the customer time by reducing the associated search costs. Moreover, Rowley (2004a) adds that brands online are "providing continuity and customer commitment in a fast moving marketplace" (p.131). Also, in a digital world, where the physical interaction is impossible, product qualities and added-value features should be well defined, captured and communicated to online users in order to build trust (Rowley, 2004a; Berry, 2000). De Chernatony & Christodoulides (2004) identify three crucial implications for e-branding, namely building genuine relationships with users, facilitating interaction between the brand and the consumer and tailoring brand offerings at an individual level. Ind and Riondino (2001) recognize the value of the Web for brands as it is a channel to facilitate interaction, build community and deliver openness. Hence, it can be concluded that online branding has a significant importance in the new digital brandscape, and its implications for brands are recognized and discussed by the academic literature.

Brand on the Internet (brand online) and Internet brand (online brand)

In the context of online branding, scholars discuss either brands on the Internet (also referred to as brands online) or Internet brands (also referred to as online brands). There is one major difference between brands on the Internet and Internet brands. Brands online are built simultaneously in the offline and the online world, whereas online brands are purely Internet-built and rely only on e-branding tools to influence customers' perceptions and to differentiate from the competition. Ind and Riondino (2001) reaffirm that the challenge for

traditional brands is to transfer the already existing brand identity from offline to online, whereas dot.com brands "can build their web presence in a way that suits them best" (p.12).

There are several reasons why branding is important to online brands. Based on the analysis of Internet companies in the UK, Ibeh, Luo and Dinnie (2005) conclude that there is a prevalent appreciation of the importance of e-branding for online brands. Moreover the scholars argue that a key role of e-branding is to increase trust in the relationships with online consumers and decrease the perceived risk towards a purchase due to the lack of physical contact. Last but not least, e-branding sets entry barriers for potential competitors, increases customer loyalty and improves the economic value of the company in a long run (Ibeh, Luo & Dinnie, 2005).

2.1.4. Online branding tools

In the online branding literature several scholars discuss activities for managing online branding, but only few of them name them explicitly 'tools' (Rowley, 2004a; Simmons, 2007; Page & Lepkowska-White, 2002). Other scholars refer to them as e-brand building strategies (Ibeh, Luo & Dinnie, 2005), enactment points for brands online (de Chernatony & Christodoulides, 2004) and Internet technologies (Chen, 2001). Based on the analysis of the type of tools in the academic literature, two main categories can be identified: on-page tools (on the brand website) and off-page tools (on the Internet), where the main emphasis is placed on the on-page tools at the brand's disposal. Table 1 presents the most frequently discussed tools in the online branding literature, highlighting the purpose that scholars attribute to them.

Table 1: Online branding tools

E-branding tool	Purpose	Source
On-page		
Search engines/ SEO	Site visibility; web traffic; brand awareness; develop brand positioning	Ibeh, Luo & Dinnie (2005); de Chernatony (2001); de Chernatony & Christodoulides (2004); Rowley (2004a) ; Chen (2001)
Domain name	Brand differentiation	Ibeh, Luo & Dinnie (2005); Rowley (2004a); Chen (2001)
Cookies	Understanding customers; personalization techniques; reinforce familiarity with the	Ibeh, Luo & Dinnie (2005); Simmons (2007); Chen (2001)

	brand	
Download speed	Ease of access to content	de Chernatony & Christodoulides (2004); Rowley (2004a); Simmons (2007)
Graphics	Content; brand promise; web experience	de Chernatony & Christodoulides (2004); Rowley (2004a); Simmons (2007); Page & Lepkowska-White (2002)
Text and copy	Reveal brand values; define brand personality	de Chernatony & Christodoulides (2004); Rowley (2004a)
Logo	Deliver consistency	de Chernatony & Christodoulides (2004) Rowley (2004a)
Navigation	Content; brand promise; web experience	de Chernatony & Christodoulides (2004); Simmons (2007); Page & Lepkowska-White (2002)
Personal support	Building trust	de Chernatony & Christodoulides (2004); Page & Lepkowska-White (2002)
Differential reward	Brand differentiation	de Chernatony & Christodoulides (2004)
Physical delivery	Building trust	de Chernatony & Christodoulides (2004)
Web analytics	Understanding customers	Simmons (2007)
Blog/RSS	Interactivity	Simmons (2007)
Off-page		
Affiliation with partners/portals	Enhance brand presence; brand awareness	Ibeh, Luo & Dinnie (2005); de Chernatony & Christodoulides (2004); Chen (2001)
Banner advertising	Brand awareness; brand recognition	Ibeh, Luo & Dinnie (2005); Page & Lepkowska-White (2002)
Viral marketing	Encourage users to share the brand message; marketing communications	Ibeh, Luo & Dinnie (2005); Simmons (2007)
Email marketing	Enhance brand values; deliver customer experience; personalization techniques; marketing communications; reinforce brand positioning	Ibeh, Luo & Dinnie (2005); Simmons (2007); Page & Lepkowska-White (2002); Chen (2001); Raff (2008)

As synthesized in Table 1, de Chernatony and Christodoulides (2004) and Rowley (2004a) debate about the text on the webpage. Yet, in their discussion it is evident that they actually refer to the content on the webpage. The scholars argue that the text and copy reveal the brand values and define the brand personality, however, these discussions are rather vague and short. Simmons (2007) goes a step further and analyzes content as an important pillar in

online branding. However, the author only refers to the ease of locating and accessing the content and does not reveal the essence of the content *per se*. Therefore, this literature synthesis shows that content is only hinted in discussions. However, the type of content or how is distributed have not been covered in the online branding literature.

As a conclusion of this section, it can be inferred that e-branding is of significant importance to organizations and the Internet has created opportunities for developing strong online brands. Moreover, there are a few e-branding tools covered in the literature, but content has not been identified as such. Hence, a more thorough analysis of the digital content and content marketing literature follows.

2.2. Digital content and content marketing

This section provides an understanding about digital content and content marketing. First, the concept of digital content is explained and then a definition about content marketing is adopted and argued for. Second, the discussion unfolds the academic research on digital content and content marketing, identifying the theoretical gaps that serve as a basis of the subsequent research.

2.2.1. Digital content basics

Different types of digital content include how-to guides, tutorials, online courses, e-books, white papers, webinars, etc. Because of the diverse formats and contexts, it is important to clarify what digital content is and what characteristics define it. To begin with, Koiso-Kanttila (2004) provides a more technical definition of digital content, being “bit-based objects distributed through electronic channels” (p.46). In addition, the EContent Magazine (2011) suggests that “digital content refers to information available for download or distribution on electronic media”. Finally, Amit and Zott (2001) refer to content as to “information and goods that are being exchanged” (p.514). These definitions create the impression of a clear relation between digital content and digital products, and specifically digital information products, which are further discussed.

Digital content: a product or a service

Digital content is compound by both product and service characteristics (Rowley, 2008a; Koiso-Kanttila, 2004). However, there is a general agreement among researchers that digital

content appears more similar to digital products rather than to digital services (Rowley, 2008a; Koiso-Kanttila, 2004). Based on a synthesis of extant literature for identifying services and goods, Koiso-Kanttila (2004) uses four dimensions to explain the proximity between digital content and digital products. This positioning is essential for online businesses when digital content is part of their communication strategies and business models.

First, the digital content is positioned as a relatively intangible entity based on the general wisdom that it cannot be touched. Yet, Koiso-Kanttila (2004) discusses that its representation can be read and heard. However, the authors of this thesis argue that digital content can be positioned differently on this continuum, depending on what is given more importance – the bit-based informational core of the digital content or its readable representation. Respectively, it will be attributed stronger either service or product characteristics. Second, another product feature is the high degree of standardization or homogeneity (Koiso-Kanttila, 2004), which also relates to the possibility to reproduce and multiply digital content in a way that identical copies are produced (Rowley, 2008a). Third, and contrary to the fundamental characteristic of services, Koiso-Kanttila (2004) posits that production of content is clearly separated from its consumption. In fact, as a matter of strategic planning, sometimes a considerable time span exists between its production and its release for consumption. Finally, the scholar discusses the possibility to store and save digital content which facilitates the information transfer and sharing. Later on, Rowley (2008a) builds upon this knowledge by adding other product characteristics of digital content such as contextual value, which depends on the particular situation it is used and on the user who is consuming it.

Another important relation explored in the literature is the one between content and information. Users browse the Internet space to satisfy their needs for information and what they find there are information products. They are defined by Rowley (2008a) as goods or services whose core is information or knowledge. Therefore, and based on the previous discussion, the different types of content can be categorized as electronic goods or digital information products, rather than services. Similarly, in most studies the terms 'digital content' and 'digital (or electronic) information products' are used interchangeably. Information is a fundamental part of digital content, which serves both as a product, subject of marketing exchange, and as means of marketing communications (Rowley, 2008a; Koiso-

Kanttila, 2004). Therefore, information also becomes an integral part of digital content marketing.

Content marketing: defined

Although the literature on content marketing is scarce, Rowley (2008a) states that content marketing is fundamentally concerned with content as a product, subject of marketing exchange, and the implications that the usage of digital content has on marketing. In addition, the author formulates a definition of content marketing as being responsible for "identifying, anticipating, and satisfying customer requirements profitably in the context of digital content" (Rowley, 2008a, p.522). However, the authors of this thesis argue that on the one hand, this definition limits the purpose of content distribution only to profit without considering other benefits for businesses. Moreover, it also fails to address more specific issues like specific characteristics of content as such and its scope.

Due to the lack of relevant theoretical definition of content marketing, the authors of this thesis consider an alternative formulations provided by practitioners. The Content Marketing Institute (2014b) and the Content Marketing Association (2014) offer similar definitions and present content marketing as a technique of delivering information with the intention to educate the users without directly selling to them (Content Marketing Institute, 2014b). The paper adopts the Content Marketing Association's (2014) formulation:

> Content marketing is the discipline of creating quality branded editorial content across all media channels and platforms to deliver engaging relationships, consumer value and measurable success for brands.

Three important points of reference emerge from this definition. First, "creating quality branded editorial content" (Content Marketing Association, 2014) relates back to the task-oriented search of information on the Internet. Content has to be valuable and relevant (Content Marketing Institute, 2014b) as users have greater control over the information that they are exposed to and thus, filter out everything that does not satisfy their needs. Hence, if the content does not provide any value, it will remain unnoticed and unread.

Second, engaging relationships reveal the power of content to attract and retain clearly defined audience (Content Marketing Institute, 2014b) and mediate the ongoing conversation between the consumer and the brand (Pulizzi, 2013). Third, delivering content "across media channels

and platforms" (Content Marketing Institute, 2014b) illustrates the scope of this relationship. In addition to that, Pulizzi (2013) also highlights the importance to consistently and repeatedly deliver content. This proves that digital content has to be an integral part of the brands' marketing communication strategy. Moreover, consistency in a long run has implications for branding, as regular and relevant content makes users come back and favors a long-term commitment with the brand.

2.2.2 Academic research on digital content and content marketing

In the literature, digital content has been tightly bounded to the products and often regarded as a value-added feature that amplifies the product offering (de Chernatony & Christodoulides, 2004; Koiso-Kanttila, 2004; Rowley, 2008a). De Chernatony and Christodoulides (2004) name it "differential reward" (p.245), which is content, complementary to the product offering, that companies like Durex and Colgate provide in order to educate their consumers. Rowley (2004a) gives similar example with Boots, providing online health care advice. It is interesting, however, that several authors who have researched content marketing, came to the conclusion that content should go beyond mere information about the product. In their study of 95 Fortune 500 companies, Kierzkowski et al. (1996) found that the majority of the digital marketing activities provided product or service information, however, less than a half offered non-product related and interactive content. Similarly, in a research on fashion web sites, Rowley (2008b) concludes that there is a surprising lack of non-product related content. Hence, it is compelling to explore digital content beyond its function to sell the product, but to satisfy the interests and curiosity of the online users. As it was pointed out, this thesis explores firm-generated digital content that is consistent, valuable and free of charge for the end-consumer, but that requires significant resources from the supplier.

Digital content: opportunities for businesses

In their study about the changing digital content landscape in the music and news industries, Swatman, Krueger and van der Beek (2006) state that "the Internet consumer is accustomed to free information" (p.64). The statement is also supported by several authors, who research 'freemium' as a sustainable business model (Pauwels & Weiss, 2008; Mounier, 2011). Consumers have increased by large their online consumption of content (Oestreicher-

Singer & Zalmanson, 2013), but they also demand this content for free and feel that they should not be paying for any information on the Web (Pauwels & Weiss, 2008). On the other hand, Swatman, Krueger and van der Beek (2006) discuss that there has been a rising acceptance of paid content among users. These two divergent viewpoints and differences in the consumer behavior illustrate that the ease of access to digital content creates a competitive landscape for brands. The challenge for online companies, therefore, is to establish a good balance between the editorial content they distribute for free and the one they charge for (Swatman, Krueger & van der Beek, 2006; Fetscherin & Knolmayer, 2004). It may be expected that online companies that distribute valuable content for free, even though they can charge for it, will have a competitive advantage on the market.

In addition, the reduced cost of information processing is the most cited characteristic of the virtual markets (Amit & Zott, 2001) that creates preconditions for the distribution of free content. The digitization of the content has resulted in dropping down the marginal costs of the supplier close to zero, which has created immense opportunities for many industries to distribute content (Feng, Guo & Chiang, 2009). Koiso-Kanttila (2004) states that, when digital products are offered free of charge, the supplier generates revenue from other sources. Prominent examples that illustrate this discussion are websites, such as Mashable or Business Insider, that deliver the latest news for free to the users, but at the same time earn revenue from selling on-site advertising space. In conclusion, the changes in the customer behavior and the cost structure of content suppliers have forced many businesses to reconsider their strategies and thus, new business models have emerged.

An interesting contribution from practice is the work of Anderson (2009), a strong proponent of the concept of 'digital free'. In his book *Free - The Future of a Radical Price* he argues that information on the Internet has the potential to become free and presents various business models, proving that digital content can be part of a successful business strategy for many online companies. This statement is also supported by other practitioners. An article in the EContent Magazine (2011) discusses that diverse types of digital content already exist and each of them brings benefits for businesses. Thus, the question is not what content to create, but how to distribute it or in other words, should it be free or paid. In fact, practitioners often relate free content to the notion of educating the consumers. Referring to webinars as a popular form of digital content, Voigt (2010) asserts that such type of

educational digital interaction connects businesses with their audience, establishing confidence in the brand. Therefore, it could be inferred that, when digital content is embedded in the online business strategies, it might also impact the brand performance.

Content marketing: unexplored areas

The digitization of the products has led many practitioners to the realization that content marketing is essential for their business and companies are now more willing to invest in digital content. However, content marketing literature seems to be lagging behind in providing theoretical evidence and support for what online companies already put into practice. Previous research on digital editorial content employed as a business strategy has gradually appeared in the recent years but is still scarce and few important areas yet remain unexplored.

First, researchers in the past two decades have been trying to identify key characteristics of digital content, however, very few of them have actually related those to branding. In fact, a study by Kierzkowski et al. (1996) discusses that the digital consumer raises the need for a new marketing approach to replace the former static, one-way broadcast communication, described as “brochureware” approach by de Chernatony (2001). In addition, Kierzkowski et al. (1996) proposes five critical factors that determine success in digital marketing, namely attract, engage, retain, learn and relate. In this model, content is regarded an important role for providing the substance for customers, ensuring the ongoing contact, engagement and a reason for customers to revisit the website (Kierzkowski et al., 1996). However, in the late 90s digital content still has not been the primary focus nor a fundamental contributor for success in online marketing and branding. Later on in the academic field, Koiso-Kanttila (2004), relying on the extant literature, suggests that five elements build the essence of digital content: information recombination, accessibility, navigation interaction, speed, and essentially zero marginal cost**.** The main focus, however, is placed on functions related to the technical environment rather than on content quality and brand building (Koiso-Kanttila, 2004).

Second, in the following years, this problem has been addressed by several scholars who have related digital content to online branding, brand equity online (Simmons, 2007) or Web equity (Page & Lepowska-White, 2002), however mainly focusing on website design, navigation and other functionality features that provide interactivity (Christodoulides & de

Chernatony, 2004; Simmons, 2007; Simmons, Thomas & Truong, 2010). If the website is considered a virtually constrained space where the actual communication between the supplier and the receiver of information occurs (Grönroos et al., 2000), its optimization, design and organization of content are essential for online branding. However, the authors of this thesis argue that digital content should have a broader scope that goes beyond the technical features of a website and focuses more on what actually relevant and valuable content means and how does it affect business success. One such study by Kim, Oh and Shin (2010) intends to broaden this perspective by exploring three sources of value of the digital content, namely design, scenario and structure. The researchers suggest that the value of the content is related to its ability to satisfy the users' needs and conclude that elements, contributing to the visual appeal, bringing entertainment and unity in the structure, are positively related to the value of the content. The study is a useful contribution to the digital content marketing literature as it focuses not only on the technical and visual part of content, but also on its quality, creativity and unity (Kim, Oh & Shin, 2010).

Third, the digitization of the content significantly altered the business landscape for media providers and thus, the primary focus in the literature of digital content marketing has been specifically on music, newspaper and magazine industries (Amit & Zott 2001; Clemons, Gu & Lang, 2002; Swatman, Krueger & van der Beek, 2006; Feng, Guo & Chiang, 2012; Oestreicher-Singer & Zalmanson, 2013). However, limited remains the number of studies that go beyond these industries and identify fundamental characteristics of digital content valid in all digital content marketplaces (Rowley, 2008a).

In summary, this section presented the relation between content and information, outlined several preconditions that facilitate the distribution of information online and suggested that digital content might serve as a basis to create competitive advantage for online businesses. In addition, the discussion revealed several contexts in which digital content has been used as a particular business strategy and its significant role for organizations not only as means of market exchange but also as a communication tool. Moreover, the outlined discussions in the content marketing literature have highlighted the importance of digital content for building strong online brands. Therefore, the literature review further analyzes how strong online brands are created and managed, focusing on brand equity in a digital environment.

2.3. Brand equity and brand equity online

This section begins with presenting the traditional perspective of brand equity and the most frequently cited models for its management. The analysis continues with an overview of the contemporary academic discussions about brand equity in a digital environment. Lastly, a theoretical framework for brand equity online is presented, highlighting its relevance and appropriateness for the purpose of this study.

2.3.1. Brand equity

The academic literature discusses widely the concept of brand equity, its measurement and management. The first to define brand equity is Farquhar (1989) as "the 'added value' with which a given brand endows a product" (p.24). However, the most frequently used and cited definition is suggested by Aaker (1991):

> […] a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a company and/or to that company's customer (p. 15).

Scholars define differently brand equity, taking diverse standpoints. However, there is a common agreement that various approaches exist to create value for a brand and that brand equity serves as a denominator for analyzing marketing and branding activities and assessing brand's value (Keller, 1998). Brand equity can be discussed in two perspectives. From an organizational perspective, referred to as "financial brand equity" (Kapferer, 2012, p.446), the brand is represented as an asset that generates additional cash flow through increasing the potential for new customers and preserving current ones, charging price premiums and leveraging the supply chain (Aaker, 1991). From customer perspective, brand equity discussions place the main focus on customers and their perceptions of the brand. Scholars propose various models and conceptualize brand equity as composed by different elements. However, from the extant brand equity literature, there are two prominent customer-based brand equity models, developed by Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993). Moreover, these models were analyzed and tested for their predictability as well as validated empirically (Buil, de Chernatony & Martinez, 2008).

Customer-based brand equity model (Keller, 1993)

Keller (1993) separates the customer-based brand equity model (CBBE) from the financial models and offers a strategic viewpoint of brand equity and brands as organizational assets that can be used to improve marketing productivity and efficiency. The CBBE model is defined as "the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of a brand" (Keller, 1993, p.8). The definition places importance on the *differential effect* of a brand in comparison to other brands or not-branded products or services; *brand knowledge* as referring to the brand awareness and brand image; and *consumer response to marketing,* denoting the marketing mix impact on consumer preferences, behavior and perceptions (Keller, 1993). According to the author, positive customer-based brand equity will increase the cash flow, reduce the costs and thus, increase the profits.

In the essence of the CBBE model is brand knowledge and Keller (1993) discusses it in terms of brand awareness and brand image. Brand awareness is defined as "the likelihood that brand name will come to mind" (Keller, 1993, p.3) and consists of brand recall and brand recognition. The second component of CBBE model, as explained by Keller (1993), is brand image, which represents the customers' perception of the brand, expressed through brand associations in their memory. These brand associations can vary in type (by level of abstraction and qualitative nature), favorability, strength and uniqueness (Keller, 1998). The CBBE model suggests an approach of how to build, measure and manage customer-based brand equity, that can serve as strategic brand management manual for organizations.

Aaker's (1991) model on brand equity

Aaker's (1991) model outlines the following brand equity components: name awareness, brand associations, brand loyalty, perceived quality and other proprietary assets that bring competitive advantage for organizations. However, when discussing the model, mainly the first four components are taken into consideration and 'other proprietary assets' is omitted, because it is not directly related to consumers (Buil, de Chernatony & Martinez, 2008). Name (or brand) awareness is discussed in terms of the share of mind that a brand has, whereas brand associations are referred to as everything that is 'linked' to a brand in the consumers' minds (Aaker, 1991). Further, Aaker (1991) defines brand loyalty as the "attachment that a customer has to a brand" (p.39). According to the author, brand loyalty can serve as trade leverage and it leads to streamlined marketing costs, new customers and provides organizations time

to respond to new threats from competition. It should be noted that the perceived quality component does not reflect directly the actual product or service quality, but the customer perceptions for it, formed by individual assessment.

Having briefly outlined the most discussed and tested brand equity frameworks, their components and how organizations can benefit from leveraging their brands, the authors of this thesis pose the question if these frameworks are valid in an online environment. Hence, the discussion continues with literature review on brand equity in a digital environment.

2.3.2. Brand equity online

The advent of the dynamic Internet environment, characterized by high connectivity and interactivity, digitized products and rich information (Amit & Zott, 2001) had a fundamental impact on communications and revolutionized branding. The intangibility of the products and services offered by online companies (Koiso-Kanttila, 2004; Rowley 2008a) made consumers more insecure and more dependent on online brands (Chen, 2012). Therefore, the essence of branding on the Internet is fundamentally about maintaining relationships with customers built on mutual benefit, trust and loyalty (Argirou, Kitchen & Melewar, 2006; Kim, Sharma & Setzekorn, 2002). At a strategic level online companies are even more concerned about how brands on the Internet should be managed (Argirou, Kitchen & Melewar, 2006) or in other words, how online brands can create value for the company and the customers. In this regard, Kim, Sharma and Setzekorn (2002) suggest that leveraging brand equity enhances superior customer value and serves as a valuable differentiation tool in a digital environment.

Theoretical gap

The branding literature has extensively explored the construct of brand equity, however, less attention has been paid to measuring brand equity in a digital environment as well as identifying specific sources of brand equity that facilitate the successful differentiation of online brands. Rios and Riquelme (2008) explain this gap in the academic field with the possible belief that the key principles of building strong brands remain the same on the Internet. The authors also point out that existing traditional models of brand equity dimensions have rarely been tested with online companies. It is just very recently that researchers have acknowledged the importance of brand equity in a digital environment and

thus, new terms such as "Web equity" (Page & Lepkowska-White, 2002, p.231) and "cyber brand equity" (Na & Marshall, 2005, p.49) emerged in the literature. Extant studies identify sources and dimensions of brand equity in a digital environment and their authors propose different conceptualizations of what are the sources and what is their impact on brand equity online.

Christodoulides et al. (2006) develop a framework that departs from the traditional equity models. The authors identify five facets of online retail/service (ORS) brand equity, namely: emotional connection, online experience, responsive service nature, trust and fulfilment. This model, is criticized by Rios and Riquelme (2008 & 2010) for unjustified exclusion of brand awareness as a major source of brand equity. Even though the authors of this thesis agree with Keller (2003) who states that increased brand awareness and familiarity leads to brand equity, it is noteworthy to take into consideration the uniqueness of the digital environment. In this regard, Rios and Riquelme (2010) conclude that, when it comes to online brands, brand awareness is only a meaningful source of brand equity in the initial stage of introducing the brand to the market. However, in the ORS brand equity model such arguments are overlooked.

Furthermore, a fundamental part of the academic research, dedicated to brand equity on the Internet (Christodoulides & de Chernatony, 2004; Simmons, 2007; Rios & Riquelme, 2008; Kim, Sharma & Setzekorn, 2002; Rios & Riquelme, 2010), is grounded on the two most cited traditional equity models, proposed by Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993). These studies are based on the assumption that the same drivers influence brand equity offline and online (Rios & Riquelme, 2008) and thus, the findings contribute to measuring the applicability of a traditional brand equity models in a digital environment. Christodoulides & de Chernatony (2004) propose a model that builds up on the Aaker's (1991) model by adding 10 more Internet-specific dimensions of brand equity online. One strength of this model is the inclusion of 'relevance' as a dimention of brand equity (Christodoulides & de Chernatony, 2004), even though it has not been part of the Aaker's (1991) framework. With the immense amount of unfiltered information on the Web, brands have to be contextually relevant, meaning to target and attract clearly defined audiences with relevant content (Content Marketing Institute, 2014b). Nevertheless, content as such is not an individual source of brand equity in this model.

One of the few studies that links brand equity to specific marketing activities is that of Rios and Riquelme (2010), emanating from traditional brand equity frameworks. The authors measure the impact of specific online marketing activities, in particular the web functionality (which refers to the website interactive design components), on four sources of brand equity, namely: awareness, associations of value, trust and loyalty. In fact, loyalty has found to be the most important driver of brand equity online (Rios & Riquelme, 2008 & 2010). An interesting finding in their research, however, is that the website functionality only influences brand loyalty and brand equity indirectly, through trust and awareness. It is suggested that once awareness for the online brand is created, users take for granted the functionalities and ease of navigation on the website (Rios & Riquelme, 2010). The study illustrates the relationship between website design associations and brand equity and perhaps, de-emphasizes the great importance that previous research has placed on website-specific tools for branding. However, the authors of this thesis suggest that quality content is important for building brand equity online. Therefore, the next section explores a particular online branding framework, in which content is regarded a fundamental role.

The 'Four Pillars of i-Branding'

In an attempt to provide comprehensive understanding about successful branding on the Internet, Simmons (2007) draws on the branding literature to identify three most frequently highlighted themes: *understanding the consumers*, in terms of gathering rich information about consumers at individual level; *marketing communications*, essential for the desired positioning in the marketplace and; *ongoing interactions with customers* in order to maintain strong relationships with relevant audiences. Moreover, the scholar concludes that the same themes appear in research about branding in a digital environment (Kierzkowski et al., 1996; Rowley, 2004b; Ibeh, Luo & Dinnie, 2005). Hence, Simmons (2007) proposes 'The Four Pillars of i-Branding' framework, where the three pillars of the model correspond to these themes and *content* is added independently as a fourth pillar.

Simmons (2007) highlights the importance of content in a digital environment and justifies its differentiation in a separate equally important pillar with several arguments. The author states that unique content can help online companies to establish strong brands, develop unique positioning and maintain relationships based on trust and loyalty. Therefore, content is seen as a differentiation tool for online brands (Simmons, 2007; Simmons, Thomas &

Truong, 2010). In addition, these arguments are supported by many other researchers who relate content to website-specific tools and mention its relevance as an important characteristic (Page & Lepkowska-White, 2002; Ibeh, Luo & Dinnie, 2005; Christodoulides & de Chernatony, 2004; Argirou, Kitchen & Melewar, 2006; Rowley, 2008a). However, discussions in these studies did not place the main focus on content and Simmons (2007) was the first one to emphasize its fundamental role for online branding. Simmons, Thomas and Truong (2010) further develop this framework, explaining how the interactions between the pillars create brand equity online.

The importance of Simmons' (2007) framework calls for its detailed review. Thus, the following discussion has three parts, addressing the framework's elements, functionality and applicability. First, each pillar in the framework is discussed individually as it is important to understand what does it consist of and how it contributes to online branding. Second, the interactions between the pillars are explained as these interactions actually create brand equity online. Third, the authors of this thesis present their arguments supporting the adoption of this model as theoretical framework for the empirical data analysis.

Most authors relate *understanding consumers* to personalization and customization (Ibeh, Luo & Dinnie, 2005; Christodoulides & de Chernatony, 2004; Rowley, 2008a) or cite it as a fundamental factor that enable brands to go beyond awareness and focus more on building trust online (Simmons, 2007). In the essence of this pillar are Internet tools such as web analytics, online surveys, databases and client-side data capture (cookies) to gather detailed information about each user and perform precise segmentation.

In the framework, *marketing communications* combine with individual level of interaction with the customers, hence shifting the traditional one-to-many communications to more personalized, one-to-one approach. The objective, therefore will be to create repeated exposure and preference for the brand, as in this case customers will be more willing to receive subsequent information from it (Simmons, 2007). The tools that Simmons (2007) attribute to this pillar are the company's web site, email marketing and viral marketing. Through implementing them organizations will be able to develop "places, where stories are told and dialogues are initiated, as well as information is being discovered" (Simmons, 2007, p.551).

As a hot topic in the Internet branding literature, it is not surprising that *interactivity* has been regarded an important place in this framework as perhaps no researcher has overlooked its importance in a digital context (Kierzkowski et al., 1996; Page & Lepkowska-White, 2002; Ibeh, Luo & Dinnie, 2005). The Internet-enabled environment eliminates the distance and time boundaries, providing opportunities for interactions between users and companies, which Simmons (2007) relates to website interactivity and specific tools such as blogs, RSS and online communities. The model suggests the use of these interaction tools to create engagement with users, which leads to increased customer attention levels, stronger relationships with the brand and higher customer satisfaction.

The model discusses *content* mainly in terms of the web site quality and the ease of identification of content for customers. The tools that Simmons, Thomas and Truong (2010) suggest in regard to the content pillar are design, speed, content grouping and easy navigation. Although content is given more importance in this framework compared to others, it is still only related to design and technical functionalities of the website. As discussed in this thesis, quality and relevance of content in an online branding context are the cornerstones in the definition of content marketing (Content Marketing Institute, 2014) that are, however, overlooked in this model. Despite this drawback, Simmons, Thomas and Truong (2010) emphasize the importance of content, illustrate its interaction with other pillars in the framework and explain how these interactions create brand equity online.

Simmons, Thomas and Truong (2010) adopt the Aaker's sources of brand equity and suggest that the interactions between the pillars impact brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality and brand loyalty. The framework suggests that by understanding consumers organizations are able to segment precisely their customer base, to deliver tailored marketing communications, and thus go beyond brand awareness, increase trust and loyalty**.** Furthermore, the use of customized marketing messages at an individual level leads to increased interaction as customers will be more willing to engage with messages, relevant and valuable for them. As suggested by Simmons, Thomas and Truong (2010), this engagement creates brand equity online because it generates positive brand perceptions and associations. Looking at the reverse relation between the three pillars, by triggering interaction, businesses collect rich customer data and consequently utilize these insights to understand their customers better and to deliver personalized marketing messages. Based

on the study of Simmons, Thomas and Truong (2010) the authors of this thesis propose an adapted visualization of the 'Four Pillars of i-Branding' framework (see Figure 1) in order to better illustrate how the interaction between the pillars create brand equity online.

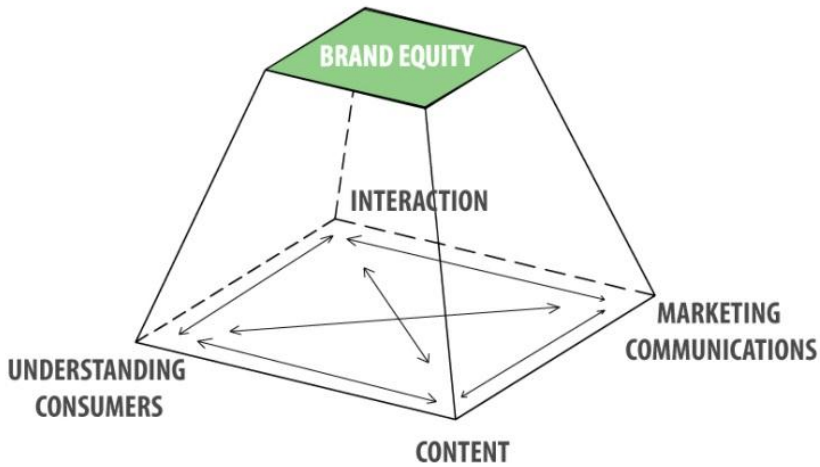

Figure 1: Interactions between the four pillars as sources of brand equity online

Adapted from Simmons (2007) and Simmons, Thomas & Truong (2010)

Before explaining the interactions of the content pillar within the framework, it should be noted that Simmons, Thomas and Truong (2010) use the term 'machine interactivity' for the process of controlling and modifying the content on the company website by the user. On the one hand, through creation and distribution of content exhibiting machine interactivity, businesses are engaging with consumers and developing unique brand experiences (Simmons, Thomas & Truong, 2010). On the other, as the framework suggests, content serves as a communication tool to deliver marketing messages and create brand's image. Hence, understanding consumers helps businesses deliver relevant content, which leads to tailored communication at individual level and at the same time increases interaction. Thus, this thesis will center the discussions on content as link between the other pillars of the framework.

As it was pointed out, this framework is built upon the Aaker's (1991) sources of brand equity, being perceived quality one of them. In a digital environment, Ha (2004) discusses perceived quality in terms of the quality of the website and the information on it and concludes that these aspects significantly affect brand trust on the Web. Interestingly, Simmons, Thomas and Truong (2010) barely mention perceived quality in their study. Instead, they refer to brand trust in relation to the quality of the products online and the

perceived risk, associated with them. However, the scholars do not include brand trust as an independent source of brand equity. In the academic literature, brand trust is defined as "the willingness of the average consumer to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function" (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001, p.82). In an online environment it is influenced by website security and privacy, brand name, worth of mouth, web experience and information (Ha, 2004). Hence, as in a digital environment there is a risk associated with the intangibility of the products, the authors of this thesis argue that one of the main objectives of online branding is to build brand trust due to the lack of physical contact. Moreover, recent studies on online branding confirm the vital importance of trust in an digital environment and its role in brand equity building (Rios & Riquelme, 2010; Ha, 2004). Based on these considerations, for the purpose of this thesis, perceived quality is replaced with brand trust as a source of brand equity. Exploring content beyond the website functionalities, the thesis further investigates how the interactions between content and the other pillars create brand equity on the basis of four sources, namely brand awareness, brand associations, brand trust and brand loyalty.

In conclusion, the authors of this thesis have several arguments supporting the adoption of this model as a benchmarking framework of the present research. To begin with, the framework could be deemed as credible and exhaustive as it draws on both the branding and online branding literature, thus integrating existing knowledge in a comprehensive way. Furthermore, to the best of the authors' knowledge, no other model in the Internet branding literature, highlights content as a fundamental driver of brand equity. Lastly, as Simmons (2007) asserts, this integrated framework provides "an intuitive tool for marketing practitioners to use in their thinking and planning with respect to the successful exploitation of the internet as a branding tool" (p.548). The model is, therefore, a powerful instrument in the hands of marketers who have to constantly adapt their online branding strategies and tactics. In addition, it is particularly relevant for the purpose of this thesis as it provides the theoretical foundations, on the basis of which to analyze digital content in an online branding context. Adopting this framework as a theoretical background within the empirical data analysis, the research will be able to extract the interdependencies between digital content phenomena and the other pillars, hence aid in answering the question how digital content can be used as a tool for creating brand equity online.

The discussion in this section has been focused on reviewing the Internet branding literature and highlighting several important frameworks that have contributed to the understanding about specific drivers on brand equity online. In addition, this review has identified one particular model in which content is attributed a greater importance, however, not fully explored. Therefore, the presented argumentation gives the authors of this thesis another reason to investigate more thoroughly digital content as part of the 'content' pillar of the four pillars of i-branding model and its interactions with the other pillars to build brand equity online.

3. Methodology

In this chapter, the methodological approach is presented and argued for. First, the epistemological and ontological standpoints that guided the research process are presented. Moreover, the research strategy and approach are discussed. The chapter further explores the structure of the proposed research design and the selection of data collection methods as well as presents an argumentation for their appropriateness. Lastly, the criteria for evaluation the research design and research strategy are discussed and several limitations are outlined.

3.1. Research philosophy

The philosophy of the researcher is compound by ontological assumptions about the nature of the reality and epistemological assumptions about what should be regarded an acceptable knowledge in the field of study (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2008). These assumptions and considerations guide all stages of the management research process and underpin the choice of research design and data collection methods.

3.1.1. Social constructionist ontological position

Several characteristics of the phenomenon of interest are briefly outlined, as they impact the choice of research philosophy in the present study. To begin with, the present research is looking into the strategic objectives and tactical decisions, underpinning the content marketing process. On the one hand, these strategies and tactics represent marketing management processes that depend on the organization, or on the specific setting, in which they are studied. Thus, the present study is context-dependent on the particular social environment, which implies certain level of subjectivity. On the other hand, decisions and processes “reside wholly in the minds of people, where they are substantially inaccessible” (Guba & Lincoln, 1982, p.239). Thus, they can only be explained, interpreted or given meaning by the same people from the particular social environment. This means, for example, that marketers within an organization differ in what they do and how they do it and they are only able to express their objectives or practices related to digital content through sharing their experience. The variance in their strategic and tactical decisions, regarding content in an online environment, is a result of their diverse mental frameworks, skills and beliefs as individuals in the social group (Moisander, Valtonen & Hirsto, 2009).

In addition, as Guba and Lincoln (1982) assert, there exist as many constructions as there are people involved. However, marketers differ in their tasks and decision making. Hence, the researchers, who have to capture these individual perspectives in order to explore the digital content phenomenon in its full complexity, are considered social actors as well. For these reasons, a social constructionist ontological stance, built upon the premise that reality is determined by people as social actors (Bryman & Bell, 2007), is adopted. It allows the authors of this thesis to distance from any pre-existing objective truth about the social world (Alvesson, 2003) and to consider knowledge as subjectively constructed through social interaction, through sharing experiences with others and through language (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2008). Therefore, the understanding about digital content strategies and specific practices is constructed by both the representatives from the organization and the researchers themselves, as social actors internal and external to the organization. However, this understanding is not universal, because knowledge is considered 'perspectival' (Moisander, Valtonen & Hirsto, 2009). Benchmarking from the social constructionist paradigm, reality is not a uniform construct, but instead the social actors create their own meanings of reality (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2008). Thus, in this study, understanding about what digital content is and how it is used, is only one version of subjective truth. The latter emerges as a result of the interaction between the representatives from the organization and the researchers as social actors themselves.

3.1.2. Interpretivist epistemological stance

The purpose of this study is to provide understanding about digital content and its relation to online branding through the perspective of marketing managers as social actors within the organization. In order to fulfil this objective, several reasons underpin the epistemological stance of the authors of this thesis. In first place, it has been pointed out that variations might be expected in the managers' decision-making process related to digital content. This entails data triangulation from different sources within a particular social environment in order to capture multiple 'realities' about the phenomenon of interest and generate conclusions. This aligns with the social constructionist subjective assumptions that individuals construct their own reality as they make sense of situations, experiences and the world around them (Bryman & Bell, 2007). In this regard, Bryman and Bell (2007) state that, when conducting a research among people within an organization, and when the differences between these people and their behavior are important, interpretivism allows knowledge to be indeterminate and surprising findings to

emerge throughout the process. Hence, in the context of the present research, an interpretivist epistemological stance allows the authors of this thesis to grasp the subjective meanings of the digital content strategies and practices (Bryman & Bell, 2007) and understand these meanings through the perspective of the social actors within the organization (Sanders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). For these reasons, and also as suggested by Sanders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009), an interpretivist stance is highly appropriate for management research particularly in the field of marketing and thus, has been adopted in this study.

3.2. Research strategy and approach

3.2.1. Qualitative research strategy

The research strategy is a broad orientation that guides the choice of research design and is grounded on the research philosophy. Daymon and Holloway (2002) suggest that, although qualitative research methods can be successfully employed within different philosophies, they are in most cases grounded on the interpretivist and the social constructionist paradigms (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Daymon & Holloway, 2002). In alignment with the interpretivist epistemological stance, a qualitative research strategy has been adopted in this thesis for several reasons.

First and foremost, qualitative research methods contribute to the in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of interest, that is, digital content in its natural context within an organization (Carson et al., 2001). The digital content phenomenon will be described–and analyzed through the eyes of the social actors constructing it, respectively, the organization's employees who are creating the content and the researchers as the ones interpreting and drawing conclusions. Mintzberg (1979) argues that when studying a reality that has been invented by the social actors in it, as it is in organizations, researchers have to "get close to the data, [to] know well all the individuals involved and observe and record what they say" (p.584). Therefore, when the motivation, the decisions and the point of view of members of a certain social group are of interest (Bryman & Bell, 2007) and they are expressed through language, an alternative quantitative research strategy and numerical data may not lead to meaningful results. Instead, qualitative methods are preferred.

Second, as the focus of the research is to examine the managerial decisions related to the content marketing process, a qualitative strategy will provide the necessary flexibility to

interpret context-specific management situation (Carson et al., 2001). Contextual understanding is essential in order to comprehend_the processes surrounding the digital content, as the phenomenon itself and its role in strengthening the online brand is still an under-researched field in the literature. Hence, a qualitative strategy is suitable, because it provides an in-depth understanding of "how, why and in what context certain phenomena occur" (Carson et al., 2001, p.80) and generate preliminary insights (Malhotra, 2010).

Third, an interpretative qualitative approach enables the researchers to investigate the digital content in a broader sence, follow a more open structure and produce more serendipitous findings in comparison to quantitative research (Carson et al., 2001). As Bryman and Bell (2007) suggest, open structure increases the likelihood to deliver more authentic representation of the digital content phenomenon, as in this case to produce more genuine findings about how it is used as an e-branding tool. In conclusion, a qualitative research strategy, that starts from "the perspective and actions of the subjects studied" (Alvesson & Sköldber, 2009, p.7) and emphasizes on words rather than numbers, is a justified choice for the purpose of this study as it allows the researchers to grasp different socio-cultural perspectives and contexts in which reality constructed (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

3.2.2. Abductive research approach

Qualitative research concerned with theory generation, rather than hypothesis testing, is exploratory by nature (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Malhotra, 2010) and in many cases related to inductive methodological approach. However, in the present study, a clear-cut distinction between deductive and inductive approach is not appropriate because, although findings of theoretical significance are likely to emerge from empirical material, they are at the same time theory-driven. Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009) refer to this approach as to an abduction, that "starts from an empirical basis, just like induction, but does not reject theoretical preconceptions and is in that respect closer to deduction" (p.4). It is noteworthy that, the review of the literature has identified a feasible theoretical framework which is used to further guide the empirical study. The framework is adapted and applied in the context of the present thesis, which allows the findings to be interpreted within the scope of the theoretical model and build on it. Therefore, the present study adopts an abductive research approach and proposes one such version of reality that is composed by empirical findings and facts from previous academic research that are "reinterpreted in the light of each other" (Alvesson & Sköldber, 2009, p.4).

3.3. Research design

Related to the choice of qualitative research strategy, structuring the research design is a decision to organize the research process and select data collection methods (Bryman & Bell 2007) in a way that the research design leads to achieving the objectives of the study (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2008).

3.3.1. Exploratory case study design

The authors of this thesis suggest that an exploratory case study design is appropriate in order to fulfil the objectives of the research and present several arguments for that. First, as it was pointed out, understanding about digital content in an online branding context is still underdeveloped. Eisenhardt (1989) asserts that case studies can be used to achieve research objectives such as providing description and generating theory, which is in alignment with the purpose of the thesis. In addition, case studies are often employed in exploratory analysis when the researchers' aim is to collect multidimensional rich information about a particular case or small number of cases (Daymon & Holloway, 2002) that provide detailed elucidation of the object of interest (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

Second, Daymon and Holloway (2002) posit that "from an interpretive epistemology [the research process] starts with the individual, the setting and the phenomenon under investigation as a unique entity" (p.102), thus it starts with a case. In addition to that, Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009) state that case-study based management research in practice often uses abductive research approach. These scholars explain that through abduction researchers select often surprising cases from practice, interpret them from different angles and strengthen their conclusions by selecting new cases, thus providing understanding about underlying patterns of the phenomenon of interest. Therefore, in the present thesis, the choice of a case study research design is naturally guided by the choice of research philosophy and research approach.

Third, Yin (2009) suggests that 'how' research questions are likely to lead to the adoption of a case study design when operational links need to be studied in order to understand a complex social phenomenon. He also states that a case study research design is suitable when contemporary event within its real-life context are being studied. In this regard, the authors of this thesis have presented few examples from practice of companies such as HubSpot, Barclays, IBM, etc. that are interesting to look at as they deliver digital content completely for free. Thus, when dealing with small population and sample sizes and when single settings are of interest,

case studies provide detailed understanding about the dynamics within these settings (Eisenhardt, 1989). This allows the researchers to combine several qualitative methods and to achieve depth of analysis in the phenomenon of interest (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

3.3.2. Single-case study research design

A typology of case study designs by Yin (2009) shows that they can involve single or multiple cases. In this regard, structuring the research design also entails decisions about the number of cases to include. On the one hand, multiple-case research design has been often preferred in business and management research mainly because it places the emphasis on the individual cases (Bryman & Bell, 2007), allowing the researcher to compare and contrast individual findings. This results in improved theory building process (Eisenhart, 1989; Bryman & Bell, 2007) and greater possibilities to generalize distinct findings to other similar settings (Daymon & Holloway, 2002; Bryman & Bell, 2007). Based on these strengths, multiple-case study research designs are very often recommended. On the other hand, this type of research design does not seem feasible in present study for several reasons.

To begin with, a multiple-case study research does not fit the purpose of this thesis. The problem formulation section outlined some examples of companies such as Coursera and HubSpot, distributing digital content and emphasized that few of them actually deliver digital content completely for free. Hence, such companies represent very specific, rare and unusual cases and provide an intrinsic interest for the researchers of this study. As Yin (2009) states, unique, unusual or extreme cases, where it is difficult to establish common patterns and which are difficult to compare, involve only single-case study research designs. In conjunction with this statement, and also from purely practical reasons such as good access to one of these companies and as well as time constraints, this thesis adopts a single-case design.

Further, a single-case design is appropriate because it emphasizes the context in which the phenomenon is studied, which multiple-case designs fail to accomplish (Bryman & Bell, 2007). While the main drawback in multiple-case research designs is that the focus of the analysis can easily be diluted, single-case studies are better focused on generating understanding of a particular situation or phenomenon within one single setting (Daymon & Holloway, 2002; Bryman & Bell, 2007). In addition, as digital content and its relation to online branding is still an underdeveloped area of research, the authors of this thesis argue that a clear understanding,

detailed and intensive analysis can be accomplished through exploring the features of one particular and unique case.

Lastly, it has been noted that, compared to single-case studies, multiple-case study designs allow greater possibility to generalize findings that emerge from them. However, Flyvbjerg (2006) asserts that formal generalization is only one way to accumulate knowledge. Yet, even if that knowledge cannot be formally generalized, it can still contribute to knowledge accumulation in a given research field (Flyvbjerg, 2006). In this regard, the authors of this thesis intend to raise understanding and give meaning to the theoretical concepts of content marketing and online branding as well as to provide theoretical support for the digital content phenomenon that already exists in practice. Hence, certain level of theoretical generalizability within a single-case study research design is possible when the case is carefully chosen and relevant to the purpose of the research (Yin, 2009).

To recapitulate, a single-case study research design has been adopted for three reasons; (1) an unusual case, which may not be comparable to others, is of intrinsic interest; (2) the real-life context of the phenomenon is in focus and; (3) findings emerging from the case will contribute to the knowledge in the fields of digital content marketing and online branding.

3.4. Data collection methods

To avoid too great reliance on only one data collection method, a combination of semi-structured interviews and virtual observation was employed in the present study. The focal objective during the research process was to rely mainly on primary data sources. Due to the exploratory nature of the case study research design, however, several secondary data sources were used to investigate more generally the content marketing field and its current state among practitioners. Moreover, secondary data from the company website and several publicly accessible on the Internet industry reports were used to frame the background information about the company, related to its market position, brand positioning and historical overview.

In order to explore digital content in its natural context and full complexity, the empirical data collection entailed two research stages. In the first stage of the research process semi-structured interviews with representatives from the chosen company were conducted. Taking solely the managerial perspective in this research, the semi-structured interviews aimed at answering both the first and the second derived research questions. Hence, it was possible to uncover the objectives of the content that is being published and to reveal how the selected company uses

digital content on a tactical level. The main objective in this stage was to understand the content marketing process, the characteristics of digital content and their relation to online branding. The findings in this first stage guided the further data collection process.

In the second stage of the research process data was collected from virtual observation of the digital content published by the company. The purpose was to observe numerous publications in order to verify the findings that emerged during the interviews and also to reveal how exactly the company is distributing, promoting and branding the digital content and in what context. In addition, an argumentation about the choice of methods and explanation about the data collection procedures at each stage follows.

3.4.1. Semi-structured interviews

The interview is considered the most commonly used method for qualitative research (Bryman & Bell, 2007) and is also a widely used source of primary data for a case study (Yin, 2009). According to Bryman and Bell (2007) interviews place the focus on the interviewee's point of view and provide flexibility and possibility for an in-depth research in a chosen area of interest. In addition, the interviews give the opportunity to respondents to answer questions freely and express their actions, beliefs and behavior and at the same time enable the researcher to ask follow-up questions (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Qualitative interviews take the form of either unstructured or semi-structured interviews, and it is the aim of the research that determines how structured an interview should be (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2008). As Bryman and Bell (2007) state, semi-structured interviews allow more specific issues to be addressed in the questions, which is in alignment with the purpose of this thesis to understand how digital content is used as an e-branding tool. In this regard, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were employed.

Guided by the abductive research approach, semi-structured interviews allowed the researchers to ask further questions grounded in the theoretical models and frameworks, underlying the research phenomenon. During the interviews a laddering technique was used, that included asking follow-up 'why' questions in order to grasp the hidden motives and reasons for particular statement or decision (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2008). Further, this technique ensured that all key points are included in the discussion and the researchers were able to draw the bigger picture within the investigated case. The semi-structured interviews were designed with similar structure and wording for different questions, which Bryman and Bell (2007) consider

very important when the research is conducted by two people. Last but not least, semi-structured interviews followed a predefined interview guide (see Appendix 1), which ensured that the interviews cover all topics of interest and that the empirical material serves as a solid basis for analysis.

3.4.2. Virtual observation

Virtual observation was conducted at the second stage of the data collection process, after a preliminary analysis of the empirical data obtained from the interviews. Observation is a method of gathering empirical qualitative data and it is defined by Malhotra (2010) as "recording behavioral patterns of people, objects and events in a systematic manner to obtain information about the phenomenon of interest" (p.230). Hence, the term 'virtual observation' is used due to the fact that the observations were solely conducted on the Internet. In this regard, the authors of this thesis abstain from using the term 'netnography' for two reasons. First, the observation did not focus on the interactions between the brand and its audience when digital content was published, which would be the case of netnography. Instead, the focus was placed on how the digital content was distributed and promoted and what this content consisted of. Second, the researchers took the role of complete observers, hence they did not directly interact neither with the brand online, nor with its audience (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

Although it could be argued that observation method usage is more appropriate for gaining complementary data, rather than for in-depth analysis and exploration, the authors support the statement that observations "can be an integral interpretive tool in reaching deep and insightful understanding of real phenomena, which provide meaningful and usable data for marketing managers and qualitative researchers alike" (Carson et al., 2001, p.151). Conducting virtual observations from interpretivist perspective allows gathering rich contextual data, gaining in-depth insights (Carson et al., 2001) about digital content as such and understanding about specific practices for its creation, delivery and promotion. Observation was chosen as a data collection method because it provided flexibility and allowed observing the digital content in its natural setting (Malhotra, 2010). Moreover, the observation method reveals "implicit features in social life [..] because of the ability to observe behavior rather than just rely on what is said" (Bryman & Bell, 2007, p.503). The observations ensured depth of the case study analysis by detecting data about the digital content, which might be omitted by the respondents because they consider it irrelevant, are not aware of its existence, or are not able to communicate it (Malhotra, 2010).

The focal point of utilizing observation in this research was; (1) to understand how content is distributed, branded and promoted; (2) to reveal how content is managed by the chosen company and; (3) to triangulate the findings, previously identified in the interviews. Hence, the method is recognized as a suitable approach to collect empirical data.

3.5. Sampling method and empirical data collection

The case study research entails a three-level sampling process, consisting of; (1) case selection; (2) interview respondents selection and; (3) selection of online channels for observation.

3.5.1. Case selection

The case was selected on the basis of judgemental sampling, meaning that the brand is chosen according to the judgment of the researchers, case relation to the phenomenon of interest and the availability to the case (Malhotra, 2010). As a type of convenience sampling, judgemental sampling is often associated with generalization problems (Bryman & Bell, 2007). However, the purpose of this research is exploratory and aims at illuminating how digital content is used as an e-branding tool and serving as a "springboard for future research" (Bryman & Bell, 2007, p.198). As this thesis intends to obtain deeper understanding about the digital content phenomenon, "a representative case or a random sample may not be the most appropriate strategy" (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p.13). After investigating various companies and the digital content they publish, the authors selected Telerik Sitefinity as an intrinsic and unique case to be studied. Telerik Sitefinity is a web content management system, that is a software, enabling businesses to publish, edit, create and optimize their web content easily which replaces the manual coding. The brand is positioned in the high-end content management market, providing innovative methods for web page administration and employs strong content marketing strategy in its online activities. The case company is further discussed in details in Chapter 4.

Telerik Sitefinity has been chosen as a case study company for the following reasons. To begin with, the brand has adopted a strong content marketing strategy that entails continuously publishing digital content across all online communication channels and in different types such as webinars, e-books, reports, white papers, etc. and distributes them free of charge for the final reader. Moreover, Telerik Sitefinity is established as a strong and reputable brand with global exposure and many Fortune 500 companies rely on its services (CNBC, 2014). Therefore, analyzing the relation between the e-branding activities and the digital content that Telerik

Sitefinity publishes corresponds to the purpose of the study. Moreover, the company was chosen also due to ease of access to the organizational setting. The latter is ensured via acquaintances who connected the authors of this thesis to the management level in the organization, thus facilitating the process of collecting empirical data.

3.5.2. Interview respondents

The purpose of the participants selection was to reach employees in Telerik Sitefinity who are directly related to the content marketing process and were willing to share their experience and expertise. Therefore, a non-probability sampling was performed and the respondents in this research were selected based on the position they hold in the organization. The major objective was to obtain different perspectives of how digital content is created and distributed and what is its role in the e-branding strategy. Therefore, in order to understand the strategic perspective on content marketing activities and digital content in particular, the product marketing manager of Telerik Sitefinity was selected. The second interview aimed at 'zooming in' the process of content creation, and delivery, thus, the campaign manager was selected for an interview. Moreover, the researchers aimed at gathering context-rich information about the brand and its relationship with community. For this reason, the community manager was selected as a third respondent in order to gain contextual insights and understanding of how the brand 'speaks' to the community and nurtures the relationship with it.

In April, a total of five interviews with three managers at Telerik Sitefinity were conducted; (1) one in-depth interview and a follow-up interview with product marketing manager; (2) one in-depth interview and a follow-up email interview with the campaign manager and; (3) one in-depth interview with the community manager. The follow-up interviews were necessary, as after a preliminary analysis of the first interviews with the product marketing manager and the campaign manager, common trends were identified, which were particularly relevant to the study, but were not fully discussed. As a result, the follow-up interviews aided in gaining deeper understanding about the processes related to content marketing and online branding.

The in-depth interview guides included between 9 and 12 open-ended questions (see Appendix 1), divided in two main parts. The first one aimed at gathering background information as well as establishing a relationship with the respondent before proceeding to the more specific questions. The second one addressed the company's e-branding and content marketing activities. The types of questions were adjusted to different respondents, taking into

consideration their position in the organization. The main objective was to capture different managerial perspectives, both on strategic and tactical level. Each question, included in the interview guide, was designed to open up a discussion on a particular topic and to enable the respondents to expand on their own thoughts and experience. Over the course of the interviews, the questions became more specific, triggering explanation of a particular situation of content delivery, in order to obtain more detailed answer from the respondents. Above all, the interview guide aimed at enabling the researchers to acquire consistent and relevant data, that facilitated the subsequent analysis and interpretation.

The in-depth interviews were administered on the Internet using Skype as a communication platform. The follow-up interviews were conducted either by Skype or email. The working language in the chosen company and the digital content one is English, thus all interviews were conducted entirely in English. This ensured universal understanding and consistency between the respondents' answers, the following observation and the interpretation in the consequent analysis. Prior to the interviews, the respondents received information about the purpose of the research as well as the interview guide questions. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed and the transcription was sent for approval to each respondent before proceeding to analysis and interpretation.

The complete interview guides for each respondent are presented in Appendix 1.

3.5.3. Virtual observation

The virtual observation was accomplished through the main social media channels and it included publications within a six-month period, from October 2013 to March 2014. The time frame was set in order to explore in details the brand's communication online and the role of digital content in it. The researchers argue that six months is a sufficient time period to analyze online branding patterns and regularities as well as to identify the characteristics of the digital content. This is also in alignment with the six-month content planning period identified by one of the respondents. During the observation, a structured approach was adopted, observing the digital content according to three main themes:

- Type of digital content published
- Branding of the digital content
- The way content is communicated to its audience

The platforms selected for observation were the company website, Facebook and Twitter since these are the main communication channels of Telerik Sitefinity. All channels were observed simultaneously in order to capture the full complexity of the researched phenomenon. The researchers followed a predefined observation schedule (see Appendix 2) and took research notes during the process, including screenshots about each digital content publication. This resulted in rich empirical data and enabled the researchers to investigate exhaustively and thoroughly the activities online, triangulate the data from the interviews and relate it to the theoretical framework, adopted in the thesis.

3.6. Research frame

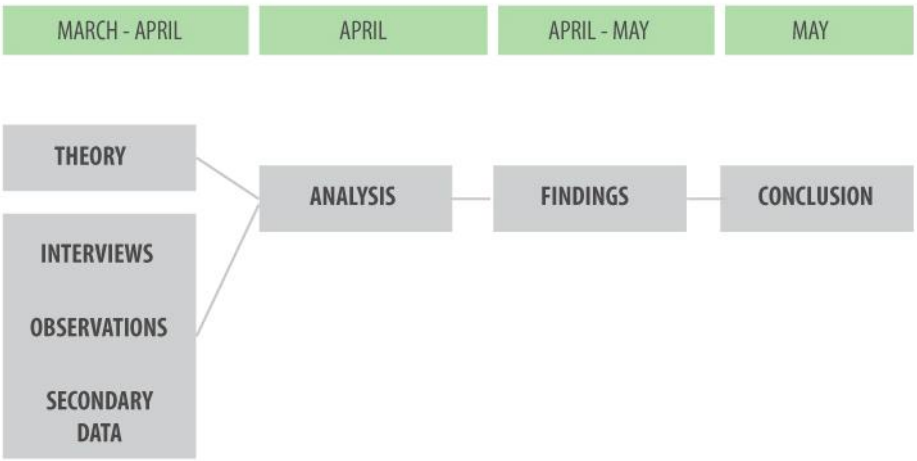

Figure 2: Frame and period of the research

Following the argumentation for the choice of research design and data collection methods, the reader is presented with the research frame of the present thesis. The research was conducted in 10 weeks, from March to May 2014. As illustrated in Figure 2, the research was driven by gaining deep understanding about digital content marketing and online branding from both practical and theoretical perspective. Data triangulation was used in order to enhance the credibility of the findings, based on multiple sources. The empirical data collection started from the exploration of secondary data. In addition, between March and April, the in-depth interviews and the virtual observation were conducted. Within these two months, the authors of this thesis were able to collect sufficient empirical data and gain understanding about the phenomenon of interest in order to proceed with the analysis and interpretation. Further, with the objective to keep clear focus and to avoid any confusion, the analysis of the empirical data was conducted on two levels. Following the abductive approach, first, the empirical data from secondary and primary sources was analyzed independently and then, the findings were interpreted on the

basis of the theoretical framework (see Figure 2). The conclusions were drawn upon the findings of the present thesis in order to answer the research question how digital content can be used as a branding tool to create brand equity.

3.7. Trustworthiness

It is a fundamental responsibility of the researcher to ensure the trustworthiness of a proposed research design and strategy. In this regard, reliability and validity are the most commonly applied standards to assess the quality of a study, especially in quantitative analysis. Nevertheless, Bryman and Bell (2007) explore several examples in which they were successfully employed in a qualitative analysis as well. In the context of the present study, however, these criteria are not considered appropriate as they presuppose a single and absolute truth of social reality (Bryman & Bell, 2007), which contradicts with the social constructionist ontological stance. Alternatively, Guba and Lincoln (1982) state that "the more individuals one explores, the more realities one encounters" (p.239) and suggest four criteria to assess a qualitative study, namely credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. They are particularly relevant for the present thesis as five interviews with three different people were conducted and virtual observation was subsequently used for interpretation.

Firstly, Guba and Lincoln (1982) relate *credibility* to how acceptable or believable are the interpretations of the researchers about the multiple realities that they deal with. In addition, Bryman and Bell (2007) suggest that credibility is about carrying out a research by following all ethical standards. In the present thesis, these two considerations are ensured by providing the participants in the study with an account of all findings in order to confirm that the researchers have correctly interpreted their meanings of the social setting. In this way greater congruence between the participants' perspectives and the researchers' inferences is achieved (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

Secondly, *transferability* is proposed to replace generalizability and refers to the extent of which findings hold in other context (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Transferability is an appropriate standard because the purpose of the present study contributes to knowledge accumulation in the digital content marketing and online branding fields by carefully choosing a single-case study research design. Guba and Lincoln (1982) state that certain degree of transferability is possible if rich accounts about context is provided on the basis of which the transferability of findings in a similar setting can be evaluated. Hence, in this thesis, Chapter 4 begins by presenting detailed

background information about the company, the brand and the context in which digital content is explored.

Thirdly, *dependability* entails a consideration that in some cases the research design in a qualitative study needs to be modified; therefore, keeping a detailed account of all procedures in each stage of the research process is important to establish stability of the research design (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Hence, in the present study, dependability is ensured by following a case study protocol, containing strict research instruments and guidelines of collecting data as well as by keeping records of all decision points along the process.

Lastly, Guba and Lincoln (1982) explain *confirmability* in terms of objectivity of the results. As researchers' biases are a hot topic in qualitative research, the scholars emphasize that objectivity or confirmability are primarily interested with the data and not the certifiability of the researchers. Although business research can hardly be fully objective (Bryman & Bell, 2007), confirmability of the results of the present thesis was considered in two ways. In the first place, triangulation ensured that the empirical material was collected from multiple sources, that is from different representatives of Telerik Sitefinity. In addition, two different methods, namely interviews and observations, were used with the purpose to cross-check the data and confirm the findings. Moreover, in order to minimize biases and ensure confirmability of the results, the researchers have restrained from taking any preconceived position that will impede them to accept contradictory findings.

In conclusion, to ensure the trustworthiness of the results, the proposed single-case study research design has been structured in accordance with these four specific criteria for assessing qualitative research as they are in conjunction with the social constructionist research philosophy as well as with the purpose of the study. In addition, few more considerations regarding the qualitative research strategy are discussed in the next section.

3.8. Methodological limitations

Although the authors of this thesis put their best efforts in conducting comprehensive, exhaustive and in-depth research, there are some limitations in relation to the choice of empirical data collection methods and research design.

A major limitation of the in-depth interview method are the difficulties related to analyzing and interpreting the data, which might lead to interpretation bias (Malhotra, 2010). Often in

qualitative research subjectivity of the empirical data, based solely on the researchers' perspective (Bryman & Bell, 2007), is criticized. It is noteworthy that, in alignment with the interpretivist epistemological stance, subjectivity is acceptable and the research findings represent only one subjective reality, based on the participants' perspectives about the phenomenon of interest as well as on the researchers' own input in the process of explication of these perspectives. Nevertheless, in an attempt to minimize the interpretation bias, both authors of this thesis analyzed the results from the interviews and conducted observations individually and then, were able to cross-check their interpretations, discuss them and draw informed conclusions.

Another research limitation is the observation period. Due to time constraints, the authors of this thesis observed the content published by Telerik Sitefinity within six months only. Therefore, the conclusions drawn upon this analysis are limited in scope as well as in providing an analysis of how digital content strategy has been evolving throughout the years. This limitation is partly resolved through the answers of the strategy-related interview questions, where the respondents could expand more on their past experience and on how their objectives to deliver content have changed over time.

Having discussed and justified the choice of research methodology, the authors of this thesis are aware of the particular pitfalls and limitations that each methodological decision implies. However, the Telerik Sitefinity case represents a unique, relevant and accessible setting that was explored in details through a combination of data collection methods, namely in-depth semi-structured interviews and virtual observation, thus, ensuring validity of the findings and trustworthiness of the analysis. Although single-case study is often considered insufficient for in-depth research, the authors of this thesis consider that it brought fruitful results, new insights and understanding of the digital content phenomenon in an e-branding context. As Eysenck (1976) stated:

> Sometimes we simply have to keep our eyes open and look carefully at individual cases - not in the hope of proving anything, but rather in the hope of learning something! (cited in Flyvbjerg, 2006, p.7).

4. Empirical Findings

The chapter is divided in three main sections. The first section provides a thick description of the case setting, including detailed information about the company, the brand and the organizational structure. The second section presents the empirical data collected through in-depth interviews and virtual observation. The empirical findings are structured according to the phases of the content marketing process, namely planning, creation and distribution.

4.1. Case setting

This section presented the reader with a detailed overview of the case setting, which serves as a basis of the further analysis and interpretation of the empirical data.

4.1.1. Telerik - from a Bulgarian startup to a global IT leader

Telerik was established in 2002 by four college friends in Sofia, Bulgaria. The company started initially as an IT consulting company, but soon after its creation, the founders shifted to online business model, selling software products online. The first Telerik software product was Radeditor, which helps online users to easily edit text, images and all types of content on the Web. Four years later, in 2006, Telerik expanded internationally and opened an office in Boston, USA. Currently, Telerik delivers software products that help software developers to create compelling user experiences online across various applications, including websites, desktop computers and mobile devices. Telerik is targeting both small enterprises and large corporations. The company's unique value proposition is to simplify and integrate the entire lifecycle of software development (Telerik, 2014). Nowadays, Telerik has offices in 6 countries and more than 100 000 clients.

In January 2014 Telerik rebranded the corporate brand and restructured its brand portfolio, transforming its brand architecture from a house of brands to a branded house. The company grouped its products in four major brands, each consisting of one or few products. The current structure of the brand architecture is presented in Figure 3. Along with the brand image enhancement and brand architecture transformation, the company also changed its brand promise. From "Delivering more than expected" prior to 2014, Telerik now "Develop[s] experiences" (Telerik, 2014), which aligns with the strategic goal to help software

developers deliver one-of-a-kind experience through applications on any kind of platform or device (Capital, 2014). Telerik Sitefinity is the only product under the Telerik CMS brand (see Figure 3). The Telerik Sitefinity product offering and brand specifications are discussed further.

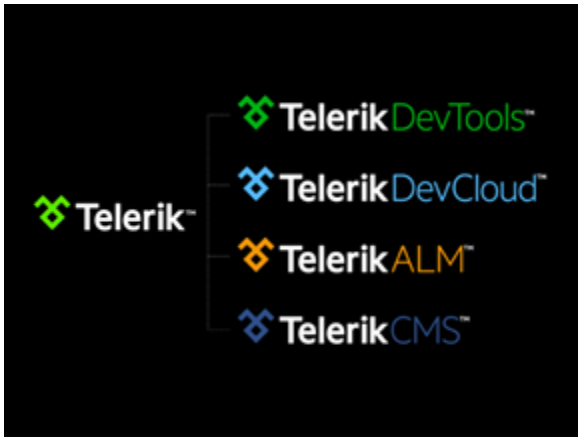

Figure 3: Telerik brand architecture

Source: Telerik (2014)

4.1.2. Telerik Sitefinity as a product

Telerik Sitefinity was launched on the market in 2005 and it is positioned as a user friendly web content management system, employing the latest technologies to deliver great user experience (Telerik Sitefinity, 2014). To clarify, content management system (hereinafter referred to as CMS) is a software that enables website owners to create, edit and manage their content on the website and it can provide additional tools such as performance measurement tools, marketing automation, e-commerce options, etc. (TechTerms, n.d.). Telerik Sitefinity is a licensed software, positioned in the high-end CMS market, targeting both small and large enterprises. Its biggest competitors are other licensed CMS such as Sitecore and Kentico, as well as open source CMS as Drupal, Wordpress and Joomla.

Telerik Sitefinity is a modern CMS that enables business users without any coding experience to create user-friendly websites and engage, retain and grow their customer base (Telerik Sitefinity, 2014). The major differentiating feature of the product is that it empowers businesses and marketing professionals to implement their own online strategies. Also, Telerik Sitefinity is a mobile CMS, meaning that the website and its content are visible and can be managed for every device, without any additional coding. Moreover, the Telerik

Sitefinity platform simplifies the implementation of various online marketing activities, such as e-commerce, SEO, e-mail marketing, etc. (Telerik Sitefinity, 2014).

4.1.3. Telerik Sitefinity as a brand

Along with the corporate brand, Telerik Sitefinity also went through a rebranding phase in January 2014. Three major changes came along with the rebranding (see Figure 4); (1) logo change (2) received endorsement of the mother brand Telerik and; (3) slogan alteration. The new brand promise "Winning Customer Experiences" is seen as a continuity of the corporate brand promise "Deliver Experience" (Telerik Sitefinity, 2014). The brand inherits the Telerik's core values, being integrity, trust, respect, teamwork, hard work and meritocracy of ideas (Telerik, 2014). Moreover, during the interviews with the product marketing manager and the campaign manager, the researchers identified specific values of the Telerik Sitefinity brand; professionalism, innovation, unique experiences, productivity, customer-orientation, constant strive for excellence.

Figure 4: Telerik Sitefinity logo after rebranding in 2014

Telerik Sitefinity is a B2B product and has two major customer groups - business professionals and software developers. In comparison to the other brands in Telerik's portfolio, that are mainly developer-oriented, Telerik Sitefinity also targets business and marketing managers, as they are the actual everyday users of the product. As a pure online brand, Telerik Sitefinity has a global audience with a customer base of more than 11 000 customers worldwide. The brand communicates with its audience through three channels: website, social media and partner websites.

4.1.4. Internal marketing structure

The internal marketing structure in Telerik Sitefinity is rather flat. The product marketing manager is responsible for the strategic planning of marketing activities, whereas the campaign manager is focused more on the day-to-day execution of these activities. It should be noted that the marketing team does not work separately from the other departments, but is closely integrated in the product development and the sales processes. In addition, the community manager works closely with the marketing team, focusing on nurturing the relationships with the brand's community and understanding its needs and current trends. The graphic design team, supporting the marketing activities, functions on a corporate level along with the marketing communications department, which ensures consistency and that all brands 'speak' with the same voice.

4.2. Content characteristics

Answering the question how content can be used to create brand equity online implies first gaining better understanding of the content characteristics. Throughout the interviews three important content characteristics emerged, which were further confirmed through the virtual observation. Therefore, the following discussion briefly outlines each of these characteristics that serve as a basis for the subsequent analysis of the content marketing process.

4.2.1. Content as a problem solver

Doubtlessly, a successful brand satisfies a unique need. According to the Content Marketing Institute's (2014) definition, content marketing is the discipline to deliver relevant content to satisfy a particular need for information, thus bringing consumer value. However, finding the right information in the immense amount of content on the Internet, might be a challenging task. The analysis of the empirical data about Telerik Sitefinity showed that the brand strives to deliver content to solve a particular problem, that is the need of information, of a particular audience. The relation between the audience's information needs and the brand, providing the right solution, was overly emphasized in the interviews with the respondents and identified through virtual observation.

The respondents emphasized that solving a specific problem becomes a point of differentiation for the brand. Petya Popova-Chilikova, campaign manager at Telerik Sitefinity (hereinafter referred to as CaM) stated that, as a brand, Telerik Sitefinity is:

> CaM: *oriented very much towards [the] customers with the aim at delivering always leading solutions that exceed their expectations.*

A particular statement by Svetla Yankova, product marketing manager at Telerik Sitefinity (hereinafter referred to as PMM), captured the interest of the authors of this thesis. She explained that the brand strives to be recognized as:

> PMM: *someone who knows what they are talking about* [...] and is particularly focused in providing [...]*no-nonsense helpful resources.*

These statements reaffirm one of the brand's core values, namely professionalism, and highlight at least two fundamental goals; (1) providing an expert solution to a unique need and; (2) delivering content that is differentiated as highly relevant compared to the bulk of random information on the Internet. The point of differentiation is reinforced by the role of content as a problem solver and it is well explained in the following statement:

> PMM: *Every company has different strategies […] But providing good content around problems that are by definition not too simple, it is a little bit mad-end […] So, in that regard we try to solve the problem that they have by explaining how we solve it, how our customers solve it, how partners solve it, how analytics help and things like that. […] essentially, people come looking for you as a brand and as product, as a solution […]. And what makes companies successful is the fact that they are solving a unique problem.*

From the observations, the authors of this thesis identified that the relation between need and solution was emphasized in the language, used in the content resources themselves, as well as in the way this relation was promoted in the social media channels. Appendix 3.1 presents examples of commonly used language structure such as "help you find [what is right for you]", "the solution", "[developers] were given rapid [solutions]". In social media this is often communicated by using language such as the "how to" structure (see Appendix

3.2), which creates the impression that the content resource will give the user a manual of how to solve a particular issue.

4.2.2. Content as an educational material

In the course of the interviews it became apparent that the respondents refer to the content they produce as an educational material. Specifically, the interview with the PMM led to the finding that the brand takes the role of an educator. As she stated:

> PMM: *We pay good money to go to university, exactly for that - to get good educational material and when you go into the professional world the way you tend to get educated nowadays is through materials provided from other companies in the form of content marketing.*

Moreover, the content as an educational material is tightly related to the communication approach of Telerik Sitefinity. The focus of the message is placed on the customer's or the prospect's needs, hence with educational content the brand attempts to facilitate the problem solving process.

> PMM: *The educational component is actually an empowering component, because modern marketing has evolved in a way of not really like me trying to convince you that you have a problem, but me providing you with the full journey of different resources and materials that will answer all your questions and give you the assurance that this solution will work best for you.*

Throughout the virtual observation, an essential finding was that educating the audience as a strategy is integrated in the entire content marketing process. Both the content itself and the way it is promoted in social media help the audience "learn" and "better understand" (see Appendix 3.3), hinting the educational approach. The educational material is created in different content formats, where each resource is tightly bounded to a specific target group.

4.2.3. Content as a story teller

Interestingly, during the interviews the respondents referred to content as to an "asset" or a "resource", which implies its great importance. An important characteristic is the power of

the content to tell the brand story. In fact, the PMM mentioned "stories" in several occasions when explaining the importance of:

> PMM: *having a comprehensive mobile story way before anyone else did [...]* or *[…] a very responsive story.*

In these particular examples, 'story' relates to the same content topic, namely mobile and responsive design. As presented in Appendix 3.4, the mobile story is told in an engaging way, using different content types targeted to the different audience of this story. Moreover, the story continues to evolve until now, as the latest content activities revolve around content-driven mobile apps, hence, adding one more layer in the mobile story.

As inferred from both the interviews and the virtual observation, delivering relevant content to a strictly targeted audience with a compelling messages empowers Telerik Sitefinity to involve the audience in the brand story. By delivering the content in different formats and channels, the brand is able to include the content value proposition in the storyline and at the same time reach out to different audiences. The narration of the Telerik Sitefinity story is a gradually evolving process that satisfies the audience's information need in an engaging way.

4.3. Defining content marketing

In the course of the interviews, the authors of this thesis aimed at understanding how content marketing is defined through the eyes of the respondents and how their perspectives relate to the Content Marketing Institute's (2014) definition. All respondents recognized the fundamental importance of content marketing for the company's business. The PMM took a consumer-centric perspective to define content marketing. Highlighting the importance to provide a solution for the consumers' needs, she contrasted between consumer-centric content marketing communications and traditional one-to-many marketing communications, the latter resembling a broadcasting approach. The PMM explained that:

> PMM: *Our marketing strategy is primarily focused on content marketing. […] it is more of a 'you' message than 'me' message. I have two options: a customer goes to my site or he comes to solve some kind of problem. And I can go talking about me, me, me - I have this feature, I have that feature, here is a two-minute commercial. Or, content marketing*

> *basically takes it to a different perspective and says: okay, you probably have these and these problems because* ***I know you are a marketing professional****,* ***or .NET developer*** *and here are the resources to make you successful in your job and to make you comfortable with our solution.*

From the PMM statement: ***I know you are a marketing professional, or .NET developer*** it could be inferred that she highlights the prominent role of understanding who are the audiences and what are their needs. Nevertheless, content as a problem solver implies that in order to satisfy a particular information need, first the target audience and its demands have to be defined.

In contrast to the PMM, the CaM provided a more goal-oriented perspective, focused on the company's objectives. Identifying several phases of the content marketing process, she placed the emphasis not on the consumer, but rather on the objectives that marketers pursue by planning, creating and distributing content. Interestingly, she also stated that it is a type of content "*that talks about the product or services you offer*", which is a rather different viewpoint from the one of the PMM. As the CaM stated:

> CaM: *Content marketing is something that involves the creation and the distribution of a very well targeted content that talks about the product or services you offer and this content is written with the intent to attract, convert new leads as well as to retain existing customers. So, this is not just content written for the sake of writing content.*

Vesselina Tasheva, community manager at Telerik Sitefinity (hereinafter referred to as CoM) offered a different angle that balances the previous two perspectives. She explained that on the one hand, content marketing is important for the company, as it is tied to specific objectives. On the other hand, content marketing is about delivering relevant content according to the interests of a particular target group and focusing less on the product itself. Therefore, in the case of Telerik Sitefinity, relevant and targeted content ensures that the story the brand is telling is actually interesting for its audience.

> CoM: *The purpose of content marketing is to put an extra level of your marketing funnel [...] on the top of your funnel. […] You attract people to your website, to your blogs, white papers, e-books. Usually, with content marketing you give them content, related to a topic that they are interested in, not specifically to the product and then, just in the end, you mention a little bit something about the product.*

Although seen from different angles, these definitions seem to revolve around the same idea that the Internet-enabled environment calls for new approaches to reach to the online audience and content marketing seems to be the answer. It is interesting to see that the above presented viewpoints touch upon three important aspects of content marketing that are covered also in the Content Marketing Institute's (2014) definition; (1) clearly defined audiences or target groups in order to deliver consumer value; (2) relevant content that matches these target groups' interests; (3) content marketing activities that bring measurable success for brands.

Benchmarking from these viewpoints, the analysis further explores the different phases, underlying the content marketing process. Based on the data collected through the interviews and the virtual observation, the phases of content planning, content creation and content distribution were identified (see Figure 5). It is noteworthy that no clear-cut distinction can be made between these three phases, however, with the purpose of presenting the empirical data in a structured and clear way, this section outlines each phase separately. In addition, the authors of this thesis present the major findings in regard to the strategic objectives and the specific activities that each phase entails.

Figure 5: Phases of the content marketing process

4.4. The phases of the content marketing process

4.4.1. Content planning

As the previous discussion revealed, the first aspect of content marketing is to ensure a clearly defined target group. This objective was found in the course of the interviews and all respondents emphasized the importance of content planning. As the PMM explained, long-term decisions about the content marketing strategy begin with the process of planning the content. Reasoning about content planning, the PMM and the CaM revealed what specifically this phase entails.

> PMM: *[...] you have to come up with your buyer personas, with the user personas, you have to come up with thought leadership strategy, content strategy, demand generation*

> *strategy and that translates into very different types of tactics. [...] We have outlined for the six-month period roughly what themes do we want to talk about, so we have a content plan.*

> CaM: *The secret is to plan very carefully the content that you need and try to be unique. [...]. We do regular content audits of the resources we have and identify gaps in them with a view of the main targeted personas. Content production is also planned on the basis of the upcoming product release plans for Sitefinity and which are the main themes we should cover. A content calendar is produced, containing all relevant resources to each theme and realistic production dates.*

From these statements two important types of content planning decisions could be identified; (1) decisions regarding the "*buyer personas*" and the "*user personas"*, or the target groups and; (2) decisions regarding the "*content plan*" or "*content calendar*", that entail scheduling and planning the content within specific time frames.

First, as all respondents underlined, well-targeted content is essential for the success of the content marketing activities and all the content, created by Telerik Sitefinity, targets a particular persona. According to CaM the process *"start[s] by planning the targeted persona, [...] who is the primary audience, who is the decision-maker"*, for which Telerik Sitefinity relies on helpful insights from the sales team and from interviews with bigger prospects and clients.

The interviews revealed that there is a two-dimensional segmentation of the audience of Telerik Sitefinity: a horizontal and a vertical segmentation. Horizontally, the audiences are segmented according to their relation to the product, that is either the person using the software, referred to as 'user persona', or the person involved in the decision-making process of buying the software, referred to as 'buyer persona'. As the PMM stated:

> PMM: *people who are the decision makers are often different than the people who use the software and we try to differentiate them.*

This type of segmentation sets the boundaries of a clearly defined target group, thus facilitating more focused and relevant communication with the different 'persona'. Vertically, the audiences are segmented according to their position in the different stages of the marketing funnel. This is well explained by the CaM:

> CaM: *Because the different types of content are tied to the objectives of different campaigns and they are also tied to the different stages of the marketing funnel and the buying cycle, there will be different types of content to support these objectives.*

Second, in the course of the interviews, it became clear what does the content plan entail and how the content topics are chosen. A topic can be based on identified gaps in previously published content, explained by the CaM as:

> CaM: *[...] the need to create a set of resources, talking to a particular type of audience, which was not covered with the already existing resources, so you identify gaps.*

Appendix 3.5 presents a specific example of such topic, built around mobile applications. As it was observed, different resources, which expanded on that topic and complemented each other, were published. Moreover, a topic can revolve around new product features, software updates as well as industry-related issues or trends (see Appendix 3.6). Hence, the strategic objectives at the content planning phase are to segment precisely the target audiences and to set the direction of the content marketing development in a specific time frame.

4.4.2. Content creation

There is a tight interrelation between the content planning and the content creation phase. As content planning is concerned with setting the boundaries of clearly defined target groups, the strategic objective of content creation is to produce highly relevant content that will not only attract these well-targeted audiences, but will also retain them in a long run. In order to accomplish this objective, decisions in this phase relate to the different types of content and the ways to brand them.

To begin with, the content is divided in two major categories. On the one hand, there is the editorial content, created internally by Telerik Sitefinity. On the other, there is content created in cooperation with other companies or industry analysts and experts, external to the organization.

From the virtual observation it became apparent that in the content created by Telerik Sitefinity, the brand is explicitly shown (see Appendix 3.7). The content includes the brand colors and the logo, which is highly visible. The content takes different formats, including blog posts, white papers, case studies, webinars, etc. It is interesting to examine the managers' perspectives of how this kind of content is branded. In this regard, the CaM stated that:

> CaM: *[…] this is a Sitefinity-owned content so [there is no] need to brand it [...] It is branded content per se.*

Further, the PMM added:

> PMM: *There is a really good attention that I like to pay on the various visuals, various screenshots, that reinforce the story [...]. You have to maintain certain color scheme, certain design guidelines and we actually have full team within our company that takes care to make everything look nice, look consistent, look as a common branding.*

It should be noted that four different teams are involved in the process of creating the "*Sitefinity-owned*" content. Starting either from the marketing or technical department in Telerik Sitefinity as authors, passing the content on to the design team to frame and brand it, then to the marketing communications team to ensure that Telerik Sitefinity 'speaks' with the same voice as the other Telerik brands, and lastly to the SEO team to optimize it for search engines. Therefore, as the PMM explained "*there is a lot of 'behind-the-scenes trick' that go into place*" and significant resources are spent on creating the content.

Appendix 3.8 presents examples of co-created content with a partner. In this case there are three partners of the co-created content: Marketo, Haworth, and an industry specialist J. Boye and Forrester. In these types of externally-created contents, the authors of this thesis identified different roles of Telerik Sitefinity as a brand: the role of partner (Haworth, Appendix 3.8a), endorser (Marketo, Appendix 3.8b), or the brand is not shown at all (J.Boye, Appendix 3.8c; Forrester, Appendix 3.8d). As the PMM explained:

> PMM: *sometimes independent, third-party content that reinforces [the] story and is from a trusted source is very effective [...] because it doubles up the power of the message.*

It is also noteworthy that co-created content is branded differently. As the CaM stated:

> CaM: *[...] an analyst report that talks very little about Sitefinity and mainly covers more analyst perspective of the product. Usually, we work with analysts themselves in order to produce the final version of this type of content, to agree on it. We put mainly the analyst's branding with the subsequent Sitefinity branding.*

As illustrated in Appendix 3.8, co-created content shows mainly the partner's brand while the presence of the Telerik Sitefinity brand is either very delicate or non-existent at all. Usually, the partner produces the content. As the PMM mentioned:

> PMM: *this is content that they have come up with, so you don't have the workload to come up with this great content yourself.*

Hence, among the major benefits of the co-created content are cost- and time-efficiency.

Intriguing is the general opinion about branding the content that the PMM expressed during the interviews:

> PMM: *Branding the content is subtle, is not the main message of 'me, me, me', look at my brand, but it is a subtle message to the people - this infographic, or this webinar is actually coming from a company named Sitefinity. [...] Essentially, depending on the audience, the branding of it [the content] and saying we are such and such brand does not have to be in your face, but it has to be consistent and it has to be elegant.*

It can be concluded that the organizational activities in this phase relate to producing and branding the content. As a result two main types of content are created. The findings are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Differences between own created and co-created content

Type of content	Branding components	Content creator	Examples
Content created by Telerik Sitefinity	**Branded *per se*** - Brand colors, brand logo, fonts	Internal departments at Telerik Sitefinity	Appendix 3.7
Co-created content	**Telerik Sitefinity as a secondary brand** - Telerik Sitefinity as a co-creator - Telerik Sitefinity as a secondary brand - Telerik Sitefinity brand not shown	- Telerik Sitefinity in collaboration with a partner - External creator	Appendix 3.8

From the above, it can be inferred that the content creation is customer-centered and focused on the needs of the well-segmented audiences, rather than on the brand itself. During the

discussion about content marketing, the PMM framed this as "*it is more of a 'you' message than 'me' message".* Moreover, she outlined three important criteria for creating a webinar, namely "*conceptual integrity, engaging real-life examples and then a full walk-through of how to accomplish a solution*". Although the PMM refers specifically to the webinar, this criteria is followed in other content formats, which is confirmed by the virtual observation. Appendix 3.9 presents content that is created to help the audiences to solve a problem and to learn something relevant. In addition, it became clear that even when Telerik Sitefinity communicates its product features and software updates, the focus is on the value that they bring to the audience, while the features themselves are described subsequently (see Appendix 3.10). Hence, the objective at this stage of the content marketing process is to create highly relevant, task-oriented and engaging content that fits the specific needs of its audiences.

4.4.3. Content distribution

So far the content planning and creation phases covered two aspects of content marketing that were identified in the respondents' definitions, namely to clearly define the target audiences and provide them with relevant content. The third aspect relates to the strategic objective to release or publish the content in a way that it brings measurable success for the brand. Throughout the interviews it became apparent that success is measured on the basis of quantifiable sales objectives and revenue and in relation to the marketing funnel. As the PMM explained, the effect of different distribution and promotional activities are measured:

> PMM: *in terms of how many leads the sales team gets to work with and that translates into, naturally, revenue*.

The CaM added that there are:

> CaM: *[no] sales targets like how many deals get closed, but [there are] targets of the number of opportunities, such as upgrade or renew a subscription, that get opened* at each stage of the funnel.

Thus, different content distribution and promotion strategies are discussed in this third phase of the content marketing process, as they are viewed to contribute to achieving measurable sales objectives for Telerik Sitefinity.

From the empirical data collected, two types of content distribution strategies were identified. First, pull distribution strategy relates to delivering content through own distribution channels such as the company website and social media. Second, push distribution strategy entails a more aggressive approach and relates to promotional activities such as paid advertising and email marketing. Each strategy includes specific activities that are further discussed.

Pull distribution strategy

It became apparent that Telerik Sitefinity is relying extensively on its own distribution channels and less often to paid advertising. As the PMM stated the main focus remains on "*building out this landing pages, tutorials, webinars and blogs."* She added that although *"[…] there is an occasional display ad here and there, […] very little goes to this type of effort".*

Throughout the interviews, it became clear that the pull distribution strategy naturally starts from the website. When asked to outline important online marketing activities, interestingly, the PMM pointed out that the first thing is to optimize the company website. She deemed a significant importance to the processes of building, creating and maintaining the website, so that the content is easily accessible to users who search for it:

> PMM: *[…] in terms of activities we obviously we have a website that is very full, very comprehensive, has a lot of the resources on product and solution. […] if you analyze how the traffic comes up, our brand has reached long enough and wide enough so that people come looking for us even by name and start to get educated by the website. So, that is a critical component.*

In addition, website-specific tools such as SEO, meta descriptions and interlinking, were deemed as critical factors, driving traffic to the site and facilitating the navigation and flow. This is supported by the following statement:

> CaM: *Usually 60-70% of the traffic comes from organic search […]. When you have this content posted on your website it is always good to review carefully the entire content and the meta information of the page, the interlinking, so all the SEO aspects are covered and the content is optimized. By creating all these integrated resources, usually the SEO results could be seen in a short period of time.*

Reflecting upon different website-specific tools and activities, it was compelling to understand how the content is distributed on the company website. As the PMM asserted:

> PMM: *[...] all content is free but sometimes you have to provide some kind of email for that. […] So, we are a lot of times very liberal in terms of not locking down content or anything like that […].*

As the PMM highlighted, all content resources are free of charge for the online users. However, this statement reveals another activity, characteristic to the pull distribution strategy, which entails establishing the level of access to content; (1) content that does not require registration and is freely available to the audiences, such as blogs, case studies, information on the websites, presentations, videos on Youtube, and; (2) content that is gated behind email registration form, such as white papers, webinars, e-books and third party analyst reports. Thus, on the basis of the registration form, personal data about users' interests easily becomes available, which facilitates the process of providing the audiences with even more targeted and relevant content.

Further, as it was previously discussed, during the content creation phase two types of content are produced; own content and content, co-created in collaboration with external partners. In the course of the interviews, the respondents related back to these content types and revealed that a particular type of co-created content, namely syndicated content, is associated with a greater pull effect. Content syndication is a tactic to distribute content, created by independent industry analysts, through the Telerik Sitefinity website and social media channels. As the CaM explained, typically, syndicated resources are white papers, analyst reports and e-books and in rare cases webinars, videos or infographics. As stated by the CoM, this tactic is:

> CoM: *unique to Sitefinity, compared to other brands in the Telerik's portfolio*.

Thus, benefiting from the partners' expertise and reputation, these content syndication programs are considered highly credible and relevant, creating a pull effect for prospects towards the Telerik Sitefinity webpage. Giving a specific example about a syndicated Forrester report on industry-specific topic, the PMM stated that:

> PMM: *[…] syndicating that report and providing a complimentary copy to our prospects was a win-win for us. For one, it helped our audience make more informed decisions in a non-trivial matter. Second, it reaffirms us as visionaries and thought leaders because our approaches are backed and analyzed by Forrester.*

In addition, the CaM asserted that the objective of a content syndication program is:

> CaM: *to bring people to a landing page, to have them fill in a form, download the report and then do something else afterwards.*

Thus, content syndication is a tactic, related to the behind-registration level of access to content on the website. In addition, the observations confirmed that Telerik Sitefinity is extensively popularizing these third-party analyst reports in its social media channels. Appendix 3.11 presents examples of the same report being republished several times in Facebook and Twitter for less than two weeks.

Lastly, as the respondents highlighted, that the essence of creating pull effect is to distribute content by ensuring multiple touch points with the users across a variety of channels. The CaM referred to this activity as *"content repurposing"*.

> CaM: *Content repurposing is [when] you […] take a video, write the script, publish it on YouTube, republish it on your own website. […] Then, you can take the presentation slides from the video, put them on SlideShare, […] write something across social media, produce an infographic based on the content of this video and put it on Pinterest. All of these create different touch points, and also occupy different positions on the search engine result pages in Google.*

As the CaM explained, content repurposing is a tactic to create different formats for one specific content resource and to promote them in different social media channels. The main rationale is to maximize the outcome of creating a certain resource by reaching a wider audience. Content repurposing creates multiple touch points and increases users' chances to come across the content resource and interact with it. Moreover, content repurposing serves well for search engine optimization, hence increasing the brand visibility and multiplying the opportunities for new and existing customers to interact with the content. Appendix 3.12 presents one part of a work document, provided by the company, that reveals how each content format is being repurposed. This is also illustrated through an example of a webinar, converted into a blog post and then into a byline article on an external website (see Appendix 3.13).

From the discussion it could be inferred that these groups of activities create pull effect and favorable opportunities to attract and retain audiences, hence contribute to achieving quantifiable marketing objective at all stages of the marketing funnel.

Push distribution strategy

Push distribution strategy relates to activities that intend to promote content resources across different channels and ultimately drive increased traffic to the website. Throughout the interviews different tools were mentioned, among them pay-per-click (PPC), social media advertising, remarketing, etc. However, the respondents emphasized that display ads and email marketing are considered the most efficient tools for content promotion. For this reason, push distribution strategy is analyzed in terms of creating email marketing and display advertising campaigns and the following example serves as a basis of this discussion.

> CaM: *Recently Sitefinity hosted a webinar which talked about different approaches to mobile: mobile web, mobile apps or hybrid. As a type of resource, the webinar had several main goals. One, was for lead generation […]. We promoted it [the webinar] via e-mail marketing campaigns, also via ad banners and PPC campaigns. […] Another goal was that it had a lead nurturing aspect. […] Here, as a promotional tactic, we used mainly e-mail campaigns, because we used the chance to target these types of leads that we had knowledge of that they had already downloaded a mobile-related resource. So, we knew their profile: (1) Sitefinity leads; (2) interested in mobile and (3) falling within this business scope.*

First, from the example above, it became apparent that both tools can be used together to support the dissemination of one single content resource. Interestingly, however, different viewpoints on the usefulness of display advertising emerged throughout the interviews.

As it was pointed out, the PMM of Sitefinity suggested that the company is less concerned with paid advertising. Moreover, in the interview she argued that, as the industry and the target audiences are very specific, display ads showing the product are far less effective to drive new visitors to the site compared to organic search. Thus, it could be inferred that display advertising plays a secondary role in the promotional strategy of Telerik Sitefinity.

Compared to the PMM's viewpoint, the CaM offered a different perspective. Interestingly, she placed greater emphasis on the importance of display advertising and directly linked it to accomplishing branding objectives.

> CaM: *Display advertising is probably the best one for brand awareness. Display advertising could go with a very simple landing page together with a trial download call-to-action for people who are just considering products like yours but they have never heard of this particular brand and they might want to play around with it and see what functionalities it has. So, very quickly they will be progressed from an awareness to an interest stage. […] But, if I have to pick one channel for creating brand awareness, that would be in general display advertising.*

Despite the divergent viewpoints of the PMM and the CaM, it became clear that display advertising campaigns contribute to establishing the first contact between the brand and its audience, thus increasing the traffic at the top of the marketing funnel. In addition, as the CaM mentioned, display advertising could be used in combination with different call-to-action tools such as trial download button, which creates additional opportunities for the users to interact with the content. The authors of this thesis came across a display ad in a specialized CMS industry article in Forbes (see Appendix 3.14). It features the aforementioned Forrester research report, which is another example that different strategies are used to popularize and maximize the effectiveness of this type of co-created content.

Second, in the webinar example, email marketing was identified as the main promotional tool to nurture the relationships with the leads. As the CaM explains, on the one hand, an e-mail marketing campaign can be organized based entirely on Telerik's *"own internal database [...]. Sitefinity has a huge database, so we hit a part of it, depending on the type of resource that we're promoting."* On the other hand, another e-mail marketing approach is to rely on list rentals from external companies that specialize in this type of service and, *"depending on a set of criteria […], prepare […] media plans containing those lists and target audiences"*. These statements suggest that certain previous knowledge about the audiences and their interests, obtained at the first two phases of the content marketing process, is needed in order to launch an email marketing campaign and send strictly targeted messages to the receivers. In addition, the PMM also commented on how powerful email marketing is for brand engagement with prospects and current customers.

> PMM: *Most effective is usually the e-mail blast which we use for webinars. There's something about receiving an e-mail for a topic that you're interested in, that usually makes people to sign up in greater numbers than various other channels. And so, the email is very very critical component.*

It is noteworthy that an interesting finding came to support this statement. As throughout the observations the authors of this thesis downloaded several white papers and webinar recordings, which were gated behind e-mail registration forms, the follow-up emails were also analyzed. For instance, an analyst report on mobile trends was downloaded. Then, a week later a subsequent e-mail was received suggesting additional resources on the same topic (see Appendix 3.15). It is compelling to see that email marketing draws on the knowledge about the customers and suggests related content that might be useful to their needs and interests, thus increasing the chances of their interaction with the content.

As the CaM explained, a primary objective is to:

> CaM: *fill the marketing funnel with as many leads as possible at different stages of the funnel*.

From the above discussion, however, it can be concluded that, while pull distribution tools were used at all stages, email marketing and display advertising campaigns are used as a promotional tools primarily to target top-of-the-funnel prospects and establish the first contact between the brand and its audiences.

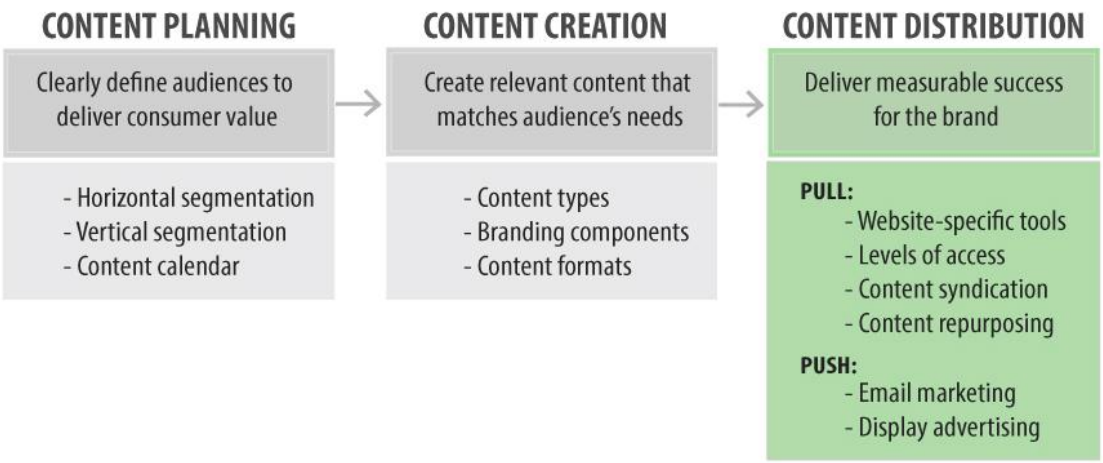

Figure 6: Strategic objectives and tactics in each phase of the content marketing process

To recapitulate, in this chapter three phases of the content marketing process were analysed within the Telerik Sitefinity case setting, namely content planning, content creation and content distribution. As Figure 6 illustrates, the empirical findings revealed the strategic objectives and tactical decisions related to each phase of the content marketing process. As a continuous process, each phase is dependent on the preceding strategic objectives and activities. The researchers identified that the content planning and creation phases are extremely interrelated as they represent the 'preparation' phase. However, the content distribution phase represents different activities related to how the digital content is actually delivered to the public. In order to investigate how these empirical findings contribute to building brand equity online, they are further analyzed in relation to the theoretical framework adopted in the present thesis.

5. Discussion

The following chapter presents a discussion based on the empirical findings. The chapter begins with an independent analysis of each phase of the content marketing process from a branding perspective. Thereafter, the discussion reveals how the content marketing process contributes to building brand equity online. Lastly, a framework for building brand equity through content marketing is proposed and argued for.

Having presented the strategic and tactical decisions in each phase of the content marketing process within the case study setting, the authors of this thesis further explore the process from a branding perspective. The present thesis employs a customer-based brand equity model based on four sources, namely brand awareness, brand associations, brand trust and brand loyalty. It is noteworthy that this thesis employs a managerial perspective of looking into the digital content phenomenon in an online branding context. This is due to the authors' interest in the managerial activities and efforts that create opportunities for building brand equity in a digital environment. Nevertheless, the analysis of the empirical data does not provide a straightforward answer whether these activities truly affect different sources of brand equity as it does not measure their effect among consumer groups. Yet, the empirical material allows to discuss the prerequisites that digital content presents for branding and the subsequent opportunities for building strong online brands.

5.1. A branding perspective on the content marketing process

A broader look at the content marketing process indicates that the decisions at each phase are highly interdependent. On the one hand, the actual interaction between the users and the brand happens at the distribution phase, when content is disseminated through diverse channels in different formats. On the other hand, before the actual distribution, the content has been tailored with specific objectives in mind in order to comply with certain needs. Hence, there are two important considerations that lead the discussion in this section; (1) strategic and tactical decisions, regarding content planning and creation, contribute to the effectiveness of the activities in the distribution phase (see Figure 6), but do not directly influence the brand equity building as there is no interaction between the brand and the users, and; (2) strategic and tactical decisions in the distribution phase are likely to influence the sources of brand equity.

5.1.1. Content planning and content creation

As the findings revealed, the strategic objective in the planning phase is to clearly define the target audiences, to gain deep understanding about their needs and to make a realistic plan of reaching them. Similarly, in the literature, understanding about online consumers is regarded as an important driver of success in a digital environment (Kierzkowski, 1996; Simmons, 2007). Moreover, Weber (2009) suggests that the digital environment requires a new segmentation approach of classifying users by behavior, attitudes and interests, instead of demographics, and targeting these users "with marketing activities that are meaningful to them" (p.38). This approach was also found in the present study. In the case of Telerik Sitefinity, a horizontal segmentation differentiates the 'user persona' from the 'buyer persona' or, distinction is made between web developers and marketers who use the software, and decision-makers who allocate the budget for it. Further, a vertical segmentation classifies the users according to their position in the marketing funnel. According to Lin, Luarn and Lo (2004), a segmentation that corresponds to the requirements of the potential and actual customers, empowers organizations to establish an ongoing and fruitful interaction to meet their demands. Hence, it is suggested that the segmentation process can also facilitate the choice of content topics that match the needs of the target audiences. The empirical data supports this statements as, once the target groups are defined, a content calendar is further created around topics of their interest.

However, in the fast-paced Internet environment, the firm's understanding about consumers is relative as users' needs gradually evolve. As Lin, Luarn and Lo (2004) state, the dynamic market trends require that marketers continuously revise their segmentation policies and adjust their strategies to meet the specific customer demands. Similarly, the respondents emphasized that the process of understanding the consumers is a never-ending one. Further, they explained that insights are gathered on a regular basis from web analytics, sales teams, independent analysts and industry professionals. Among others, these tools are found to contribute to better understanding of the audiences, their demands and interests (Simmons, Thomas & Truong, 2010).

Further, in the content creation phase, a strategic objective is to craft the type and the format of the content resource in a way that it is best assimilated by the target groups and it best responds to their needs. This relates to the Content Marketing Institute's (2014) definition of content marketing as a process of "creating and distributing valuable, relevant and consistent content". Christodoulides and de Chernatony (2004) discuss relevance and consumer value as important

contributors to brand equity online, and they define relevance in terms of personalization. However, the scholars do not further explain what should be regarded as relevant content. Hence, the present thesis contributes to that knowledge and reveals how digital content can deliver consumer value and be relevant and consistent.

First, content relevance resides in the precise segmentation and the different content formats that serve the information needs of these segments. Case studies, for instance, serve the needs of decision makers when they are considering Telerik Sitefinity CMS, while blog posts target web developers and provide them with practical, step-by-step solutions, containing screenshots and tutorials. These examples come to support the argument that online users are attracted by personalized content (Ha, 2004), which can be achieved through an ongoing segmentation process and through producing content resources, according to the demands of the audiences. Hence, the empirical data supports the viewpoint of Christodoulides and de Chernatony (2004) that relevance is tightly related to personalization.

Second, the relevance together with certain content characteristics constitute the value of the content. In the case of Telerik Sitefinity, three characteristics were found, namely content as a problem solver, as an educator and as a storyteller. The value of digital content is discussed by Kim, Oh and Shin (2010) in terms of *conciseness*, referring to the clear, comprehensive and simple way, in which content is able to deliver the meaning, and *unity of structure*, referring to graphics and sounds. However, while conciseness and unity of structure only reflect the coherence of the content as a piece of text, which has to be comprehensive and entertaining, the present thesis reveals three important characteristics that create value for the users by solving their problems, educating them and engaging them in the brand story.

The content characteristics found throughout the empirical data analysis are tightly interconnected. First, the problem solving and educational characteristics are dependent on each other. As the product marketing manager explained, the content first aims at educating the audience about the current industry trends and then, help users take an informed decision and choose the best solution for their specific problem. Therefore, digital content creates user value by solving their specific problem and by reducing their search costs on the Internet. Lastly, the content narrates the brand story which gradually evolves as the audiences' needs change. Hence, the content as a storyteller is a characteristic that drives the content marketing process in a strategic direction, which ensures the content consistency over time.

To conclude, the effectiveness of the content marketing process depends on how relevant and valuable the content is for the users, as in a digital environment the "tolerance for inconsistency and mediocrity is rapidly disappearing" (Reichheld & Schefter, 2000, p.113). Hence, the content planning and creation phases are essential for the success of the content distribution phase.

5.1.2. Content distribution

Website-specific tools

Website navigation and optimization have been regarded as important drivers of online branding performance. Although the literature identifies different website-specific tools (see Table 1), there is a common agreement among scholars that these tools contribute to the functionality of the website and thus, improve the users' experience with the brand. The empirical findings confirm the prominent role of website-specific tools to the brand performance. As the respondents highlighted, significant efforts are dedicated to landing page optimization, navigation, interlinking, and SEO in order to improve search engine ranking. In addition, as de Chernatony and Christodoulides (2004) state, when users have no or low familiarity with the brand, leading positions in search engines can lead to leadership brand associations. Hence, from a branding perspective, website-specific tools can contribute to brand visibility online, leadership brand associations and better user experience.

As emphasized by the respondents, the website optimization is the cornerstone of the content distribution process and thus, an integral part of the 'content' pillar in Simmons' (2007) framework. However, to explore how it contributes to brand equity online, it is necessary to analyze website optimization in relation to the other pillars. There is a two-way interaction between website optimization and the 'understanding consumers' pillar. On the one hand, optimizing the content on the website is entirely based on clearly defined target groups and their needs, ensuring that the content is easily searchable and accessible on the website. On the other hand, the website is a virtual contact point between the brand and its customers and it allows gathering rich user data, which contributes to deeper understanding about the audiences' demands. Both aspects of this relation lead to more accurate response to the users' needs and thus, as Simmons (2007) suggests, can lead to positive associations with the brand. Lastly, understanding better the users' needs and communicating effectively with them is accomplished through interactive content formats such as blogs, webinars, videos, infographics, etc. They allow users to choose the format that fits their needs best, which leads to increased interactivity with the brand as users can comment, share information or ask questions in real time.

In their study from a customer perspective, Rios and Riquelme (2010) confirm that website functionality influence brand awareness and associations. Moreover, Chen (2001) concludes that the user brand experience online impacts positively brand equity. Therefore, it can be inferred that content website optimization is a tactic that improves the functionality and interactivity of the website. If managed properly, the tactic can increase brand visibility online, create better user experience and bring leadership brand associations, which in turn can lead to enhanced brand awareness and positive brand associations.

Level of access

In their study of 19 content providers, Fetscherin and Knolmayer (2004) conclude that whenever the digital content is not paid, it could be delivered either completely for free, or gated behind a registration form. However, they do not further discuss the difference between these two levels of access. Yet, the analysis of the empirical data brought the authors of this thesis to the conclusion that this differentiation is meaningful in the case of Telerik Sitefinity. As the product marketing manager explained, the distinction entails that *"some of [the content] is free and wide open, some is behind a simple form that asks for name and email*". She further clarified that registration require "*white papers, webinars, e-books, other reports and the most major things*". In this statement the phrase "*the most major things*" creates the impression that content resources, associated with significant investments from the company, are usually gated behind registration forms, while others that require less efforts, such as videos, presentations, etc., are freely accessible.

From a branding perspective, establishing a behind-registration level of access to content is important for several reasons. First, in relation to the 'understanding consumers' pillar in Simmons' (2007) framework, gathering information through registration forms contributes to the database building and thus, adds a personal layer to the vertical and horizontal segmentation of the target groups. Further, it is noteworthy that, compared to the cases when data is collected through website-specific tools, filling a registration form requires more personal interaction with the content. The users consciously and voluntarily provide certain data to the company because of the high perceived value of the information source. Lastly, the behind-registration level of access favors a more complete information about the target audiences and their needs and also creates opportunities for subsequent personalized communication messages. For instance, users who have downloaded a report about mobile trends are likely to

receive e-mails on the same or similar topic in the future. Hence, this tactic favors the trustful relationship between the user and the brand as a result of personalized communications.

Content syndication

The empirical material revealed that content syndication is an activity to distribute co-created content which can provide several opportunities for online branding. To begin with, as explained by the product marketing manager, content syndication "*doubles up the power of the message*" due to the reputation of the co-creator and thus, enhances the brand message. From a strategic perspective, it can be concluded that content syndication assists in communicating the 'expertise' core value and gives credibility to the stories narrated by the brand. As the product marketing manager highlighted, syndicated content *"reaffirms us [the brand] as visionaries and thought leaders"*, hence this tactic can be utilized in positioning the brand in the long run. This finding supports the argument that content partnerships with trustworthy portals enhance the brand presence (Ibeh, Luo & Dinnie, 2005). Also, as Kim, Sharma and Setzekorn (2002) suggest, forming a strategic alliance with a well-known company is an effective way to build trust in an online environment, as the reputation of the partner is transferred to the brand. Hence, the case of Telerik Sitefinity illustrates that content syndication creates a leadership association effect and enhances the brand message.

Within the scope of Simmons' (2007) framework, content syndication triggers the interaction between 'understanding consumers' and 'marketing communication'. As the syndicated content is relevant to specific needs, it results in higher user interaction. Analyzing the reverse relation, by promoting syndicated content and gating it behind a registration form, Telerik Sitefinity is able to collect user data that can be utilized in tailored marketing communications on an individual level. Moreover, Simmons, Thomas and Truong (2010) state that customized communications lead to positive brand associations. Therefore, content syndication increases interaction and enhances the brand message, thus this distribution tactic can contribute to positive associations about the brand.

Content repurposing

During the interviews it became clear that planning and creating the content is associated with significant resources. Thus, as the campaign manager stated, content is not created "*just for the sake of writing content*", but instead the objective is to increase the effectiveness of each content type that is produced. As it further became apparent, content repurposing is a tactic

that maximizes the return on investment in creating content. Disseminating one resource in different formats and through different channels leads to multiple user touch points and wider audience reach. In turn, this results in greater interaction and brand visibility in search engines and social media. However, content repurposing has not been discussed in the academic literature. The empirical findings, on the one hand, enrich the current academic knowledge and, on the other, present a new tool for practitioners to maximize the effect of their content marketing activities.

The analysis of content repurposing in relation to Simmons' (2007) framework led to interesting conclusions. Above all, content repurposing triggers higher level of interaction with the audience, as it multiplies the possible touch points and, in this regard, can increase brand awareness. Moreover, Telerik Sitefinity uses rich user insights to repurpose the content resource according to the audiences' information needs, which, in combination with higher brand visibility and increased interaction, can provoke positive brand associations (Simmons, Thomas & Truong, 2010). Therefore, through content repurposing managers can increase brand visibility and user interaction, which creates opportunities for higher brand awareness and positive brand associations.

Email marketing

As an online communication tool, email marketing has been widely discussed in the academic literature and it is associated with various branding purposes (see Table 1). Merisavo and Raulas (2004) conclude that email marketing is important for brands as it provides opportunities to develop relationships with customers. Ibeh, Luo and Dinnie (2005) reflect upon the application of email marketing campaigns for customer relationship management, in terms of sending personal messages and building one-to-one communication. However, the case of Telerik Sitefinity adds to the current knowledge of email marketing implications for branding, as it presents an example of how email marketing can be combined with content marketing activities. As the empirical data revealed, email campaigns are used to personalize the messages and to promote the digital content resources to specific target audiences. As the campaign manager explained, the main objectives, related to the email campaigns, are "*lead generation as well as nurturing leads and it is basically about progressing them from one stage of the funnel to another*". It can be inferred that the managerial intentions to use email marketing are to raise brand awareness, as well as to develop a relationship with the users. Interestingly, the email campaigns within the content marketing process can generate greater interaction, as the users

are presented with relevant and valuable content. In this regard, organizations can avoid the trap of sending out 'unwanted communication' or 'spam', that Merisavo and Raulas (2004) consider detrimental for brands.

In the scope of Simmons' (2007) framework, it can be concluded that email marketing triggers interactions between all pillars. As a communication approach, it is tailored to specific target groups and based on their information needs and at the same time promotes valuable and relevant content. This results in higher user interaction, which in turn can lead to higher brand awareness and positive associations (Simmons, Thomas & Truong, 2010). In their customer-based study, Merisavo and Raulas (2004) conclude that targeted email messages impact favorably the users' associations about the brand. Therefore, it can be inferred that through the combination of email marketing with content marketing activities, organizations can achieve more personal communications with users and increase interaction, which in turn can lead to increased brand awareness and positive associations.

Display advertising

Ibeh, Luo and Dinnie (2005) suggest that placing advertising banners in high traffic websites creates brand awareness. However, in the case of Telerik Sitefinity, display banner ads are placed in specific industry-related websites, attracting a flow of visitors who are interested in this content or want to learn more about a particular topic. This illustrates that managers are concerned with raising brand awareness among specific audience and with a unique message, rather than driving random traffic to the website. Hence, quality of the audience, attracted to the webpage, is preferred over quantity. Moreover, throughout the analysis of the empirical data, an interesting approach was identified. Advertising a syndicated industry report by Forrester (see Appendix 3.11a), Telerik Sitefinity promotes relevant content from a reputable source, which can bring value to the user. Therefore, display ads promoting syndicated content contrast to the traditional display advertising, as the message focus is on the value that the user receives by clicking and not on the brand that sends this message. This is not surprising as content marketing is more about communicating the value for the users rather than the brand itself.

Examining this tactic through Simmons' (2007) framework, it can be concluded that the audience is presented with targeted and relevant message, which naturally results in higher interaction. However, the increased interaction is not only in terms of higher click-through rate, but also in

terms of downloading the report, attending the webinar, downloading a trial, etc. Therefore, display advertising with syndicated content illustrates that a traditional one-to-many communication approach can still be adopted within a content marketing strategy to raise brand awareness among specific target groups, thus increasing the interactions and streamlining the marketing efforts.

5.2. Building brand equity through content marketing

The analysis of the content marketing process through a branding perspective led the authors of this thesis to the conclusion that the process of producing relevant and valuable content is a long and strenuous one and it precedes the distribution phase. The decisions regarding content planning and creation are essential to maximize the effectiveness of the content resources. Looking at Simmons' (2007) framework (see Figure 1), it can be concluded that through a set of distribution tactics to deliver and promote the content, managers can trigger interactions between the pillars, affecting the brand building process. In the case of Telerik Sitefinity, the distribution tactics trigger the following effects: (1) increased visibility; (2) favorable user experience; (3) greater personalization; (4) leadership associations; (5) increased user interaction and; (6) enhanced brand message. As the previous section revealed, these effects are likely to influence brand awareness and brand associations. However, Aaker (1991) asserts that "an awareness message should provide a reason to be noticed and it should be memorable" (p.72). Hence, it is suggested that in the information overload on the Internet, the distribution of relevant and valuable content provides new opportunities for brands to be seen and heard online. Moreover, Rios and Riquelme (2008) posit that increased brand awareness and positive associations reduce uncertainty online and thus, users are more likely to trust the brand. This illustrates the connection between brand awareness, brand associations and brand trust.

Issues related to intangibility of the products, privacy and security in a digital environment make brand trust even more important (Simmons, Thomas & Truong, 2010; Ha, 2004). As Simmons, Thomas and Truong (2010) conclude, deep understanding about consumers allows brands to tailor communication messages that are more relevant to the individual users and thus, enhance their trust in the brand. Hence, in the content marketing context, brand trust can be accomplished through relevant and valuable content that matches the needs of its target audiences. As it was explained, 'relevance' is achieved through precise segmentation and

pertinent content format, while the 'value' of the content resides in its relevance and content characteristics and is embedded in the entire content marketing process.

As studies in the branding literature concluded, brand trust precedes brand loyalty (Reichheld & Schefter, 2000) and only has an indirect effect on brand equity through loyalty (Rios & Riquelme, 2008 & 2010). It is also suggested that brand loyalty is the core of traditional brand equity (Aaker, 1991) and the most important driver of brand equity online (Rios & Riquelme, 2008 & 2010). In addition, Ibeh, Luo and Dinnie (2005) suggest that brand loyalty can be achieved through better understanding of customers, building genuine relationships, regular interaction and "consistent fulfillment and delivery of promises" (p.370). This statement leads one more time to the initial phases of the content marketing process and reaffirms the importance of planning and creating relevant content that enhances consumer value. Hence, there is a reason to believe that the prerequisites for brand trust and brand loyalty are to be found in the strategic and tactical decisions in the planning and creation phases of the content marketing process.

As the discussion presented, loyalty can only be achieved if brand awareness, brand associations and brand trust are already present. This inference implies certain dependability between the sources of brand equity and Rios and Riquelme (2008) empirically prove that these sources are structured hierarchically. As the scholars conclude, brand awareness impacts the brand associations, which increases brand trust and subsequently influences brand loyalty as a major driver of brand equity. Practitioners also recognize that the sources of brand equity follow a certain order and visualize them in a circular ongoing process (Duffy, 2014). The argumentation so far provided evidence that building brand equity online is a process rather than a natural outcome of having certain sources of equity. In addition, the discussion revealed that the phases of the content marketing process create opportunities to impact the sources of brand equity. Hence, in order to answer the research question, it is meaningful to juxtapose the two processes and further discuss the relation between them (see Figure 7).

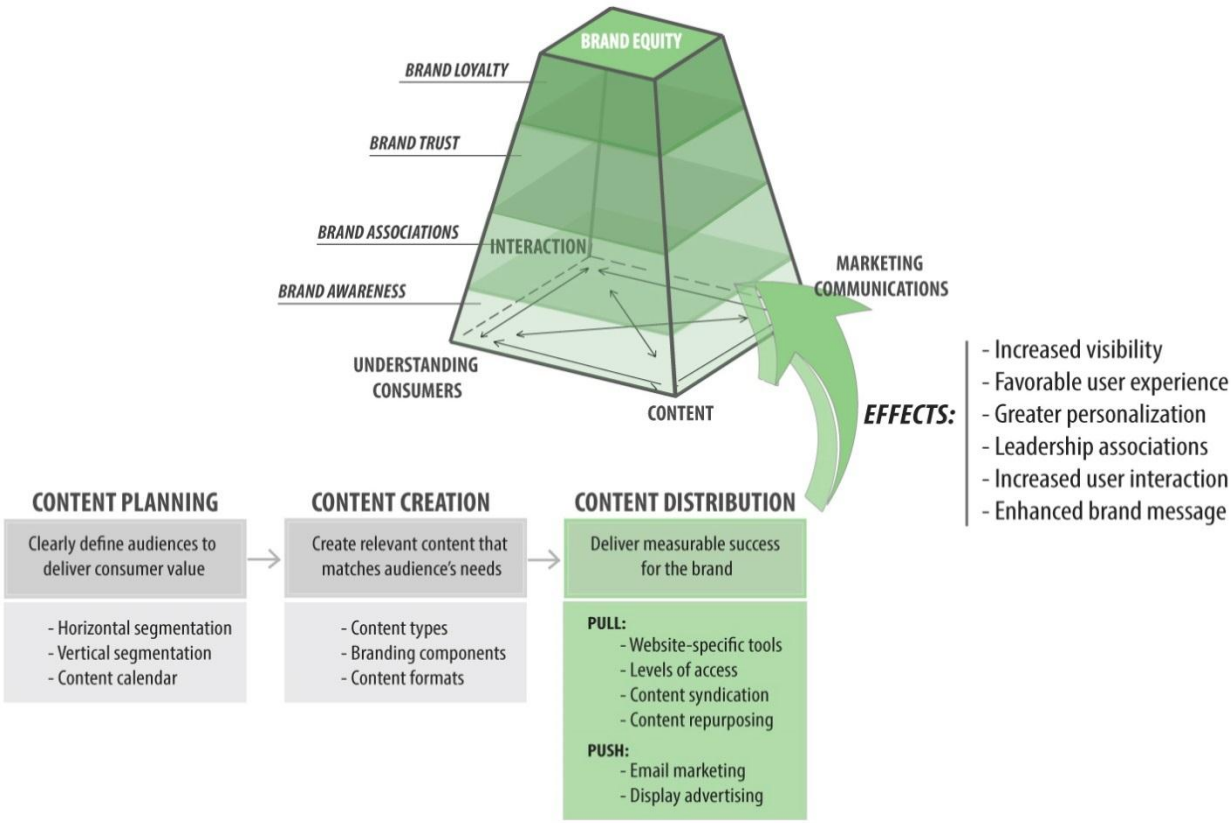

Figure 7: The process of building brand equity online

Adapted from Simmons (2007) and Simmons, Thomas and Truong (2010)

As the figure shows, the content marketing process is initiated before the brand equity building process. It is suggested that organizations need to allocate significant resources for content planning and creation in order to ensure the success of the dissemination phase. Moreover, the content distribution phase corresponds to the bottom of the brand equity pyramid and the diverse distribution tools cause branding effects that are likely to positively influence brand awareness and brand associations. Maximizing the efforts at the bottom of the pyramid is likely to trigger simultaneously more than one effect. For instance, combining display advertising with website specific tools might lead to increased online visibility, better user experience and cause greater personalization of the messages. A set of distribution tactics can create multiple touch points online and increase the interaction rates with the audience. Hence, the content distribution phase triggers the interactions between the different pillars in the framework and serves as a starting point of the process of building brand equity online.

While distribution tactics at the bottom of the pyramid trigger the initial user interaction and experience with the brand, the question how brand trust and brand loyalty are built through

content marketing is intriguing. It is noteworthy that brand trust and brand loyalty are not built overnight. The data in the thesis at hand represents a particular snapshot in time and does not include analysis of customer perceptions and behavior. Hence, it is not possible to conclude with certainty whether specific content marketing activities at the bottom of the pyramid will lead to brand trust and brand loyalty. However, content resources that match the needs and the interests of the users are likely to trigger their ongoing interaction with the brand. This important consideration implies that although increased awareness and associations reduce uncertainty (Rios & Riquelme, 2008), users are unlikely to develop trust and loyalty in the brand, unless they perceive the content as highly relevant and valuable. In addition, these characteristics are seen to emerge from the regular review of the target audiences' needs and continuous adjustment of the content types and formats to match these needs.

In conclusion, benchmarking from the findings in this thesis and based on the drivers of brand trust and loyalty, discussed in the literature, there are reasons to believe that the dynamics of the content marketing process have the potential to scale the brand up in the pyramid, beyond awareness and associations and leverage brand equity online. However, as the empirical findings revealed, content marketing has to be deeply embedded in the companies' online marketing strategy in order to create opportunities for building strong brands.

6. Conclusion

This final chapter presents an overview of the conducted research, outlining the major findings and answering the posed research question. Hereafter, the theoretical contributions and the managerial implications of this thesis are discussed. Lastly, the research limitations are presented and areas for future research are suggested.

The thesis at hand anchors from two essential facts. On the one hand, practitioners have recognized the importance of content marketing in the new digital brandscape, and on the other, there is a missing link between digital content and brand equity online in the academic literature. The present research focused on digital content and the content marketing process in an online branding context in order to reveal how digital content can be used as a tool to leverage brand equity. Driven by the research focus, three research areas were identified, namely content marketing, online branding and online brand equity. An extensive literature review permeated the deep understanding of these areas and Simmons' (2007) 'Four Pillars of i-Branding' framework was adopted for the purpose of this study. Hereinafter, an adapted version of this framework was proposed (see Figure 1) in order to visualize that building brand equity in a digital environment is essentially due to the interactions of these pillars (Simmons, Thomas & Truong, 2010). Further, benchmarking from previous academic research, four sources of brand equity were adopted, namely brand awareness, brand associations, brand trust and brand loyalty, in order to examine how digital content contributes to each of them.

The analysis of the rich empirical data, based on the case study of Telerik Sitefinity, resulted in important findings, revealing the essence of the content marketing process. Three phases of this process were identified, each of them having a well-defined strategic objective, supported by specific tactical activities (see Figure 6). First, the content planning phase entails efforts towards identifying the target groups as well as planning the content marketing strategy. The main goal in this stage is to continuously update the understanding about the behavior, demands and interests of the different 'personas' and adjust the content marketing strategy accordingly. Second, content creation was found to be primarily concerned with producing and branding the content and framing it in the most appropriate format for the predefined target groups. Finally, the efforts in the content distribution phase

are focused on maximizing the effectiveness of the content resources. In this regard, six tactics were found to support the content distribution; website-specific tools, level of access, content syndication, content repurposing, email marketing and display advertising (see Figure 6).

Further, the empirical findings revealed that the content 'relevance' is created by delivering digital content to a strictly defined target group and in appropriate format, whereas the 'value' of the content emanates subsequently from the content relevance and the content characteristics. In the case of Telerik Sitefinity, the content characteristics were found to be content as a problem solver, as an educator and as a storyteller, which are embedded in the entire content marketing process.

Following the interpretation of the empirical data, the posed research question, namely *how online brands use digital content as a tool to build brand equity,* was answered. From the juxtaposition of the content marketing process and the process of building brand equity online (see Figure 7), it can be inferred that digital content serves as a tool to create brand equity in the following way. First, the brand equity building process is triggered in the content distribution phase, when different distribution tactics cause branding effects, such as increased brand visibility online, favorable user experience, greater personalization, leadership associations, increased user interaction and enhanced brand message. In turn, these effects can increase brand awareness and create positive brand associations. Second, the ongoing segmentation, based on the users' needs and the continuous delivery of relevant and valuable content favor a genuine relationship between the brand and its audience. This creates opportunities to establish brand trust and brand loyalty, hence leveraging brand equity in the long run.

6.1. Theoretical contribution

The present study addresses the need to broaden the academic knowledge about digital content in an online branding context. New insights were generated by bridging these areas of research, which in particular resulted in raised understanding of the prerequisites that digital content can create for building brand equity online.

The present research extends the academic knowledge by providing understanding about content marketing as a process, which until now has been overlooked in the content marketing literature. In addition, scholars discuss digital content mainly in terms of website-specific characteristics, which were also found important in the present research. However, this study enriches the knowledge of content beyond the website functionalities, as it identified other decisions and activities, related to the content marketing process, even before the content reaches the website (see Figure 6).

An essential theoretical contribution of this study is the finding that digital content can be the core of the process of building brand equity online. Digital content was found to trigger the interactions between the pillars in Simmons' (2007) framework, which Simmons, Thomas and Truong (2010) claim to be the essence of building brand equity. Hence, this study contributes to foresee how all the four pillars can interact on the basis of content-related activities and cause particular branding effects. In addition, juxtaposing the two processes illustrated where the opportunities to enhance the sources of brand equity reside in the content marketing process.

6.2. Managerial implications

Although investments in content marketing are rapidly growing, only 42% of the B2B companies consider their activities successful (Content Marketing Institute, 2014a). In this regard, this thesis highlights the opportunities for organizations to strengthen their online brands through content marketing.

As the content marketing process is highly customer-driven, a crucial task for managers is to gain deep understanding about the behavior, demands and interests of the different 'personas' rather than their demographics. The study provides managers with an example of how the understanding of the audience can be integrated in the content marketing process. This will help them identify specific content characteristics and define what exactly does 'relevant' and 'valuable' content mean in the context of their business or industry, and consequently enhance their content marketing activities.

The findings revealed that the context and the circumstances, in which the audience is encountered with a content resource, are crucial in order to enhance the desired branding effects. Hence, managers have to carefully choose the type, the format and the channel to disseminate and promote the content. As different distribution tactics allow quantifiable

measurement of their effectiveness, it is reasonable to set realistic goals for each tactic or channel. Investing time and resources in different distribution activities is meaningful, as these activities can cause branding effects, which can lead to increased brand awareness and brand associations (see Figure 8). However, only through continuous revision of the understanding about the audiences and constant adjustment of the content according to their demands, organizations can create opportunities to develop brand trust and brand loyalty. Therefore, in order to leverage their online brand equity, organizations have to embed content marketing deeply in their online marketing strategies.

6.4. Research limitations and future research

Although the present study allowed its authors to answer the posed research question, there are certain limitations in addition to the methodological restrictions outlined in Chapter 4. Thus, the last section of this chapter presents the limitations of the study which provide the frames for future research.

First, the present research is limited to the managerial perspective of content marketing and its usefulness for building brand equity. Through in-depth interviews with managers at Telerik Sitefinity and virtual observation, the researchers were able to gain deep understanding about the content marketing process and the opportunities it creates for building a strong brand online. Yet, it was not examined how the Internet users, or in this case, the content readers, perceive the digital content that is created and promoted by the brand and how it impacts the sources of brand equity. Hence, a future research can provide insightful findings about what type of content users consider relevant and also test the empirical findings from this thesis.

Second, the choice of case company places certain research limitations. The presented findings are based on a single case in the IT industry that implements content marketing as a core of its online B2B marketing strategy. Although the findings can be limited in scope for the chosen industry, they provide general understanding of the content marketing process and its implications for online brand equity. Therefore, the study lays the foundations for future research, which will allow testing the findings in other industries as well as in B2C companies.

Finally, this master thesis aimed at providing insightful understanding about content marketing in the context of online branding through qualitative case study analysis. However, further quantitative analysis will broaden the scope of the research by testing the findings of this thesis,

thus contributing to the generalizability of the results across more companies and industries. Moreover, interesting findings might emerge from a longitudinal research on content marketing activities for a number of companies to examine how different strategies and tactics for content planning, creation and distribution impact brand equity online over time.

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Appendix 1. Interview guides

I. Interview with Svetla Yankova, product marketing manager

- Can you tell us a little bit about you - your name, professional background at Telerik?
- What is your position at Telerik? What are your main tasks and responsibilities?
- Sitefinity as a brand - what does it stand for?

- What are the approaches that you use to differentiate Sitefinity from other similar products?
- What are the main marketing activities that you implement online?
- What objectives do you pose for each of these activities?

- How would you define content marketing?
- Do you use content marketing in your marketing strategy? If yes, how?
- Can you tell us a little bit about your content delivery strategy?
- Could you tell us a little bit more about the organization of a webinar?
- Could you explain us a little bit more about the report delivered together with Forrester?
- Is there something else you would like to add?

II. Interview with Petya Popova-Chilikova, campaign manager

- Can you tell us a little bit about you, your professional background and your current role in Telerik?
- Sitefinity as a brand - what does it stand for?

- How would you define content marketing?
- How important is content marketing for your marketing strategy?
- What types of content do you consider most efficient for your marketing strategy? Why?
- What performance metrics do you use for these activities?
- How do you plan your content marketing activities?
- Could you give us an example of how content is delivered and promoted online?
- Is there something else you would like to add?

III. Interview with Vesselina Tasheva, community manager

- Can you tell us a little bit about you, your professional background and your current role in Telerik?
- Can you describe briefly the relationship between Telerik, its brands and the community?
- What are the main channels that Telerik uses to communicate with its community?
- How is Telerik positioned within the community (compared to the competition)?

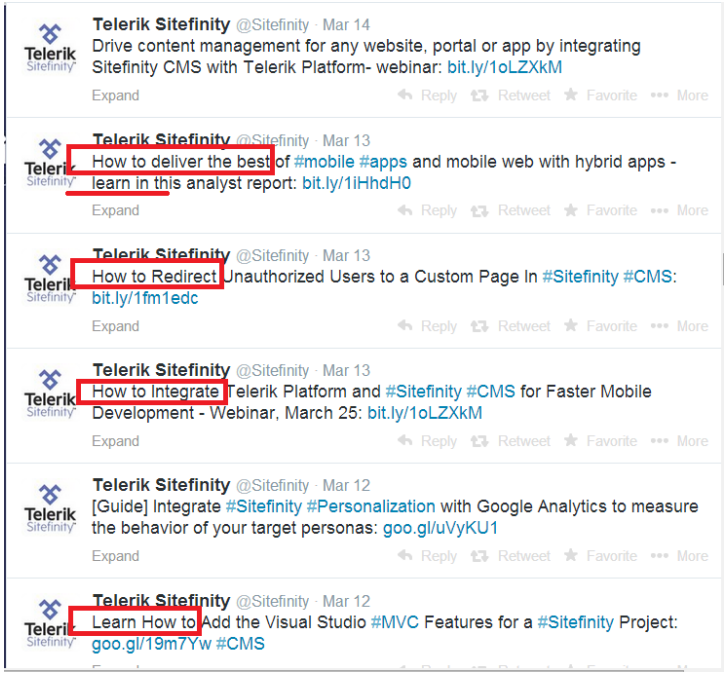
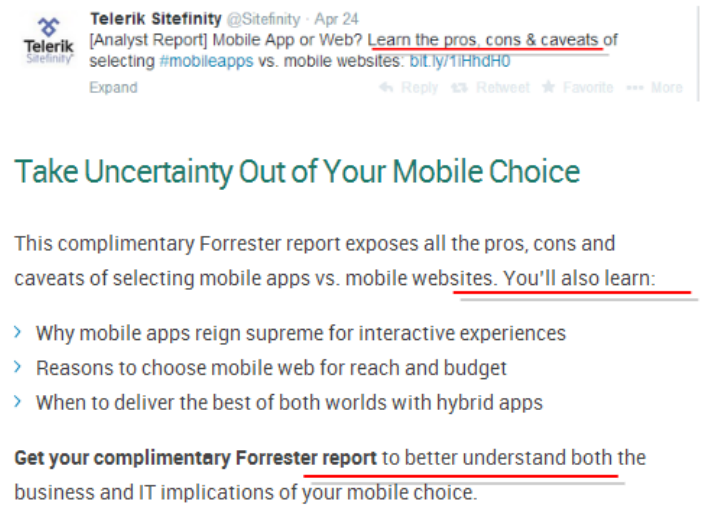
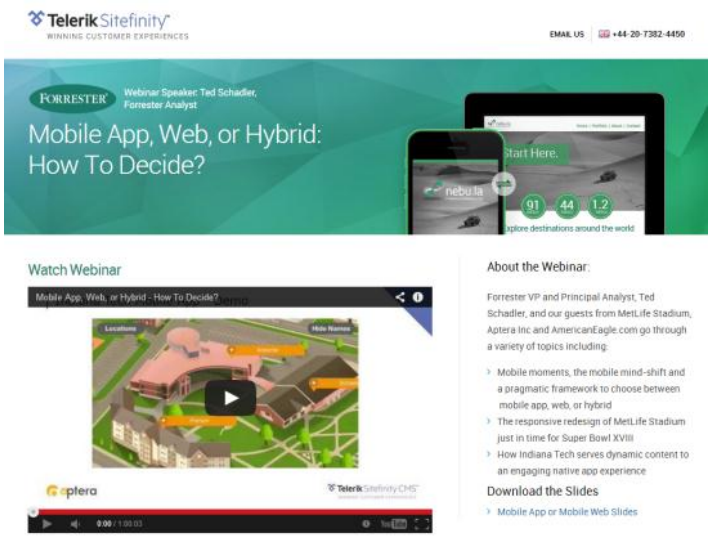
- How would you define content marketing?
- What role does content have in building Telerik's community?
- Can you give us an example of how you nurture the relationship between the brand and the community?
- Is there something else you would like to add?
- From all we have discussed until now, how would you define the role of the community management to branding and online branding?

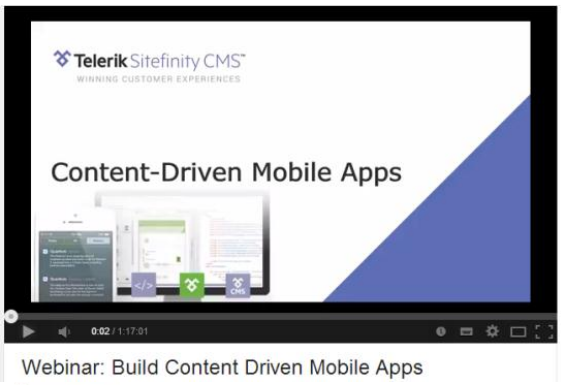
Appendix 2. Observation Schedule

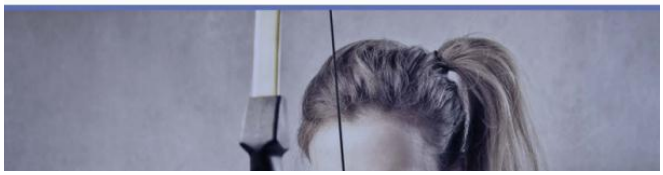
Platform	Publicaion Date	Screenshot number	Content type	Branding features	Annotations on content	Annotations on content promotional posts
Facebook						
...						
Twitter						
...						

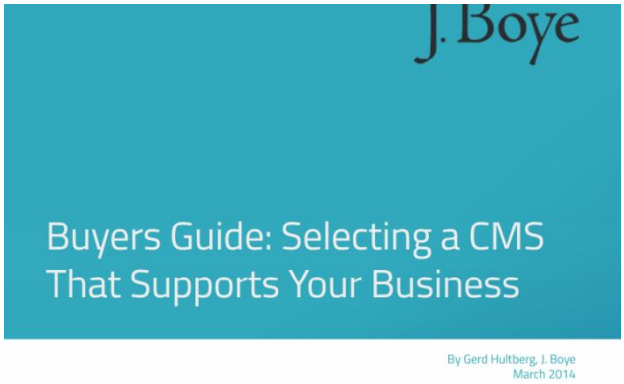
Appendix 3. Virtual Observation

	Description	Screenshot
3.1	Need-solution language structure	Three Steps to a Better Mobile Strategy Mobile device proliferation continues at a break-neck pace, far outpacing the ability of content providers to keep up. There's no doubt that the mobile storm is coming, with 2014 pegged as the year when mobile web access tops that from desktops. Whether you are just starting to address mobile, or reevaluating your current mobile strategy, this whitepaper presents three steps to jumpstart your mobile strategy and help you find the one that's right for you. First name Last name Email Introduction You have been developing on ASP.NET for quite some time and you are used to the native features offered by Visual Studio, like for instance when you are adding a Controller, adding a View or just using ASP.NET MVC scaffolding. Now you are doing MVC development within Sitefinity CMS, but you don't find those tools in there. Does this seem to be your case? If the answer is yes, then this blog post has been created for developers just like you! In the following paragraphs I am going to show you how to modify a Sitefinity project and enable all the nice productivity tools natively available in Visual Studio for ASP.NET MVC web applications. A Little Background Sitefinity has been created as a very flexible ASP.NET WebForms application. By design it uses a lot of programming principles and technologies used widely in the implementation of ASP.NET MVC. I am talking about the ASP.NET routing engine, separation of concerns, unobtrusive client side validation and other things such as wide usage of MVVM programming pattern for the backend components. That allowed the engineers to almost seamlessly add native support for ASP.NET MVC in Sitefinity. But still, Sitefinity remains a WebForms application which means that within Visual Studio developers cannot access the typical MVC tools such as "Add View/Add Controller". With the introduction of Sitefinity Thunder developers were given a really rapid development productivity tool and creating MVC widgets was one of the many features available there, so whatever your profile is (MVC or WebForms), you should definitely check the tool out (link here). The Solution In essence, allowing the MVC features in Visual Studio is as simple as editing the project file. Each project file has a collection of ProjectType Guids, which defines the type of project, so that Visual Studio can load all the appropriate tools for such a project. You can edit the project type and thus give Visual Studio no other choice, but to provide you with all the MVC tools, which is quite nice. To do so, you need to follow a very easy three steps process:

3.2	Need-solution language structure: social media	
3.3	Content as educational material	
3.4	Content as a storyteller	

		 Webinar: Build Content Driven Mobile Apps 
3.5	Content topics based on identified gaps	VIDEO How to Create Your Mobile Development Strategy Mobile CMS: In this video, Sitefinity identifies three approaches to jump start your mobile development strategy – Responsive Web Design, Mobile Apps, and Mobile Websites. A COMPLIMENTARY FORRESTER REPORT Mobile App Or Mobile Web: It's A Choice, Not A Battle Which mobile strategy do you choose? This Forrester Report outlines the pros and cons of selecting a mobile app, mobile website or a hybrid approach.Which mobile strategy do you choose? This Forrester Report outlines the pros and cons of selecting a mobile app, mobile website or a hybrid approach.

		Build Content-Driven Mobile Apps **3/25/2014 9:00:00 AM** ***How to Integrate Telerik Platform and Sitefinity CMS for Faster Mobile Development*** About the webinar: Mobile projects are booming, but there is simply too much work to do - over 200,000 sites need to be mobilized and over 10M mobile apps developed in the next 5 years alone. To move fast and be productive we need solutions that reuse services, content and infrastructure. This technical webinar will demonstrate how to build integrated solutions that scale across teams, portals and channels by enabling you to leverage existing content and mobile strategies.
3.6	Content topics based on product-related features and industry trends	CATEGORIES BLOGGERS BLOGS RSS FEED How To Display a Specific Selected Form From a Dropdown in Sitefinity CMS BY STEFANI TACHEVA MAR 06, 2014 LEAVE A COMMENT This Sitefinity content management code sample meets the following requirements: When a user selects a dropdown item, a form corresponding to the selected item will be opened in the form section of the CMS. If a user chooses another item from the dropdown, some other form will be opened. User will fill up the form and upon clicking on the submit button, a form response will be saved. CATEGORIES BLOGGERS BLOGS RSS FEED How to Add the Visual Studio MVC Features for a Sitefinity Project BY PETER MARINOV FEB 27, 2014 1  *Obi-Wan Kenobi:* You are now an MVC project *Visual Studio:* I am now an MVC project
3.7	Content, created entirely by Telerik Sitefinity	Telerik Sitefinity CMS™ WINNING CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES Website Personalization Seven Tips to Avoid a Cookie-Cutter Online Presence 

		
3.8	Content, co-created with another company a. Case study written with Haworth. Available online: http://www.sitefinity.com/customers/case-studies/details/haworth/haworth-store b. E-book in cooperation with Marketo. Available online: http://www.sitefinity.com/campaigns/whitepapers/why-is-marketing-automation-so-hot-right-now c. E-book written by J. Boye and distributed through Telerik Sitefinity channels. Available online: http://www.sitefinity.com/campaigns/reports/selecting-a-cms-that-supports-your-business	  

	d. Report written by Forrester and distributed by Telerik Sitefinity. Available online: http://www.sitefinity.com/campaigns/reports/forrester-report-mobile-app-or-mobile-web	FORRESTER For: eBusiness & Channel Strategy Professionals **Mobile App Or Mobile Web? It's A Choice, Not A Battle** by Ted Schadler, Julie A. Ask, Michael Facemire, Peter Sheldon, and Mark Grannan, December 17, 2013 KEY TAKEAWAYS **Build Mobile Apps When Rich Engagement And Offline Use Are Priorities** You will need mobile apps to deliver a deeply engaging experience, to work offline, or to tap the unique characteristics of an iPhone or Android device. **Harness Mobile Web For Broad Reach And Consistent Experiences** To make a great web impression on any mobile device, you must optimize that experience for tablets and smartphones. Use analytics to understand what content and interactions your clients are demanding of your mobile experience.
3.9	Content focused on the customers/prospects and their needs	**Telerik Sitefinity** @Sitefinity · Apr 22 [Case Study] Learn How Haworth's Online Store Traffic Skyrocketed 438% with @Telerik #Sitefinity: bit.ly/1geDr0d #CMS Expand Reply Retweet Favorite More **Telerik Sitefinity** @Sitefinity · Jan 21 How to Create Your Mobile Development Strategy - watch a short video: bit.ly/1beCilD #MobileCMS #Sitefinity Expand Reply Retweet Favorite Mo **Sitefinity** October 31, 2013 [Blog] Use Your Existing Data to Fuel Your Entire Mobile Strategy: Your existing content + a good mobile strategy + the right CMS is at the heart of a great user experience. http://tlrk.it/16OXC5y 

3.10	Communicating new features/software updates	**Telerik Sitefinity** @Sitefinity · Apr 15 Enhance products and content on your website with ratings and client reviews - now possible in #Sitefinity 7.0: bit.ly/1t4pURD #CMS Expand Reply Retweet Favorite More **Telerik Sitefinity** @Sitefinity · Mar 20 Learn How To Build Content-Driven Mobile Apps with #Sitefinity #CMS and Telerik Platform - Webinar: bit.ly/1oLZXkM Expand Reply Retweet Favorite More **Telerik Sitefinity** @Sitefinity · Feb 14 A Look at #Telerik #Sitefinity Customization - Extending Modules to Fit Your Needs: bit.ly/1lNZ8sm #CMS Expand Reply Retweet Favorite More
3.11	Syndicated content actively promoted in social media a. A Forrester report example: Twitter and Facebook	**Telerik Sitefinity** @Sitefinity · Feb 12 Complimentary Forrester Report: Understand the business and IT implications of your mobile choice: bit.ly/1iHhdH0 Expand Reply Retweet Favorite More **Telerik Sitefinity** @Sitefinity · Feb 10 Complimentary Forrester Report: #MobileApp or #MobileWeb? It's A Choice, Not A Battle. Download your copy: bit.ly/1iHhdH0 Expand Reply Retweet Favorite More **Telerik Sitefinity** @Sitefinity · Feb 6 #MobileApp or #MobileWeb? Take uncertainty out of your mobile choice! Download complimentary analyst report: bit.ly/1iHhdH0 Expand Reply Retweet Favorite More **Telerik Sitefinity** @Sitefinity · Feb 4 [Complimentary Analyst Report] Mobile App or Mobile Web? Understand the business and IT implications of both. bit.ly/1iHhdH0 Expand Reply Retweet Favorite More **Telerik Sitefinity** @Sitefinity · Jan 31 [Complimentary Analyst Report] Mobile App or Mobile Web? See the pros, cons & caveats of selecting each: bit.ly/1iHhdH0 Expand Reply Retweet Favorite More

	b. A J. Boye report example: Facebook and Twitter	**Sitefinity** February 17 Forrester Report: Mobile App or Mobile Web? It's A Choice, Not A Battle. This complimentary Forrester report exposes all the pros, cons and caveats of selecting mobile apps vs. mobile websites. Download your copy: http://goo.gl/d1rCs6 **Sitefinity** shared a link. February 4 Forrester Report: Mobile App or Mobile Web? It's A Choice, Not A Battle. Do your customers expect deeply engaging and interactive mobile experiences? Or, is it more advantageous to deliver consistent experiences on every device? Take Uncertainty Out of Your Mobile Choice with this complimentary Forrester report. Download your copy: http://bit.ly/1aZ2BNE **Sitefinity** shared a link. January 14 Forrester Report: Mobile App or Mobile Web? It's A Choice, Not A This complimentary Forrester report exposes all the pros, cons an - Why mobile apps reign supreme for interactive experiences - Reasons to choose mobile web for reach and budget - When to deliver the best of both worlds with hybrid apps Get your complimentary Forrester report to better understand botl http://bit.ly/1aZ2BNE **Sitefinity** shared a link. April 3 [Complimentary Guide] How to Select a CMS That Supports Your Business There is a relatively short window of opportunity to assess all the qualities of a CMS product and vendor, as well as strategize and envision the solution that matches your long term vision. This Complimentary Buyers Guide by analyst firm J.Boye covers all the important aspects of choosing the right CMS that will support your business. http://bit.ly/1k3bwHM  **Selecting a CMS that Supports your Business** Like · Comment · Share 2 241 people like this. **Sitefinity** shared a link. April 15 J.Boye Buyers Guide: How To Select a CMS That Supports Your Business How do you go about selecting the best content management solution in a business environment increasingly defined by its mobility and connectivity? This Complimentary Buyers Guide reviews the six most important factors you should take into account when you are evaluating the right CMS for your enterprise. Download report: http://bit.ly/1k3bwHM

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<tr><td>Feature in relevant automatic email workflows</td><td>☐</td></tr>
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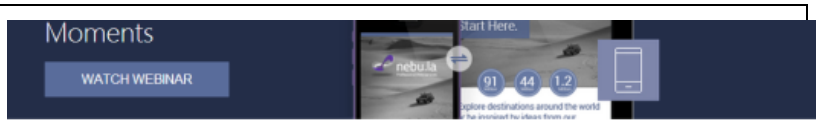
3.13	Content repurposing example: A webinar, converted into a blog post and a byline article on an external website	
3.14	Display advertising	

3.15	E-mail marketing campaign	 **Hello Alexandra,** We trust the **J.Boye Buyers Guide** was informative, useful and provided insights to help with your evaluation process. Based on customer feedback, the hot evaluation topic is certainly mobile. To help guide people through the various consideration factors, we recently hosted a webinar featuring Ted Schadler, VP and Principal Analyst for Forrester Research. Ted covered a wide variety of current research and case studies, and the panel discussed: • Perspectives on the mobile mind shift and mobile choices • Strategic ways to capture customers at the exact moment mobile engagement • How technology can be effectively leveraged for everything from hosting a televised event with 120 million viewers to providing an interactive app experience for a University campus WATCH WEBINAR By **clicking here** or calling us at +1-855-SITEFIN you can request a customized live demo of Telerik Sitefinity CMS.