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**How the Digital Transformation and  
the customer experience are related  
in the B2B context:  
a Qualitative Study**

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# Abstract

Digital Transformation is a process all types of firms and organizations are inevitably going through, is a driver to shape strategies and organizations are starting to consider it in connection with every aspect inside their business. These aspects include Marketing and the customer-firm relationship, in terms of customer experience and satisfaction. In the B2B context the Digital Transformation and the customer experience are quite analyzed topics, but not enough as in connection between them. The aims of this study are (1) identify in which ways the Digital Transformation impacts the customer sphere in the B2B context, including the purchasing process, the measure of customer satisfaction and the customer journey; and (2) investigate how have a deep understanding of the customer experience can help shaping a Digital Transformation strategy, adding value to the offer of a firm. Given the explanatory nature of this research a qualitative methodology is implemented, first reviewing existent literature on the Digital Transformation, B2B marketing, and customer experience and satisfaction. Next, collecting and analyzing data from in-dept interviews from B2B practitioners. Findings point out that digital technologies can enhance the awareness and consideration phase and are key to support the value proposition of a firm's offer. Moreover, to benefit from the Digital Transformation process, organizations should master the tools it offers, and understand how and at which point in the relationship with their customers the digital technologies are relevant. This study contributes to investigate which aspects of the Digital Transformation are central in the B2B customer experience and to highlight the importance of a customer-centric culture while adopting digital technologies.





# Introduction

## *Theory development*

This is a study focused on the Digital Transformation and the Customer Experience, and on how these two major concepts are extremely linked to each other. The core of this thesis will be on the B2B context, although it seems like in the field of research of this study related to the customer experience there is not a significant difference with the B2C context. On the other hand, the discipline of B2B marketing, where the concept of customer experience is embedded, is still less investigated compared to B2C marketing. Nonetheless, the Customer Experience is gaining importance and the attention of B2B scholars. As for the Digital Transformation in the B2B context we will focus on how the process in its entirety is addressed inside organizations and what potentiality it may have in relation with the customer-sphere. With customer-sphere we intend all the activities that influence the creation of value and engagement, as the customer experience, the customer satisfaction and its measure, the customer engagement, the customer journey, and the purchasing process.

The intent of this study is to explore how on one side the Digital Transformation can help to deliver a better Customer Experience, while on the other hand are the Customer Experience itself and the Customer Engagement at the basis of a successful Digital Transformation strategy.

The Customer Experience is a concept that in the last twenty years has gained a lot of attention, especially in the B2C context where the Customer Journey has been disrupted and the Customer Experience itself has changed a lot due to the advancements in technology and the new way of consuming goods and services. For its part, the Digital Transformation is a far newer topic that lately has attracted the interest also of B2B scholars.

In the already existing literature these two concepts are quite analyzed in the B2C context, given that, the focus of this study will be on B2B organizations. Indeed, the theory this thesis intent to support and investigate is how the Digital Transformation and the Customer Experience influence each other in B2B organizations.

## *Research setting*

The context where this study is placed is the already existing literature on the Digital Transformation and Marketing in the B2B context. Regarding the B2B Marketing literature are to be considered all the disciplines and activities that relates to it. For the purpose of this study, we first focus on the customer experience itself, along with studies about the customer engagement, the customer satisfaction, the measure of customer satisfaction, the customer journey and the co-creation of value.

A lot of articles were taken into consideration, starting from “Understanding digital transformation: A review and a research agenda” from the Journal of Strategic Information Systems by Gregory Vial, the major scholar of the Digital Transformation. Reading Vial’s article was an inspiration to find the topic to deep dive in and find a research gap to fill in with this study. Indeed, the concept of Digital Transformation by now is well dealt with. Nonetheless being a concept under constant evolution there will always be the need for more research. Particularly, Vial addressed the concept of digital technologies triggering value creation, which we wish to explore. We will do so deep diving in the customer-sphere disciplines and their relationship with the Digital Transformation.

Other topics at the basis of this study are the Digital Transformation in the B2B context and the B2B Marketing. This choice was made to analyze the Digital Transformation and Marketing just in B2B organizations, something that in general has received less attention than the same concepts in the B2C setting. Especially, analyzing B2B marketing it emerged how the Customer Experience in B2B has become relevant and has a connection with the Digital Transformation strategy.

With the purpose of investigating those topics, after the literature review this thesis intent to try to better understand how in the real world the Digital Transformation and the Customer Experience are managed in B2B organizations and how these two concepts are interrelated. In general, appears interesting how practitioners in the B2B context are facing the challenges of the era we live in exploiting new technologies and focusing on a customer centric culture.

## *Structure of the thesis*

This thesis will first focus on the review of the already existing literature concerning the Digital Transformation and the Customer Experience in the B2B context, along with the discipline of B2B Marketing. We will deep dive into academic articles from several business journals, including the International Marketing Management, the Journal of Business Research, and the Journal of Marketing.

First, we identify the conceptual framework in which this study is embedded and we analyze the literature about it. Especially we select articles about the Digital Transformation, B2B Marketing and the B2B's customer experience. With the aim of finding a theoretical support for our research question we focus on the literature about the B2B's customer experience and Digital Transformation, and about the Digital Transformation in the B2B context.

Second, we will go on formulating the research question based on the gap in the literature and on the theory hypothesis at the basis of this study.

Third, I will present the research method that consists in semi-structured in-dept interviews. We find a qualitative approach to be appropriate for our study, considered the novelty of the topics and our intention to shed light on the current situation of the relationship between the Digital Transformation and the customer experience in the B2B context and on which aspects related to these concepts B2B practitioners could leverage on or improve. Then, we present the sample selection, data collection and case description with the purpose of conducting further analysis on the research question and to bring novelty in the research setting.

Lastly, we will present the findings and discuss them with a comparative and inductive approach. We discuss both the theoretical contribution and the practical implications of this study, based on our findings and on the research hypothesis. Our aim is to suggest how the outcomes of this study contribute to the current literature about the Digital Transformation and the customer experience in the B2B context, and even more so to provide B2B marketing practitioners with some insights about

how to continue to deal with digital technologies or on how to start exploit the potentiality the Digital Transformation tools offer related to the customer-sphere. We conclude with the limitations of this study and future avenue for research.



# 1. Literature review

## *Conceptual framework*

What emerged from the context of this study is that the digital disruption typical of the twenty-one century is affecting the purchasing process mainly due to three factors of change. These three factors are the rise of new technologies, the concept of new competition and the changes of consumers' preferences. New technologies are relevant in the procurement strategy of an organization, where new trends like blockchain and data-driven insights, along with ecommerce, are shaping the purchasing process and the way in which firm address consumers. New competition is also influencing the way of purchasing, with an enormous number of players in the market and with thin boundaries between sectors. Indeed, everyone is differentiating nowadays and entering new markets, this means that the competition is unpredictable and that are emerging new players every day. Lastly, the changes of consumers' preferences are affecting the purchasing process because they are evolving and are savvier, with higher standard to meet and a digital orientation in their purchases. That last concept means that not just consumers prefer to buy online, but that even when they are in a physical shop, they tend to use their mobile phones to do research about products or check competitor's prices online.

In general, the consumer is more and more at the center of the attention of marketers and business actors. This is true not just for B2C markets but also for B2B ones. The consumer part of a business has always been seen as the human part, the one where it is important to develop good relationships and pay attention to all the extrinsic aspects of a product or of how a service is delivered. In the B2B context this human attention has always been a central pillar, with B2B practitioners used to interact in fairs and in negotiations a lot more than in B2C. The result is the development of a consumer centric culture. This means that in an organization

every process and every decision taken is done keeping in mind the final consumer. This is especially important nowadays where the consumers are empowered, well conscious about the market and with specific needs to please. To satisfy a consumer is key to understand what the value proposition is and how to offer it. In the digital world we live in the true value proposition to convey is the consumer centricity. Create value is not easy but the Digital Transformation may help. Indeed, to facilitate the value creation in marketing activities several aspects of the Digital Transformation are important. The big data revolution is one of them, certainly the ease to collect data thanks to technology and hence the huge amount of data hold by the firms, help to better understand what the consumers want and need and to deliver them the best experience. On the other hand, it is not easy to manage all the data and without the right method to process and analyze them, the big quantity of data is just useless.

The Digital Transformation could be a powerful process to apply in an organization to innovate it, keep up with the new digital consumer and boost the efficiency. Indeed, the Digital Transformation has the potentiality to reshape an entire firm, although this is true if the firm itself is capable to focus on the customer experience and customer engagement.

As mentioned before the customer journey must be at the center of the Digital Transformation strategy, considering its fragmentation and the new circular model it follows. This customer centricity begins with data. Collecting and having the right tool to analyze them, knowing what to focus on is fundamental. Data and machine learning accelerate the transformation, a meaningful one for the organization. Especially, machine learning helps activate the strategy. In fact, together with the customer-centricity and innovation, it powers the human algorithm which in turn is the heart in the process of Digital Transformation. The human part is not to be underestimated, because without the people all the improvement in technology can't be rolled out and are the people themselves that are able to get the best out of it. Moreover, with a unified approach the Digital Transformation will spread in all the aspects of the business. Indeed, the technological acceleration is meaningful not just for the mere production process but also for the way of organizing the business,



in the shareholders relationships and in how works the interaction with the customers.

The so-called digital disruption is affecting each step of the purchasing process, with the Customer Experience being the evidence of it. Indeed, the sales process is changing due to the advent of Artificial Intelligence. AI is influencing the way of personalization, customization, and data management.

The Customer Experience literature is to be included in the same category as the customer experience design and Management, the customer engagement, and the Customer Relationship Management. In this larger tradition is contained also the Customer Success Management. The Customer Success Management is an essential principle in a Digital Transformation effort. This notion states that customer success is about ensuring your clients achieve their desired outcome with your product or service.

Moreover, customer satisfaction in the B2B context and how it is measured are concepts that are obtaining more interest both in the literature and in the business practice. Digital technologies are helping in implementing practices to increase the level of satisfaction of customers, an example is the phenomenon of Digital Servitization that allows organizations to offer valuable services to customers, thus enhancing their relationships and exploiting digital technologies to increase the value proposition of a firm.

# *What is Digital Transformation?*

The concept of Digital Transformation has gained a lot of attention in recent years, although the ideas of digital products, services, and mediums in the 2000s as well as in the 1990s were already quite known (Schallmo, 2017). Trying to understand what the Digital Transformation is, implies facing several related concepts like the digital technologies, Digitization, Digitalization etc., is then important to distinguish them and to differentiate the Digital Transformation from everything that is not. The existent literature helps in this process, although what lacks is a portrait of the nature and implications of the Digital Transformation (Vial, 2019). In addition, there is no clarity on the terminology either, since terms like digitization and digitalization are used interchangeably (BDI and Roland Berger, 2015).

Before deep diving in what the Digital Transformation is and on how it evolved, let's differentiate it from the Digitization and Digitalization. *"Digitization stands for the complete networking of all sectors of the economy and society, as well as the ability to collect relevant information, and to analyze and translate that information into actions. The changes bring advantages and opportunities, but they create completely new challenges"* (BMW, 2015). Digitization has to do with the data evolution from analogue to digital. The process of conversion into digital format started in the 1940s with the Digital Revolution. From another perspective Digitization is not just the transfer of data enabled by digital technologies (Schmidt et al., 2016). On the other hand, the Digitalization is the *"process of transforming the structure, processes, people skills and culture of the entire organization so it can use digital technologies to create and offer products, services and experiences that customers, employees and partners find valuable"* (El Sawy et al, 2016). What is clear is that the use of the term Digitalization comprehends a wider context.

Digitization changed the ecosystem of the firms, speeding up the process of gathering and analyzing data. Meanwhile, the Digitalization is used as a term with a broader view on organizations (Frenzel et al., 2021).

To help define Digital Transformation a summary of its history will help. The computerization of process started almost 30 years ago. Companies and their customers are now connected through websites and all sort of digital channels, moreover the digital process supports customers interactions (Auriga, 2016). The context in which firms operates is indeed digital, where the keyword is connectivity through digital platform that allows organizations to avoid going through intermediaries. Digital technologies have transformed the industries and are continuing to do so.

As mentioned before, Digital Transformation is often confused with other processes like Business Process Engineering, but *“instead of focusing on rule-based processes like Business Process Engineering does, the main objectives of Digital Transformation are obtaining new data and using this data to reimagine these old, rule-based processes”* (Schallmo, 2017). IT-enabled transformation is also mistaken for Digital Transformation, but they have two distinctive differences (Wessel et al., 2021). Digital Transformation activities leverage digital technology in (re)defining an organization’s value proposition and involves the emergence of a new organizational identity (Wessel et al., 2021).

Digital Transformation *“involves multiple functional areas, including marketing, information systems, innovations, strategic and operations management”* (Verhoef et al., 2019). This definition add complexity in the process of defining the Digital Transformation. Even though it is a concept strictly related to digital technologies and information technology, the Digital Transformation encompasses multiple disciplines inside an organization. Concerning the Marketing area, Ritter et al. (2019) states that *“marketing practitioners were among the first to utilize data”*. Moreover, the Digital Transformation affects the whole company and its way of doing business (Amit & Zott, 2011). It is capable to rearrange the processes to change the business logic of a firm (Li, Su, Zhang, & Mao, 2018) or its value creation process (Gölzer & Fritzsche, 2017). The Digital Transformation affects the organization of a firm in the sense that organizational change is needed to adapt to the digital change (Eggers & Park, 2018). Moreover, specialists in the business world are all in understanding that the capacity to digitally rehash the business isn’t just

about the advances being received, yet rather about a radical vital and social change inside the association (Von Leipzig et al., 2017). To embrace change there is the need of an attitude of openness inside a firm and more important innovation must be implemented adapting to the social rules already existing, this with the goal to be seen as an opportunity and not an obstacle. It is fundamental that people inside an organization are well prepared to receive all the digital related advances that a phenomenon like the Digital Transformation will bring. The change of the culture inside an organization is required to keep on create a worthy value proposition. Karimi and Walter (2015) find out that to innovate inside a firm the influence of the culture is key. Even more, they highlight the role of dynamic capabilities in the performance of response to digital disruption. In addition to the culture, it is worth notice how the structure (Selander and Jarvenpaa, 2016) and the process of the firm are involved as well in the process of going through a Digital Transformation that inevitably changes the organization. *“From a process perspective, it can be viewed as introducing changes in how software products are designed and implemented”* (Carlo et al., 2012). Another point of view is to see the Digital Transformation as involving operations management if we consider that the integration of technology helped improve the supply chain performance. Lastly, when considering what helps bring value creation following a process of Digital Transformation, is to consider the strategy itself of the Digital Transformation, that seeks to coordinate and prioritize the many independent threads of digital transformation (Matt et al., 2015).

Hess et al. (2016) identify three organizational aspects touched by the Digital Transformation. On the outside, regarding the change of customer experience, on the inside, with an impact on the structure and on business objectives, and in general, influencing the business model. Kotter et al. (2009) propose the idea that *“transformation is a process that goes through stages, leaning on each other, rather than on individual events”*. Following that the Digital Transformation is seen as strategy to go through step by step and with a good implementation plan.

Nonetheless Digital Transformation is seen as a process capable to create disruption and to trigger strategic responses (Vial, 2019). It is often associated with the notion of remarkable changes and innovation. The digital technologies at the basis of Digital

Transformation are enablers of change in the value creation and are a source of disruption themselves (Vial, 2019). *“The digital disruption largely comes from consumers adopting new technologies and new shopping behaviors from novel business models offered by both new market entrants and existing retailers with the foresight to reconfigure their business models in a customer centric manner”* (Gillpatrick, 2019). Following Gillpatrick, we are now in a third wave of digital disruption that affects the consumer’s purchasing process and in which firms use new ways to capture consumer value, and in which only firms who adapt their business model can survive.

Therefore, digital transformation is inherently linked to strategic changes in the business model because of the implementation of digital technologies (Sebastian et al., 2017).

The digitalization of the business model has gained quite an attention in the existing literature, with a major contribute by Schallmo et al. (2017), who pointed out that *“The Digital Transformation of business models relates to individual business model elements, the entire business model, value-added chains, as well as the networking of different actors in a value-added network”*. It is true that the digitalization of business model is leading to a modification of the consumption habits, with organizations enhancing digital technologies. Changes are happening in the customer relationship as well as in the internal processes and on how value propositions are delivered. The value proposition can be enlarged with offer of advanced customer-related services (Paiola, 2020). The idea of value is becoming even more important, indeed in the sales process value-based selling and value modelling are seen as a way to use data in selling (Terho, 2017). Technology evolution is changing practices regarding value creation, value delivery and value capture, leading to the development of new Business Models and changes in consumer relationships, and bringing a broader macro-economic impact. Indeed, the go-to-market strategies are affected, with a major capability to understand customers benefits and costs.

The impact that digital technologies, in particular Internet of Things technologies have on a firm’s business model can be synthetized in the concept of digital

servitization. Servitization is meant as a business strategy enabling manufacturers undergird their competitive advantage (Opresnik, 2015). In combination with Big Data the phenomenon of servitization helps business to remain competitive, updating their selling strategies and allowing a data-enabled growth. Indeed, as Paiola stated “*Digital servitization and business model innovations in manufacturing firms are strictly related to the sales model adopted and to the moves that firms make in order to get access to end-user firms' data*” (2020).

To explore the wide context of Digital Transformation is not easy since it is related to a lot of different research areas. For example, Bharadwaj et al. (2013) and Piccinini et al. (2015) address it in their Information System research. From another perspective the Digital Transformation can be studied from the point of view of practitioners (Fitzgerald et al., 2014; Westerman et al., 2011).

As seen so far, the Digital Transformation is a hard to define concept, given the multiple areas inside a firm it touches and the different research areas in which is relevant. Several scholars have tried to define it in a systematic way. Of course, depending on the purpose of the study the definition is found it has a different approach. In general, most definitions relate to organizations. We also found that the idea that the Digital Transformation brings a sort of improvement and that can boost the performance is quite spread. For example, in Bekkhus (2016), Piccini et al. (2015) and Reddy and Reinartz (2017) contributions. Of course, the idea of digitization appears a lot in current Digital Transformation definitions, Haffke et al. (2016) and Horlack et al. (2017) see it as a phenomenon that encompass the digitization of processes. Lastly, a current concept inside present definitions is the idea of a new Business Model, thanks to the novelty brought by the Digital Transformation. Hess et al. (2016), Piccini et al. (2015) and Verhoef et al. (2019) are the major advocates of this idea. In the table below we have gathered the mentioned definitions and some more with the purpose of having a broader view on how the Digital Transformation is addressed.

**Table 1: Digital Transformation definitions**

<b>Author</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Bekkhus (2016)	Use of digital technologies to radically improve the company's performance.
Haffke et al. (2016)	Digital transformation encompasses the digitization of sales and communication channels, which provide novel ways to interact and engage with customers, and the digitization of a firm's offerings (products and services), which replace or augment physical offerings.
Hess et al. (2016)	Digital transformation is concerned with the changes digital technologies can bring about in a company's business model, which result in changed products or organizational structures or in the automation of processes.
Horlack et al. (2017)	Digital transformation as encompassing the digitization of sales and communication channels and the digitization of a firm's offerings (products and services), which replace or augment physical offerings.
Piccini et al. (2015)	Digital transformation involves leveraging digital technologies to enable major business improvements, such as enhancing customer experience or creating new business model.

Reddy and Reinartz (2017)	The application of computer and internet to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the value creation process, in terms of improving operation, interaction, configuration, and how economic value is created within this system.
Verhoef et al. (2019)	Change in how a firm employs digital technologies, to develop a new digital business model that helps to create and appropriate more value for the firm.
Vial (2019)	Process that aims to improve an entity by triggering significant changes to its properties through combinations of information, computing, communication, and connectivity technologies.
Ziyadin et al. (2020)	Integration of digital technologies and business processes in a digital economy.

For the scope of this study, we decided to use the following definition, that outlines the Digital Transformation “*as a process wherein organizations respond to changes taking place in their environment by using digital technologies to alter their value creation processes*” (Vial, 2019). The choice was made since it considers all ideas related to the Digital Transformation found in the extant literature mentioned above. It considers Digital Transformation inside organizations, as a change enabled by the digital advancement and that brings novelty in the value creation process.



# *B2B Marketing*

The discipline of Business-to-Business Marketing is an old one. Hadjikhani and LaPlaca (2013) track it to the 1890s, even though major contributions to the literature are found in the last thirty years. All considered B2B Marketing is receiving less academic attention compared to B2C Marketing.

With the purpose to deep dive into the discipline of B2B Marketing a distinction with B2C Marketing is needed. Following the extant literature, we identify two differences. First, in B2B context the buyer-seller relationships are predominant (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995). Second, the buying decision process is more complex in B2B organizations, with the presence of organizational buying center. The high complexity of industrial marketing relationships is also due to the involvement of many people in the decision process with complex interactions among individuals (Webster and Wind, 1972). The attention is not just on the buyer, but on all individuals and groups involved in the organizational buying process (Wind, 1978). On another hand, scholars like Coviello and Brodie (2001) don't think a distinction between B2C and B2B context is necessary while developing marketing concepts. Moreover, Mark S. Glynn in the 2011 article "Primer in B2B brand-building strategies with a reader practicum", identifies three dissimilarities: in B2B the value of the transaction is higher, the buying process is more complex, and the buyer is not the end user. In continuing this literature review about B2B Marketing is hence fundamental to keep them in mind.

The first finding in the article "The B2B Agenda: The current state of B2B marketing and a look ahead" by Wersema (2013) state that "*these are defining times for B2B marketers*". Indeed, the discipline of B2B Marketing is undergoing a transformation and it still doesn't reach the maturity step. Wersema, in its article, points out that technology's advances are a threat for some B2B practices that may become obsolete. Moreover, B2B Marketing's role is becoming more strategic, with the urge to demonstrate its relevance in a business performance and to engage at a deeper level with customers.

Analyzing the literature about B2B Marketing, we discovered some concepts that are strictly related to this discipline. First, a relevant topic in the literature about B2B Marketing is data. This is a widespread area of interest for B2B practitioners who can leverage on data to implement their marketing strategy. Indeed, B2B marketers need smart solutions to automate the process of structuring, standardizing, aligning, and customizing data. Therefore, insights from data related to customer buying behavior can help in making good decisions (Surajit, 2020). Second, B2B Marketing is strictly related to the Digital Transformation, as Taylor et al. (2019) point out there is evidence that the Digital Transformation affects the context of B2B Marketing. Moreover, digitize marketing activities has become an imperative, because consumers prefer who quickly master the use of digital channels (Shpak, 2020).

Likewise, all business strategies, B2B Marketing faces some difficulties. The first challenge is the Marketing and Sales alignment. Wersema (2012) implies that implementing a B2B strategy has implications on the buying process, in how the information are spread among the marketing process, especially leading to an integration of Marketing and Sales. The number of possible Marketing–Sales interface configurations in B2B firms is high, Biemans et al. (2010) suggest that firms must develop the marketing–sales configuration that best matches the characteristics of the firm and its environment, hence there is no ultimate solution. The second obstacle we found analyzing existent literature is globalization. Matthyssens et al. (2008) proposed four challenges related to globalization for B2B organizations. First, “delocalization” of the customers. Second, the globalization of the purchasing function. Third, the growing importance of global networks. And fourth, the transition to electronic forms of exchange.

Taking up from Glynn (2011), in B2B the buyer is not the end user. That implies that most of B2C Marketing strategies will not work in the B2B context, where the Marketing communications are proposed to be more technical and pedagogical, but also more interactive and personal (Brown et al., 2007). About the importance of the experience in B2B Marketing there are different perspectives in the existent literature. For experience we intend the one that the customers have of a brand in

its entirety. The brand experience is conceptualized as sensations, feelings, cognitions, and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli (Brakus, 2009). As opposed to B2C, the most important brand values in B2B are functional ones, whereas emotional aspects play a minor role (Backhaus, Steiner, & Lügger, 2011; Leek & Christodoulides, 2012). Another point of view is to consider B2B customers exclusively focused on operational features, for example, Österlea (2018) stated that *"B2B visitors expect more functional benefits"*. It is indeed true that the functional component of the values offered is still more important than the emotional one, as suggest in the article *"To invest, or not to invest, in brands? Drivers of brand relevance in B2B markets"* (Backhaus, 2011).

Before we highlighted the difference that B2B and B2C Marketing have but is worth notice also in which aspects they are similar. Regarding social media Marketing, for example, the B2B approach imitates B2C in a broad way (Davies, 2018). Even though the difference in the platform used to communicate is becoming thinner, B2B firms found themselves more focus on social media Marketing for acquisition-oriented usage, rather than relationship-oriented usage (Davies, 2018). Sashi (2012) proposed a framework about customer engagement where acquisition-oriented is defined as the capability to engage customers in their first interaction with the firm, then social media became important to interact and connect with customers.

Continuing exploring the discipline of B2B Marketing, we found spread interest on the area of B2B Content Marketing, which Holliman and Rowley defined as *"creating, distributing and sharing relevant, compelling and timely content to engage customers at the appropriate point in their buying consideration processes, such that it encourages them to convert to a business building outcome"*. We infer that Content Marketing contributes to attract consumers, and in general it is a discipline useful to either entertain and be informative through valuable and reliable content. The discipline of Content Marketing therefore is shifting the paradox from selling to helping.

Before we stated that the discipline of B2B Marketing is undergoing a transformation, that is due to several motivations, among which there is the

introduction of the Customer Experience Management that in turn is a key determinant to reconceptualize B2B Marketing. With the purpose of this study the following deeper analysis on the Customer Experience is necessary.

# *B2B's Customer Experience*

In the academic literature the idea of customer experience is linked to the concepts of customer satisfaction and long-term relationships (Palmer, 2010). This is true especially for the B2C setting. The B2B context requires a more strategic approach to capturing and managing customer experience (Zolkiewski et al., 2017). Customer satisfaction in B2B relationship has been defined by Anderson and Narus (1984) as *“a positive affective state resulting from the appraisal of all aspects of a firm’s working relationship with another firm”*. From another perspective customer satisfaction is the customer’s positive emotional response to an evaluation of perceived differences between the actual experience with a service and prior expectations of it (Gaudenzi, Cofente and Russo, 2020).

In the existent literature the definitions of customer experience are conspicuous. For example, Berry et al. (2006) compare customer experience with customer service. Other scholars adopt a multidimensional approach while defining customer experience. In the table below we gathered the definitions that we consider relevant for the purpose of this thesis.

**Table 2: Customer experience definitions**

<b>Author</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Lemon and Verhoef (2016)</b>	A multidimensional construct focusing on a customer’s cognitive, emotional, behavioral, sensorial, and social responses to a firm’s offerings and actions.
<b>Berry et al. (2006)</b>	By definition, a good customer experience is good customer service,

	thus the customer experience is the service.
<b>McColl-Kennedy's (2015)</b>	Customer experience comprises cognitive, emotional, affective, physical, sensorial, spiritual and social elements.
<b>De Keyser et al. (2015)</b>	Comprised of the cognitive, emotional, physical, sensorial, spiritual, and social elements that mark the customer's direct or indirect interaction with (an)other market actor(s).

Lemon and Verhoef (2016) conceptualize customer experience as a customer's "journey" with a firm over time during the purchase cycle across multiple touch points. Thus, introducing the concepts of customer's journey and touch points. Let's see them more in dept in the B2B context.

At a broader level, a customer journey can be viewed as a service system composed of a network of agents and interactions that integrate resources for value co-creation (Ng et al., 2012). The customer journey in this sense, considers the multiplicity of actors involved in B2B. This not only demands that we consider the variety of customer journeys but also that we identify more appropriate measures of customer experience that can evaluate this diversity (Zolkiewski et al., 2017).

In their conceptual model, Barnes and Adams (2013) suggest that customer journeys are made up of activity streams. These are like a flow, always going, instead of happening at a specific point in time, and are overlapping as opposed to be sequential. Today's customer journeys consist of a myriad of touchpoints scattered across multiple channels and media (McColl-Kennedy et al., 2015). The customer journey is not linear anymore with customers having the possibility of changing channels and heading out of the journey. Consumers exit and entry in different step of the journey as they may like. The number of touchpoints they go through is then

higher and since they are travelling the journey upon their preferences, this adds complexity in defining the customer journey itself. Being competitive nowadays means being able to encounter customer's needs at each touchpoint, thus mapping and analyzing the customer journey and experience is critical. The customer journey has become non-linear but still a series of stages can be identified. As Steward (2019) suggested these can be: gaining awareness, searching for acceptable suppliers and solutions, ordering, and purchasing the product, receiving and using the product, acquiring repair services, disposing or recycling the product, and reordering. With touchpoints we intend all individual direct and indirect contacts with a firm at distinct points in time (Homburg et al., 2017). Being present in multiple channels is key, since "*a better Customer Experience is driven by the presence of multiple channels*" (Pozza, 2014). Companies that manage to improve interactions at all touchpoints across the entire customer journey have a competitive advantage and can best enhance relationships with customers (Schneider and Bowen, 1995). Manage the customer experience in the B2B context is more complicated than it seems, given the higher number of actors involved in the experience, the touchpoints control and how the preferences change based on the scenario (Wittel et al., 2019).

Steward (2019) in the study about the evolution of B2B buying process modeling, points out the evolution of the customer journey and lists some of the modern customer journey's features, such as: the online and digital technology's impact on the buying process, the digital technologies used to map and model customer journey and align marketing actions, the impact of Big Data in facilitating the use of marketing analytics to assess the buying process and its consequences, and the multiplicity of customer touchpoints across multiple customer journeys. We will further explore the influence of digital technologies on the customer journey in the next section.

We now introduced the concept of the buying process, that consists in the steps a customer goes through in making a purchasing decision. In the B2B context is often addressed as the decision-making process, that considers several decisions to be made from the purchasing organizations and involves a high number of actors

making decisions, thus adding complexity to the design and implementation of the buying process itself. As Lilien (2016) suggested, the complexity and length of the buying process are the distinctive factor of B2B markets. Nowadays we often encounter the concept of customer journey rather than buying process, nonetheless, it is worth notice that a customer journey is not a restatement of the buying process, but rather a conceptualization of a much more intricate and involved process by which a customer and supplier may embark (Steward, 2019). Indeed, the notion of customer journey also includes the experiential aspects of the customer-firm relationships and their evolution over time. Furthermore, Steward in its article adds that the *“buying process maps are now called customer journey maps and buying process models are referred to as customer journey models to reflect the inclusion of behavioral considerations from the situations, influences, relationships, and networks themes”*.

Customer experience has a responsibility in how the relationship with the firm is built, in which is worth mention the co-creation process. The customer is involved in the creation process, taking part to activities which previously was company's exclusive. The result is a system of co-creation (Piller et al., 2004). Co-creation in turn makes possible the phenomenon of mass customization, which Piller and Möslin (2002) defined as *“the mechanism for interacting with the customer and obtaining specific information in order to define and translate the customer's needs and desires into a concrete product specification”*.

The objective of mass customization is to deliver goods and services which meet individual customer's needs with near mass production efficiency (Tseng and Jiao, 1996). Co-creation is a concept that in the current literature faces some argument, we chose to adopt the definition by Terblanche (2014) who state that the co-creation of value *“means that value is not created by the firm and transferred to the customer during the transaction, but rather is jointly created by the customer and the supplier during consumption”*.

Going through the literature review about customer experience other related topics have emerged, like customer experience design and management, customer



engagement, Customer Relationship Management and Customer Success Management. Porter et al. (2015) see customer success management as “*responsible for managing the customer experience and ensuring that customers get the most from the product*”. Customer Success Management is crucial in responding to the challenges firms face in the evolving business landscape, indeed this discipline is considered an advocate for the customer within the vendor firm who focuses on the customer journey and is dedicated to the customer success with a product (Hochstein et al., 2020). To sum up, Customer Success Management is about delivering to customers the outcome they desired, with the products or services of the organization.

As mentioned before in the B2B context the interactions between customers and organizations are crucial to create valuable proposition offers, indeed sometimes the level of service associated with the final offer is even more worthwhile than the product itself. This service-centered perspective on value creation emphasizes interaction between customer and firm as central to creating value (Grönroos, 2011). It is through interactions that value is created, seeing that information is exchanged and produced as well as knowledge is generated, and services are co-designed and co-created (Berthon and John, 2006).

Salomonson (2010) highlights the fact that customers’ value creation is about being able to adapt organizational resources to the needs of customers, and not just passing them information. Create value for customers consists in giving them a level of assistance and useful information in order to meet their needs in terms of how to enhance the characteristics and potentiality of the products offered by the firm.

Moreover, in their study about service quality and customer satisfaction in B2B, Huang, Lee and Chen (2019) found out that service quality positively impacts customer satisfaction and in turn customer satisfaction positively impacts customer loyalty. Furthermore, Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman (1996) propose that customer satisfaction is multi-dimensional, and that it is easily influenced by service quality, product quality, price, context, and personal factors.

Given the importance that customer satisfaction has, it is critical to being able to measure it in B2B context. We already said that in industrial markets the characteristics of the relationships are that they are long-lasting and complex. The customer is demanding and has gained an active role in the relationship. For this reason, as Homburg and Rudolph (1997) highlight in their research about customer satisfaction in industrial market, *“the satisfaction of the customer may play an important role in establishing, developing, and maintaining successful customer relationships in industrial markets”*.

In recent years the attention to customer satisfaction among B2B practitioners has increased, since they consider it as a competitive edge and as a corporate goal (Crosby, 1991). Despite this, the B2B context lacks studies and definition on customer satisfaction, in comparison to the consumer market area. Halstead, Hartaman and Schmidt (1994) defined it as a *“response resulting from the customer’s comparison of product performance to some prepurchase standard, such as expectation, ideal, or norm”*.

Hakansson (1982) considering the complexity of the relations in B2B context, asserts that *“the marketers’ and buyers’ task in this case may have more to do with maintaining these relationships than with making a straightforward sale or purchase”*. Thus, confirming the importance that relations have and how their evolution can influence customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction in B2B marketing must be considered as a relationship-specific rather than a transaction-specific construct (Homburg and Rudolph, 1997).

Other contributions about customer satisfaction are found in the B2B literature, for example Czepiel and Rosenberg (1977) lists several customer satisfaction’s aspects like the purchase process, the decision, the functional attributes, the aesthetic attributes, the psychological attributes, the service attributes, and the environmental attributes. Spreng and Olshavsky (1992), on the other hand urge a distinction between aspects of the product itself and information about the product. Bowen, Siehl and Schneider (1989) emphasize the role of services in adding value to the consumer value and determining customer’s satisfaction. Moreover, given the

complexity of the industrial products, user training, also considered as a service, is required (Cohen and Lee, 1990). In brief, customer satisfaction has a multi-dimensional nature. Indeed, Czepiel and Rosenberg (1977) hypothesized that the different roles in the buying center induce differences in customer satisfaction.

# *Digital Transformation in B2B*

In this section we focus on the Digital Transformation in the B2B context. We are going to analyze what opportunities the Digital Transformation has brought in the B2B scenario, what type of new technologies had a major influence on B2B organizations, and we will deep dive in the impacts that the Digital Transformation has on the discipline of Marketing.

The digital technologies have changed the way B2B firms act in business markets (Ritter, 2019). This is true both related to what type of product or service they may sell and to how they sell it. This shift is caused also because of how the competitive landscape is changing, indeed this is altered by the new technologies. Again, is worth mention the difference between digitization and digitalization for the purpose of the following digression on the technologies involved in the process of Digital Transformation in the B2B context. Ritter (2019) based on further literature review gives the following definitions: the term “digitization” is used to describe the transformation from analog to digital data, whereas “digitalization” is seen as the application of digital technologies.

An opportunity for B2B companies is to leverage on the digital technologies to enhance service offerings, resulting in digitalization enabling servitization (Coreynen et al., 2017). In turn, Tukker (2004) considers servitization as an opportunity, as a method to build unique and loyal customer relationship. Building a strong and long-lasting customer relationship means find a way to deliver customers the right value proposition. In this sense the advances in technologies are key, indeed technology evolution is changing marketing practices regarding value creation, value delivery and value capture, leading to development of new business models and changes in consumer and broader macro-economic impact (Gillpatrick, 2019).

With digital technologies we intend blockchain, Artificial Intelligence, data analytics, Internet of Things, cloud computing and automation. Especially is the Artificial Intelligence that will have an impact on Marketing. Davenport et al. (2019)

presented the article “How artificial intelligence will change the future of marketing” where they suggested that artificial intelligence will have an impact both on marketing strategies as well as on customer behaviors. In previous research Artificial Intelligence “*refers to programs, algorithms, systems and machines that demonstrate intelligence*” (Shankar 2018). When referring to marketing strategies we include also changes in the business models, that are adopting technologies in their configuration. On the other hand, when mentioning customer behaviors, we consider how their journey is being disrupted by the Digital Transformation, and specifically how the digital touchpoints can help B2B practitioners in building long lasting relationships. Centering the focus on Marketing, Columbus (2019) stated that “*it turns out that the marketing and sales function is adopting machine learning/artificial intelligence faster than any other department in an enterprise as of today*”.

The adoption of digital technologies also includes data analytics and therefore is worth mention data-driven marketing practices. Bresciani et al. (2021) found interesting the evolution of data-driven marketing in a constantly changing business environment that has increasingly become digital and technology-enabled. Indeed, marketing enabled by digital technologies allows companies to be more precise in predicting consumer behaviors and analyzing the purchasing process.

Fukawa (2015) proposed a framework centered on the impact of big data on marketing activities. In this perspective we can highlight that data are useful to provide insights about consumer behaviors which in turn marketers can translate in a competitive advantage. Indeed, “*a firm must utilize customer insights obtained from Big Data to continuously redefine its marketing activities to implement radical innovation*” (Story et al., 2011). As mentioned before the Digital Transformation in B2B has an impact also on Marketing, which is becoming more digital and automated. The American Marketing Association in 2013 defined Digital Marketing as a discipline that “*includes all activities, institutions, and processes facilitated by digital technologies for creating, communication, and delivering value for customers*”. Herhausen (2020) points out that the focus of a digital marketing strategy should be on how to use digital resources as inputs which, in turn, create capabilities from

which value and competitive advantage can be derived. Again, digital advances are seen as something to leverage on to boost a business.

Rodriguez (2020) deeply analyzed the phenomenon of Digital Transformation and stated that the digitalization is changing the way of doing business and has incrementally been considered as a cause of competitive advantage. Moreover, Moen et al. (2008) researched into which aspects of business digital technologies are more relevant, asserting that these are mainly used for prospecting and market information rather than for closing sales.

The Digital Transformation is a concept worth analyzing from each aspect of a firm. For example, Avlonitis and Panagopoulos (2005) affirmed that at the organizational level there can be relevant obstacles or enablers for the implementation of digital technologies, thus training is important to get people to accept them.

We already introduced the concept of servitization, through the contribution of Paiola (2020) and Coreynen et al. (2017), now let's deep dive into how digitalization contributes to servitization. There is not an agreed definition of servitization, although Kohtamäki et al. (2019), defined it as "*the transition from products and add-on services to integrated product-service-software systems*". Skylar et al. (2019) in their article about digital servitization, asserted that using digital technologies to provide a valuable opportunity is extremely related to adopt a servitization strategy. This means for organizations to invest in technologies that can be helpful for data collection and analysis. What is important is for organizations to align their digital platforms with customer interfaces and needs, implementing a Digital Transformation strategy that can boost efficiency and reactivity to customer's changing demands. It is true that customers expect smart solutions to be customized to their needs and are reluctant to pilot truly novel smart solutions. Digital servitization enable value creation and capture, through monitoring, control, optimization, and autonomous function (Kohtamäki et al., 2019).

Digital servitization is shifting the paradox of how firms engage with customers in the B2B context, from a product-centric model to a relational service-oriented

(Kamalaldin et al., 2020). Digital technologies like Internet of Things, remote monitoring, and Artificial Intelligence help organizations in this transaction. For example, remote monitoring permits firms to intervene on machines preemptively. Indeed, digital servitization is also defined as “*the provision of digital services embedded in a physical product*” (Holmström and Partanen, 2014; Vendrell-Herrero and Wilson James, 2017). Adopting a digital servitization strategy can contribute to differentiation and to create a stronger relationship with customers, with this aim is imperative for organizations to adopt a customer perspective. This allows to provide better services, indeed the opportunities to expand services increase when companies synchronize digitalization, connectivity, and data analytics (Martín-Peña et al., 2018).

Kamalaldin et al. (2020) suggested that companies need to embark on an efficient Digital Transformation that allows them to take full advantage of digitalization and servitization. Nonetheless, companies struggle with Digital Transformation since it requires a change in the business relationship and the adoption of new and innovative approaches (Iansiti and Lakhani, 2014). The notion of relationship is especially significant since the implementation of a successful Digital Transformation, through integrated products and services can only succeed when both provider and customer deploy them, and not simply because a provider delivers them (Tuli et al., 2007). This is key to value co-creation, enabled by a collaborative innovation approach as well as connected production resources shared between partners (Martín-Peña et al., 2018).

With the already mentioned changes in customer expectations, B2B customers rely upon advanced services and improved customer experience through dealing with products (Story, Raddats, Burton, Zolkiewski, and Baines, 2017). Customers demand for the value embedded in the products, thus digital servitization for companies must be established with the value-creating system and drive the firm’s strategy.

# *B2B's Customer Experience and Digital Transformation*

*"Consumer behavior is changing as a response to the digital revolution"* (Verhoef et al., 2019). Let's consider the broad contexts in which we find consumer behavior and the digital revolution, following Pil and Holwelg (2003), we can see customer knowledge management and innovation as the two key modern-firm drivers for a set of successful survival, growth, and development strategies, enhancing business efficiency, performance, and sustainable competitive advantage. Being the Digital Transformation considered a sort of innovation and considering consumer behavior literature belonging to the same area of customer knowledge management, we can consider the two disciplines as equally worth investigate to understand how to implement a successful strategy inside an organization.

Gillpatrick (2019) underlines that the digital disruption is affecting the purchasing process, mainly due to three factors of change: the influence of new technologies, the development of new forms of competition, and the changing consumers preferences. Companies are starting to understand that the only way to survive in the competition is to enable the Digital Transformation. On its side, the Digital transformation requires companies to rethink about how they interact with their customers including sales, marketing and service (Singh, 2021). Indeed, the automation phase that companies are encompassing is changing the role of customer service and marketing in a definitive way. Consumers nowadays have complete access to information about a firm and its competitors, in terms of what they sell and what offer. Consumers are savvier and more skilled, making for them easier the adaptation to the ways of self-service, intelligent data use, automation, and a fast and adaptive customer service (Singh, 2021). To master digital capabilities has become thus an imperative to satisfy consumers and improve the customer experience. Moreover, many companies who use digital in an effective way often enjoy five times the growth of their peers who are not yet adapted this digital transformation (Angevine et al., 2018).



Digital Transformation and customer experience are quite well analyzed in the existent literature, although not together, as two concepts contaminating each other. Several scholars have concluded that digital information technologies shape the B2B buying journey that is generally buyer-driven (Grewal et al., 2015; Schwartz and Kim, 2012). One contribution is made by Solis (2018) who asserted that “*customer experience and engagement fuel the most progressive digital transformation strategies for firms today*”. We can further broaden this concept by saying that for a Digital Transformation effort to be efficient it must consider the customer experience, in particular customer success that is about for the consumer to achieve the desired outcome, with the firm’s offer.

Singh (2021) in his article “A study on the revolution of consumer relationships as a combination of human interactions and digital transformations”, analyzed the relationship between digital interaction and the customer’s satisfaction. What emerged is that when a digital relationship is established, what serve as a differentiator is not the digital aspect of the relationship, but the capacity for a business to be innovative in shaping the relationship. Consequently, “*the Digital Transformation of the relationship between customers often requires a human change.*” (Singh, 2021). That means that even from the digital point of view, the relationships with customers work fine, is not enough to provide a satisfactory customer experience. Further improvement must be made in the Customer Relationship Management, with the purpose of increasing the value to the consumers.

We already introduced the idea that digital technologies are disrupting the customer journey, as Steward (2019) remarked in her article digital technologies impact the buying process, the mapping and modeling of the customer journey, and in particular Big Data ease the analysis of the customer journey. Indeed, the introduction of software and systems to map the customer journey is by now widespread and facilitate by the availability of Big Data.

In the B2B context, 67% of all buying tasks is undertake online (Gerard, 2014). This is happening because organizations have at their disposal digital platforms where

customers can directly insert orders and at the same time serve as mean to monitor all the transactions of a purchase and support customers in each phase of the purchasing process. This allows firms to better monitor the level of satisfaction of their customers, in terms of repeated purchase, lead time delays and the level of assistance customers require and the firm can provide. Actually, even B2B customers are growing in comfort and expectation of the Artificial Intelligence potentiality, for example chatbot-enabled services to get more information faster (Steward, 2019).

The influence of technology on the buying behavior is undoubted, indeed at each touchpoint of interaction the customer experience has been redefined by digital technologies. Thus, is fundamental to reengineer the entire purchasing process to make it more amenable and satisfying for the customer (MacMillan and McGrath's, 1997). And let the digital automation leads customers on their journey (Edelman and Singer, 2015). At the same time is critical to understand that technologies must be integrated within the customers' requirements, meaning that is not enough to adopt digital technologies. It is true that these technologies need to fit in with the type of offer of the firm and with customer's needs. Integration between customers' and organizations' digital platforms, programs and software is required, with the aim to not create dissatisfaction along the buying process.

Nowadays is not enough to offer digital products or implement a digital buying process, what makes a difference in the firm's offer is the level of the value-added service given within what the firm sells. This means organizations should differentiate their offers, aiding customers on how to exploit their digital offers. Hoar (2015) noted that only consultant salespersons who offer high value- added services will survive. It is worth remembering that in the B2B context, the purchasing process is not entirely based on digital tools, on the contrary purchasing managers rely upon interpersonal connections. A good level of assistance in the buying process is then still important for customers.

Taking the customers' perspective, digital technologies have altered how B2B customers make buying decisions. In the B2B context, peers' reviews are still one of

the major forms of reliable recommendations and thanks to the advent of new technologies are now obtained at professional community sites, review sites, and referral sites (Simonson & Rosen, 2014). For example, consulting research states that 53% of buyers rely on peer recommendations, 76% prioritize vendors based on such recommendations, and 84% of B2B purchases begin with a referral (Matias, 2018). However, sometimes digital technologies are still seen as not fully trustworthy to make decisions and guide the purchasing process; moreover, the complexity of the B2B organizational buying, that involves a high number of steps and people involved in the process, is built on strong relationships based on trust that sometimes are undermined by the digitalization (Arli et al., 2017). Another similar view is the one of Rodriguez (2020) that points out the external cultural obstacle that is the belief in some companies that digitalization can lead to more wasted time or data insecurity than traditional communications, and a negative perceptions of technology does not help. For that is critical for B2B practitioners to understand the potential and the way of using digital tools. In contemporary times, new opportunities for suppliers arise, and, in some ways, there is the necessity that they streamline information and engage with customers in a more sophisticated manner (Steward, 2019).

Rodriguez (2020) in her research about the digitalization process of complex B2B sales processes found out that the digitalization of the sales process works best in those stages in which the information is not crucial. Consequently, digitalization is most relevant in the following stages: identifying the customer, making a sales proposal, and follow-up support. Another view on which stages of the buying process are most digitalized is that those are the ones that do not require interaction between seller and buyer.

Lastly, digitalization helps the selling organization to divide up the complex B2B sales process (Rodriguez, 2020). For example, regarding organizational functions like identify customers, build relationships and follow-up support, the digital technologies can come to a hand. This means that the sales team could be organized by functions more effectively than before (Rodriguez, 2020).

**Table 3: Overview of current literature**

Author	Year	Type of research	Purpose of the research	Key findings	Research setting	Respondents	Limitations
<b>Study on Digital Transformation</b>							
<b>Gillpatrick</b>	2019	Qualitative	Discuss industry level and macroeconomic impact of the Digital Transformation of Marketing	Buyer behavior is the most critical factor driving the evolution of economic demand today and into the future	Literature review on digital disruption, marketing and innovation	/	Fail to understand evolution of consumer preferences that influence economic competitiveness and consumer welfare
<b>Hess et al.</b>	2016	Qualitative	Illustrate the concepts of formulating and executing a Digital Transformation strategy	Strategic questions for managers responsible for Digital Transformation along four dimensions of DT: Use of technologies, Changes in value creation, Structural changes, Financial	Two rounds of interviews with industry experts and representatives of firms that successfully have undergone Digital Transformation	Three German media company: ProSiebenSat, Mittelbayerische, Ravensburger AG	Inability to provide unique universal answers
<b>Paiola</b>	2020	Qualitative	Describe the service-oriented impact of IoT technologies on firms' Business Models	Map of digital servitization: impact of the firm's sale model as a strategic factor and identification of three levels of complexity of digital servitization (product-, process-, outcome-oriented)	Inductive research approach founded on a qualitative exploratory research design based on a multiple case study	Theoretical sampling logic: sample selected based on their relevance to the research question. Interviews with 10 industry experts in the Italian manufacturing sector, of 25 B2B firms	Restricted generalizability due to no quantitative investigation
<b>Schallmo</b>	2017	Qualitative	Define Digital Transformation through a structured approach	A five-step roadmap to execute Digital Transformation: Digital reality, Digital ambition, Digital potential, Digital fit, Digital implementation	Case study methods. Analysis of the best practice for DT of Business Models	German industrial group with different division: ThyssenKrupp	Non broad application of the study in other industries: need to analyse different industries and company
<b>Sebastian et al.</b>	2017	Qualitative	Illustrate how old companies navigate Digital Transformation	Identification of two digital strategies that provide directions for Digital Transformation: Customer engagement and Digitized solutions	Studies of 25 companies embarking Digital Transformation strategy	More than 85 CIOs from big companies from a variety of industries. One hour semi-structured interviews by video or phone	Focus just on big old companies

Verhoef et al.	2017	Qualitative	Provide a multidisciplinary perspective on digital transformation	Identification of the digitization, digitalization and digital transformation as the three stages of Digital Transformation. Importance of digital assets and capabilities. Importance of organizational structure in the Digital Transformation process.	Multidisciplinary integrative approach based on a firm level analysis. Research fields: IS, Strategic management, Marketing, Innovation, Operations management	Academic sources: broad set of 42 leading journals in each of the selected fields	Description of how firms go through the phase of digital transformation. How to develop digital resources. Identification of the most efficient structure for firms going through Digital Transformation.
Vial	2019	Qualitative	Investigate Digital Transformation through an inductive framework	How dynamic capabilities contribute to digital transformation. The strategic relevance of ethics in digital transformation.	Inductive approach to review 282 works and build a framework of DT articulated across 8 building blocks	Peer-review sources pertinent to IS literature using as database: AIS Library, Business Source Complete, Science Direct	Implications of Digital Transformation for organizations as well as for society
<b>Study on B2B Marketing</b>							
Glynn	2011	Qualitative	Examine the empirical evidence about business-to-business (B2B) brands and its implications for brand strategy	Relevance of B2C branding frameworks to B2B brands	Revision of current theoretical frameworks and reader practicum	/	No address to the multidimensional nature of a B2B brand in creating value between firms
Taylor et al.	2019	Qualitative	Investigate the Value Proposition in Marketing	Framework emphasizing digitally transformed marketing interactions: reconceptualizing the concept of Value Proposition	Analysis of B2B and service literature	Focus on individual decision-making actors	Perspective that is missing: person-specific, multilevel and longitudinal theories are needed
Wersema	2013	Qualitative	Understand what forces impact business markets and their marketing implications	Two big challenges emerged from our inquiry (strengthening marketing's interfaces and leveraging granular knowledge), along with four related imperatives for B2B marketing (i.e., demonstrating its impact, deepening customer engagement, organizing marketing, and developing talent/competency)	Quasi-Delphic process to solicit two rounds of input from the 30 academic members of the B2B Board	Open-ended, one-on-one interviews and additional interactions with 71 B2B executives	No further delineation of specific issues for practitioners to explore, or for academics to research
<b>Study on customer experience in B2B</b>							
Hochstein et al.	2020	Qualitative	Describe Customer Success Management	Inability of firms to proactively engage with customers to cocreate value. CSM as a industry practice to solve the problem.	Literature review and case study in the digital industrial sector	Case study on GE Digital	Study of CS in other industries
Homburg and Rudolph	1997	Qualitative	Develop a model to measure industrial customer satisfaction	Identification of several dimensions influencing customer satisfaction: interactions of salespeople's and customers; process of handling orders and complaints	Industrial customer-supplier relationships	Field interviews within 25 industrial companies	Lacks generalization
Steward et al.	2019	Qualitative	Analyze the evolution of the B2B buying process	Identification of 7 themes (transactions, situations, influences, responses, relationships, networks, journeys) that infer that purchasing decisions have multiple sources and timing of influence	Review of academic literature on four decades of publications on the B2B buying process	/	Lack of study on the customer-supplier interaction and marketing analytics

Zolkiewski et al.	2017	Qualitative	Critique the adequacy of efforts to capture the complexities of customer experience in B2B	A B2B context requires a more strategic approach to capturing and managing customer experience	Theoretical paper that reviews literature of B2B customer experience	Outcomes-based, multi-actor approach in a B2B service context	No empirical interrogation
<b>Study on Digital Transformation in the B2B context</b>							
Bresciain et al.	2021	Qualitative	Explore how the current digital transformation is changing the way in which companies do business	Emergence of new digital skills, new business models and transformation within key industries, and the new role and behaviors of consumers	32 papers on innovation process and business model transformations	Contributions from: Italy, North America, Canada, Asia, UK, Nigeria, Australia. Industries involved: Healthcare, Food, Financial, IT.	Study of CS in other industries
Coreynen et al.	2017	Qualitative	Describe and explain how digitization can enable servitization for manufacturers	Three pathways for digitally-enabled servitization are identified: Industrial servitization, Commercial servitization, Value servitization	Multiple-case study at four manufacturing companies	Four manufacturing SMEs based in Belgium that utilize digital tools for service infusion. In-dept interviews of two hours	No hypothesis testing and no other industries investigated beside the manufacturing
Davenport et al.	2019	Qualitative	Understand the impact of AI on Marketing	AI is influencing: Marketing strategies and Consumer behaviors	Multidimensional framework based on prior work and extensive interactions with practitioners	Practitioners from: Stitch Fix, Infinit ML, CognitiveScale	Limited number of practitioners involved
Kamalaldin et al.	2020	Qualitative	Shed light on how the provider-customer relationships transform over time in the context of digital servitization	Demonstrating relational engagements and a relational view as key to progressing in digital servitization. Illustrating how transformation unfolds in digital servitization and by showing the interdependence of activities along the transformation process. Central role of different approaches of governance for various phases of digital servitization relationships	Exploratory multiple case study of four B2B dyadic relationships between providers and customers of digital services	Globally active Swedish providers and customers engaged in longstanding relationships in digital servitization	Limited to the Swedish context. No quantitative proof. Limited to dyadic relationships (not considering the ecosystems of B2B organizations).
Kohtmaki et al.	2019	Qualitative	Understand digital servitization business models of firms in the context of ecosystems	Recognition of the linkage between digitalization and servitization. Presentation of digital servitization business models.	Literature review on servitization	/	Lacks a vision of the digital servitization in considering the whole context (and not just the theory of the firm)
Ritter	2019	Qualitative	Create an overview on the digitization and digitalization of B2B Business Model	Firm's digitization capability as consisting of three dimensions: data, permission, and analytics. Firm's digitization capability is an antecedent to a firm's digitalization.	Industrial marketing literature	Insights based on the results of the "From Big Data to Big Business: Building Profitable Data-Driven Business Models"	View digitization in relation to business models
<b>Study on customer experience and Digital Transformation in the B2B context</b>							
Rodriguez et al.	2020	Qualitative	Research into enablers and obstacles of the digitalization process of complex B2B sales process	Later stages in the sales process are more difficult to replace with digital interfaces. Identification of several dimensions to consider in the digitalization of sales process (i.e. organizational, cultural)	Qualitative design using insights from case studies	In-depth series of interviews with salespeople in several companies	Limited to complex service solutions in the software industry
Singh	2021	Quantitative	Show the relationship between digital commitments and human touch in the context of CRM	Implications to optimize CRM: Include digitalization as a way to increase value for customers, Hybrid model of CRM (human and digital), Focus on digital channels where customers interact.	Review of existing literature: study of the level of adoption rate of technology and draws relationships between the adoption rate and the satisfaction rates	104 people in the age-group 15-60 in cities where technology is used as a mean of purchase. Correlation and regression analysis	Business perspective is missing

**Table 4: Overview of existing research field and contributions of this study**

Author	Year	Key findings	Gap Emerged	Purpose of this Study
<b>Bresciani et al.</b>	2021	Emergence of new digital skills, of new business models and transformation within key industries, and the new role and new behaviors of consumers	How the Digital Transformation affects key components of Business Modell, such as value creation	How the Digital Transformation contributes to value creation
<b>Coreynen et al.</b>	2017	Different digitization options enable manufacturing companies to follow distinct servitization pathways	Limited to specific sectors	Do a cross-sector study
<b>Gillpatrick</b>	2019	Digital disruption is likely to impact firm competitiveness and the nature of larger global economy	How the digital transformation of marketing will affect economic competitiveness and consumer welfare	Understand how the Digital Transformation influence the consumer sphere
<b>Paiola</b>	2020	Map of digital servitization that helps in understanding firms' strategic transitions caused by technologies	How the whole ecosystems play a role in the Digital Transformation journey	Acknowledge the role of ecosystems within the Digital Transformation journey
<b>Ritter</b>	2019	Definition of digitization in B2B markets	Deep investigation in the B2B context of digitalization	Customer-firm relationships in the Digital Era in the B2B context
<b>Schallmo</b>	2017	A five-step roadmap to execute Digital Transformation	Application of the findings in several industries	Investigate Digital Transformation in diverse sectors
<b>Taylor et al.</b>	2019	Framework emphasizing digitally transformed marketing interactions: reconceptualizing the concept of Value Proposition	Emerging service concepts of customer experience and customer journeys	Investigate customer experience and customer journeys
<b>Verhoef et al.</b>	2019	Identification of three stages of Digital Transformation and growth strategies for digital firms	Impact of Digital Transformation on performance	How Digital Transformation influence performance in terms of customer satisfaction
<b>Vial</b>	2019	How dynamic capabilities contribute to digital transformation. The strategic relevance of ethics in digital transformation.	Approach that favored breadth over depth	Zoom in the specific relationship that Digital Transformation has with customer experience

<b>Wiersema</b>	2013	B2B markets are undergoing major changes and that evolving customer demands are placing unprecedented pressures on B2B marketing and other customer-facing functions	Adoption of a senior marketing practitioner's perspective	Including several corporate function practitioners
<b>Zolkiewski et al.</b>	2017	Reconceptualization of B2B customer experience and design of a strategic customer experience management framework	Propositional nature of the B2B customer experience framework proposed	Empirical investigation on B2B customer experience
<b>Steward et al.</b>	2019	Identification of 7 themes (transactions, situations, influences, responses, relationships, networks, journeys) that infer that purchasing decisions have multiple sources and timing of influence	Lack of study on the customer-supplier interaction and marketing analytics	Focus on the customer-firm relationship in B2B industries
<b>Kohtmaki et al.</b>	2019	Recognition of the linkage between digitalization and servitization. Presentation of digital servitization business models.	Lacks a vision of the digital servitization in considering the whole context (and not just the theory of the firm)	Focus on the service aspect of implementing a strategy of Digital Transformation in the B2B context

Against the background proposed (Table 1), this study places its roots in the literature about Digital Transformation, with a focus on the B2B context, and about the customer experience sources as an ever more important discipline for B2B marketing practitioners.

Going through existent literature, several gaps emerged. These neglects offer some important research opportunities (Table 2): First, mostly of the studies zoom into a specific sector (i.e., manufacturing) and don't consider an overview of the B2B context. Another gap is found in considering the Digital Transformation as a concept linked to the consumer-organization relationship, contributing to the value creation process, hence playing a role not just in the firm sphere but also in the consumer one. Even more, is missing a deep analysis on how the Digital Transformation influence customer satisfaction. This is mostly true in the B2B context, where studies on the customer experience are rare. About customer satisfaction and its



relationship with the Digital Transformation, some studies address the phenomenon of Digital Servitization, which this study aims to further investigate in the sense of how digital technologies can enhance the level of service related to a firm's offer.

This study aims to unify some of the gaps emerged throughout the literature, especially taking the one emerged from Vial (2019) as a starting point. Vial deeply analyses the Digital Transformation, although preferring a breath over a deep analysis, leaving some relationship between the Digital Transformation and other business-related concept out of his study. We then propose a study that zooms in the specific relationship that Digital Transformation has with customer experience, specifically in the B2B context.



## 2. Research Question

### *Hypothesis development*

This study investigates how the Digital Transformation and the customer experience have a profound relationship in the B2B context. For the purpose of this research when we talk about customer experience, we adopt the definition by Lemon and Verhoef (2016) that states that customer experience is “*a multidimensional construct focusing on a customer’s cognitive, emotional, behavioral, sensorial, and social responses to a firm’s offerings and actions*”. Moreover, we include all the concepts linked to the customer experience and related to the customer-firm relationship, especially important in the B2B context. These concepts comprehend the measure of customer satisfaction, the customer journey, the customer engagement, and the consumer value.

Our aim is to research into the idea that to implement a good Digital Transformation process it is fundamental to understand and consider not just the digital technologies themselves but also all what is inherent to the consumer sphere. For example, have a deep knowledge of what is the consumer journey the customers go through and recognize what is the type of experience the customers demand, is crucial to shape a Digital Transformation strategy that can really add value to what a firm’s offer. Indeed, to adopt the right digital tools is critical to consider the objective of an organizations in terms of which kind of experience it wishes to offer.

We introduced the concept of relationship between the Digital Transformation and the customer experience in the B2B context, indeed this research also aims to identify how the Digital Transformation impacts not just the production or the processes inside an organization, but even the purchasing process, the measure of customer satisfaction and the customer journey. We imply that to shape the firm’s Digital Transformation strategy one should leverage the opportunities it offers and

can be useful for every specific case. We wish to investigate how these opportunities are in turn reinforced by the level of consideration of the customer experience, meaning that to benefit from them organizations must keep in mind how digital technologies can help their customers and the relationship with them.

# 3. Research Methodology

Given the explanatory nature of this study we implemented a qualitative methodology in conducting our research. To analyze the interrelation of the Digital Transformation with customer experience and customer value creation, we conducted a cross-sector research in the B2B context. Through in-dept one-to-one interviews with practitioners in the B2B setting we provide insights about the state of the art of Digital Transformation, its implementation and how this discipline has a profound connection with the consumer sphere. Especially we shed light on at which point in the customer-firm relationship the digital technologies became relevant and how much is important to understand the customer's needs and behaviors to exploit the potentiality of the Digital Transformation.

We consider the approach proposed to be appropriate to examine our research question, indeed an inductive research approach is ideal to deal with the new topics that call for further attention (Bluhm, Harman, Lee, & Mitchell, 2011). Given the novelty of the research's topics, an inductive approach helps establishing clear links between the research objectives and the summary findings derived from the interviews. The inductive approach serves the purpose of analyzing qualitative data and produce reliable and valid findings (Thomas, 2006).

## *Data Collection and Sample Selection*

Consistent with our goal to assess Digital Transformation and its relationship with consumer experience in an industry-overarching context, we conducted in-dept interviews of various practitioners across various B2B industries. Our aim in selecting the sample was to include several corporate function practitioners, to have a larger view on how Digital Transformation can be determinant in the firm strategy as well as in other aspects inside an organization.

Given the exploratory nature of this research our qualitative research adopts a non-probability sampling technique following a theoretical rather than a statistical sampling logic (Bryman, 2003). This is appropriate considering that this study aims to take an overview of the current situation of on one hand the Digital Transformation can influence the customer experience and on the other hand of how the implementation of a Digital Transformation strategy is influenced by the consideration of some consumer sphere's aspect, such as the customer needs and behaviors. Theoretical sampling is *"the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes and analyses his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them in order to develop his theory as it emerges"* (Glaser & Strauss, 2012). The aim of using a theoretical sample is to generate and develop theoretical data.

Our sample is a purposive one because something from it can be learned and typical since its highlights the average situation. The sample size is consistent with the logic of reaching a point of saturation in the answers and the novelty they bring.

Moreover, following a criteria-based selection, we selected the sample accordingly to the crucial criteria identified for this study. Altogether, the following criteria were used to select the companies for the research project. Organizations had to: be B2B organizations or organizations operating in the B2B industry; have at least one area of interest related to Digital Transformation; be willing to recognize the importance of the research work and commit to it; provide access to information and knowledgeable informants.

The aim of the field research was to get detailed information on the state of implementation of the Digital Transformation process and the potential next steps. Moreover, we investigated the way in which the customer experience is managed and the importance of the contribution to consumer value that the firm strategy may bring, with particular attention to the Digital Transformation strategy.

# Interview design

We followed Gioia et al. (2013) suggestions to design the interview guidelines. These had to be flexible in order to avoid a preordained understanding or imposing an academic terminology, and to reduce the risk of missing key aspects from the respondent’s perspective. We adopt a semi-structured set of questions, to be open to the emersion of further questions while the interviews where taken.

Moreover, based on the fourth edition of “Qualitative research a guide to Design and Implementation” by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), we selected two of the six types of questions proposed. For the purpose of this study will be relevant “opinion and value questions” and “experience questions”. The authors also suggest that *“generally it is a good idea to ask for relatively neutral, descriptive information at the beginning of an interview. Respondents can be asked to provide basic descriptive information about the phenomenon of interest.”*. With this is mind we open our interview guide with general questions about the phenomenon studied.

**Table 5: Interview design**

Focus of this study	Main topics for interviews	Interview guide
Glance on the DT in B2B organizations	3 stages of DT: digitization, digitalization, digital transformation	Descriptive information to provide basic insights of the phenomenon of DT
DT and contribution to value creation  DT and its role in the consumer-sphere	Digitalization as a way to increase value for customers	“Opinion and value questions” → <i>what is your opinion on the new digitalization strategies? How do you value their</i>



		<i>importance in terms of customer value?</i>
Perception of importance of CJ and CX in B2B	How B2B companies are managing the customer experience	“Opinion and value questions” → <i>what do you think of the importance to measure customer experience?</i>
Customer-firm relationship in the digital era in B2B context	How companies engage with customer to cocreate value	“Experience questions” → <i>tell me about how your organization engage with customer</i>

The interview design of the questions proposed to the interviewees had the aim to investigate on the following topics, to connect the questions with the main research gaps at the basis of our research questions:

- How organizations are dealing with Digital Transformation: we investigated at which stage both organizations and their clients are in the process of Digital Transformation and how important is for B2B organizations to embrace digital technologies.
- Which aspects, processes, departments are affected the most by the Digital Transformation: we investigate where and when implementing a Digital Transformation strategy can bring benefits. The questions had the aim to explore how the digital technologies are impacting the performance and the competitiveness of B2B organizations.

- Customer-firm relationship in the digital era in the B2B context: we focused on questions about how organizations engage with customers and which aspects of their relationship changed because of the Digital Transformation.
- The importance of measure customer satisfaction in the B2B context and how digital technologies can help: we researched into why is important to monitor and evaluate customer satisfaction, asking questions about if and how the measure of customer satisfaction is considered when implementing the organization's strategy. Moreover, we asked questions regarding how the digital technologies changed the way to analyze and shape the customer experience.

## *Research Method and Case Description*

We conducted online interviews in real time through a video-communication service suitable for the interviewees. The video component has made the interviews more like face-to-face encounter, giving the opportunity to not just listen but also to analyze the reactions of the interviewees to the questions and their non-verbal expressions while answering. Moreover, this methodology was necessary to meet the needs of the various interviewees and reach them despite the geographical distance. All the interviews were about 20-50 minutes long.

Our interview structure is semi-structured, hence including more or less structured questions, and all the questions are flexible, this allowed us to deep dive into some topics and insights emerged only during the interviews. We start with generic questions, ending with specific queries. Moreover, we went from non-guided to guided questions. This is in order to influence the interviewees answering and follow their stream of thoughts. Although there is no predetermined order in the questions. The interviewees add some insights and share their points of views ranging in the topics of our interview and contribute to make this study even more comprehensive and extensive.

We used a non-probability sampling technique in selecting the interviewees, which is a method to select participants in a subjective way and is also the method of choice of most qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Non-probability sampling helps solve qualitative problems, such as discovering what occurs, the implications of what occurs, and the relationships linking occurrences (Honigmann, 1982). We contacted fourteen possible participants through emails and LinkedIn and were able to conduct the interview with ten of them. Among the participants, three cover a managing position in B2B firms, three are CEOs in organizations active in the B2B sector, two are working in the marketing department of B2B firms, and two cover senior roles inside B2B companies. The year of experience of the participants in the B2B context wide from 5 to 30 years, thus providing different perspective and insights based on their professional career.

**Table 6: Interview sample**

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Type of organization</b>	<b>Industry</b>	<b>Years of experience</b>
Participant 1	Marketing Planner	Multinational Company	Industrial Technology	5
Participant 2	CEO	Holding controlling several companies	Oil and Energy	30
Participant 3	Manager	Multinational Corporation	Agriculture and Construction	20
Participant 4	General Manager	B2B Company	Packaging	21
Participant 5	Founder and CEO	B2B Marketing Agency	Digital	14
Participant 6	General Manager	B2B Company	Advanced Composite Materials	17
Participant 7	CEO	Consultancy Company	Digital	6
Participant 8	Digital Marketer	B2B Company	Industrial Solutions	6
Participant 9	Marketing Director	Multinational Company	Analytics	22
Participant 10	Partner	Consultancy Company	Digital	10

Participant 1: works for a B2B firm that is a global supplier of technology and services, in the business sector of Industrial Technology. What emerged from the interview is that adopting a Digital Transformation strategy has become necessary for firms to survive in the business landscape, nonetheless, being ready to the changes brought by the Digital Transformation is key and helps spread the transformation among all the firm's functions. Digital technologies have brought closer firms and their customers, simplifying their relationship, especially in the awareness phase of the customer journey. Several tools like platforms and shared clouds help the consultancy the firm offers to its customers. Moreover, these tools facilitate the measurement of the customer satisfaction, both in qualitative and in quantitative terms. Indeed, as any tool, is crucial to have the ability to master the use of digital technologies and understand how they can be impactful in terms of performance, otherwise they can be seen as an obstacle.

Participant 2: is the CEO of a holding that controls a group of firms active in the oil and energy industries. Insights from the interview are that what helped the firms the interviewee handles is the level of digital infrastructure they have and that the Digital Transformation is penetrating every business process. What influence the pervasiveness of the digital technologies are the firm's products, the industry, and the positioning of the firm. In terms of the customer sphere, emerged that every type of purchasing process is going through a digitalization, being digital the initial touchpoint or all the process. In the B2B sector create a valuable and efficient customer experience through digital technologies is becoming as important as offering a good product or service, it is indeed the key to create interest, attraction, and retention. Measuring the customer experience means having a continuous monitoring of the needs, expectations and satisfaction of the customer and is the driver in the implementation of every type of strategies inside our business. The adoption of the digital technologies has become a strategic element in terms of competitiveness and the interviewee's organization is constantly in research of which type of process can better benefit from them. An example is how digital technologies can help the marketing department to better communicate the real value of the offering.

Participant 3: is a manager in a global capital goods company specializing in equipment and services for Agriculture and Construction. In the interviewee's opinion the process of Digital Transformation is quite uneven inside the business world and it is going at different speeds, for example in the interviewee's company considering the business to client sphere the Digital Transformation was quite slow and happened just in the last three years. One perk of adopting digital technologies, like sharing and work planning tools, is the ease of exchange information with clients in real time, that makes everyday tasks more efficient. Moreover, implementing digital technologies in the products have make them always connect with the client; this connectivity between the company and the customers improved the support service of the company. Regarding the customer journey, the interviewee think that digital technologies have eased the initial phases, the first contact between the firm and the customer has been easier thanks to the digital tools. In terms of measuring the customer experience work is still to be done, but digital technologies solutions are entering the panorama of possibilities, for example exploiting the connectivity of the products to download data about usage and satisfaction. This also helps the performance, because having data in real time about how your customers are satisfied and are using the products, avoids slowdown in production. An insight about the digitalization of the purchasing process is that in the B2B industry most products aren't suitable for a complete process of digital selling. This is due to the type of products but also to the relational aspect of the selling process, where the network of people involved is high in numbers and rely a lot on their personal experiences and instincts. The digital technologies help the customer-firm relationship since they can be useful in the product marketing discipline, indeed digital channels have a major impact compared to traditional ones when a firm must engage with its customers.

Participant 4: is the General Manager of a packaging solutions company active in several B2B sectors. The company the interviewee is part of is going through a process of Digital Transformation that reflects the current trends and market requirements, and every aspect of the company's business is now impacted by the digital technologies. Our interviewee thinks that be ready for the novelty the Digital

Transformation brings is crucial, and what helped was to have equipment already suitable to implement connectivity tools and moreover to have an internal culture of openness to innovation, even if sometimes despite this are the technical constraints that make the Digital Transformation process complex. For this is important to be able to understand where and when digital technologies can help and investigate what the customers demand and how well they master digital tools. The use of connectivity tools also facilitated the sharing of information with clients and made the customer experience seamless. Digital technologies also brought closer customers to the firm, contributing in terms of deliver a better level of engagement. Considering the customer journey, this has been impacted by the process of Digital Transformation in the awareness and consideration phase. About the measurement of customer satisfaction, in the B2B industry the listening of the customers happens through an exchange of technicalities information through which firms understand how satisfied their customers are. The codified process of analysis of parameters also boosts productivity and performance. What emerged regarding the marketing discipline is that digital technologies help the process of automation and improve the communication strategy of the company.

Participant 5: is the founder and CEO of an organization working in the B2B sector. What arise from the interview is that digital technologies are essential for the competitiveness of the firm. These technologies have a direct impact on the customer journey, especially in the first phases of awareness and consideration. Nonetheless, all the purchasing process is contaminated with the use of digital tools that make it seamless. Data collection is important to have a profound knowledge of the level of satisfaction of the customers. In the B2B context, data collection is well deal with, the problem is how the data are managed: is critical to know how to transform data in useful information.

Participant 6: is the General Manager of a leader company in the design and production of advanced composite materials components, active in diverse B2B sectors. The interviewee's opinion is that the Digital Transformation process is taking place fast and for companies to exploit it there is the need of qualified people

who understand the potentiality of the digital technologies in terms of what advantage they can bring to the customers and to the company's performance. What boost the implementation of the Digital Transformation process in the interviewee's company was also the types of needs and requests coming from the customers. To satisfy the customers in relation to the type of information and assistance they demand, tools like digital sharing platforms were implemented. Digital technologies have helped the interviewee's firm both in the customer-firm relationship and in measuring the performance and improve it. Customer experience measurement is done thank to the digital platforms that gain all kind of information regarding how the customers are using the products and are very specific in evaluating different parameters regarding the level of satisfaction of several aspects of the products. Thanks to the implementation of the Digital Transformation process the speed of operational tasks increased, as well as the decisional process that has become more branched, even though is not always easy for people inside the organization to accept it. Is important to educate people to understand the potentiality of the digital technologies and to learn how to leverage on them in relation to the business as well as the customer sphere. Is the interviewee opinion that digital technologies like IoT and digital interconnection are suitable for organizations with a high level of automation in their processes.

Participant 7: is the CEO of an organization that engage with B2B customers. Insights from the interviewee are that when it comes to the Digital Transformation process, the company's dimensions or industry play a minor role. Digitalization demands for information access and is changing how decisions are taken, considering customers' needs in relation to the implementation of a digital strategy. Regarding how the Digital Transformation is influencing the B2B customer experience, is the interviewee's opinion that every aspect of the customer journey is impacted by the digitalization: what was happening in physical spaces now is partially shift to the digital ones, is thus fundamental to consider the journey in the totality of its touchpoints, both physical and digital that need to be coordinated. As for the measurement of the customer satisfaction, the digital technologies have contributed making it more frequent, easier, and efficient, and if it is integrated with other data



can provide better insights about how well a firm is engaging with its customers. Moreover, an example is to measure the level of usage of a product, that can indirectly give you insights about the level of satisfaction. Data collection helps in the B2B industry to improve a service, reducing costs; indeed, interconnection has the purpose of make processes more lean, fast, and efficient.

Participant 8: works in the marketing area of a world leader company in the production of technical solutions for furniture. What emerged from the interviewee is that the Digital Transformation is a process that brought several opportunities to organizations, although benefit from it depends on how they and the market they are in are ready. In the interviewee's company Digital Transformation has impacted all areas of the business process: from the design of the products (thanks to Artificial Intelligence tools) to how they engage with customers. In terms of measure customer experience, it is critical to do it in the B2B context even though sometimes is difficult since collecting feedbacks is more complicated when you deal with other firms instead of the final consumer. Nonetheless, digital technologies helped in the definition of all the touchpoints in the purchasing process. It is important to understand how evolved the customer in terms of digitalization is to implement and exploit the right digital technologies. Since the application of a Digital Transformation process the interviewee's firm had a small but constant growth in terms of performance. Digital technologies improved the purchasing process, given that they help assist a higher number of customers simultaneously. Data collection has become easier thank to the digital tools, the problem is learning how data can really help making rational decision and that the data are the representation of customer's needs and level of satisfaction. Is critical to learn how to use the digital tools, indeed, depending on how they are used they may bring different results.

Participant 9: is a Marketing Director of a leader company in Analytics, Software, Artificial Intelligence, and Data Management. Grasps from the interview are that the Digital Transformation process in the B2B context pervaded all types of companies, the difference is in the time necessary to embrace the process that in big and resourceful companies was less compared to small firms. Regarding the customer

experience's measurement is important to implement it also in qualitative terms, being able to listen the customer and understand in which phase of the journey digital technologies may help. That is important because in the interviewee's experience sometimes customers are willing to commit to a digital relationship but don't have the expertise necessary, an organization then can help adapting to the customer's need. The digitalization of the purchasing process is the normality nowadays, although is critical for firms to engage expertly with the customer. Is the interviewee's opinion that is not enough to implement digital technologies, but a deep understanding of how to use digital tools and of the justification behind their use is necessary.

Participant 10: is a partner of a B2B consulting company. From the interviewee emerged that what helped the implementation of the Digital Transformation process is for companies to be already oriented to the digital technology's panorama and the presence of digital products in the company's portfolio. Given that, companies of big dimensions have a competitive advantage regarding data collection, because they benefit from software or advanced data analysis methodologies. Big companies on the other hand may struggle with the adaptation to big transformation. Diagnostics, through data collection, helps understand the product's performance, its usage, and some insights regarding sales; Internet of Things indeed can help extract from this data the level of customer satisfaction. Data aggregation through dashboards has a big potentiality since you can get insights on customers' preferences, trends and level of satisfaction based on how they are using a product. Data collection in the B2B context can be easier compared to B2C, since in this last context you are considering a consumer with all sorts of dimensions, whereas in B2B the customer is just representing a firm. Data analysis is about the collection, the data quality and how data are managed. The analysis of the customer satisfaction in the B2B context is common and become interesting the more the supply chain is long, since it allows you to identify bottleneck, excellences, or slowdowns. In the interviewee's opinion customer satisfaction is about the level of usage of a product. The more information a company gives to the customer about how to use a product and the usage opportunities, the more they help in engage with

the customer. Customer satisfaction increase in relation to the services related to the product or service, and with this regard the Digital Transformation can certainly help improving this discipline. Digital technologies are a tool and thus is important how they are used: just the adoption doesn't guarantee a better performance, companies must ask the right questions and be able to extract information from the data collected. The interviewee believes that without digital tools a company has a competitive disadvantage, but just having a tool doesn't guarantee a company a competitive advantage. The Digital Transformation has strongly impacted the purchasing process that is the primer driver of the interviewee's company.



# 4. Data Analysis

## *Findings*

The purpose of this research, through the in-dept interviews with B2B practitioners, is shaped around the topics of how organizations engage with customers in the B2B sectors and how the purchasing process, in particular the journey a customer goes through, is embedded with digital technologies.

The interviews allowed us to understand how in the business environment the topics of this research are addressed. First, we focus on how the interviewees' organizations are addressing Digital Transformation, how further they are in the implementation process and which aspect of their businesses is impacting. Indeed, even though our goal is to study how the Digital Transformation is in relation with the customer experience, we found out that digital technologies have a strong connection with other dimensions inside a firm, for example the organizational aspect. Then, we investigate how the organizations of our sample are engaging with customers, both in terms of the everyday practical aspects and of how they measure customer satisfaction; specifically, we study how these concepts are digitalized and how digital technologies help in their better execution. Lastly, we deep dive into how implementing a Digital Transformation strategy and using the right digital tools in the customer-firm relationship can enhance competitiveness and performance, and moreover, how can increase the value perceived by the customers.

Our aim is to understand how digital technologies are helping B2B organizations in better engaging with customers and how considering the customers' needs is fundamental to adopt the right digital tools. Indeed, is important to determine how technology may alter the interactions between buyers and suppliers and within the firm between purchasing professionals and internal customers (Steward, 2019).

With the purpose of extract valuable insights from our interviews we adopt a comparative method in analyzing data, where the task is to compare one unit of

information with the next, looking for recurring regularities in the data (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). This method was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Data analysis consists in construct categories, also called themes or findings, that are abstractions derived from the data (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). This process in qualitative research is called coding and involves assigning key words to some sort of set of data to classify them.

What follows is a series of table representing the main insights from the interviews. Grasps from the interviews are categorized and coded in the tables below.

**Table 7: How organizations engage with customers exploiting digital technologies**

	<b>Customer Journey</b>	<b>Measure of Customer Satisfaction</b>	<b>Purchasing Process</b>
<u>Participant 1</u>	Digital technologies help in the awareness phase	Digital tools as facilitators in measuring customer satisfaction, both in qualitative and quantitative terms	
<u>Participant 2</u>		Fundamental to have a constant measurement of needs and expectations	It is inevitably going through digitalization, sometimes just the first touchpoint or the entire process
<u>Participant 3</u>	Digital technologies had	Connectivity aided by the	In the B2B context most products are

	eased the initial phase, the first contact between customers and organizations	Digital Transformation improved the support service of firms, with the possibility to download data about usage and satisfaction	not suitable for a complete process of digital selling
<u>Participant 4</u>	Digital technologies brought customers and firms closer, delivering better level of engagement and contributing to the awareness and consideration phases	Digital technologies helped the process of automation, that in turn improved the measurement of customer satisfaction through data collection (technicalities information)	
<u>Participant 5</u>	Direct impact on the awareness and consideration phases of digital technologies	Through data collection	Digital tools to make seamless the purchasing process
<u>Participant 6</u>		Is done thanks to digital platforms that gather information about how the products are used and evaluate parameters regarding diverse level of satisfaction	

<p><u>Participant 7</u></p>	<p>Every steps is impacted by the digitalization. Importance to coordinate all touchpoints, both online and offline.</p>	<p>Digital technologies have made it more frequent, easier and efficient. Data about usage can be combined to understand the level of satisfaction</p>	
<p><u>Participant 8</u></p>	<p>Digital technologies helped defined all the touchpoints</p>	<p>Difficulty of collecting feedbacks and of traceability since both the company and the customers have to be digital advanced</p>	<p>Improved by digital technologies, since it is possible to assist more customers at the same time</p>
<p><u>Participant 9</u></p>	<p>Essential of understand in which phase digital technologies may help</p>	<p>Importance of the qualitative measure of satisfaction</p>	<p>Digitalization of the purchasing process is normality, is important to learn how to engage with customers</p>
<p><u>Participant 10</u></p>		<p>Can be assessed through IoT tools that extract from data about usage and sales the level of satisfaction</p>	<p>Impacted by digital tools in its whole</p>



**Table 8: How Digital Transformation is embedded in organizations**

	<b>Customer- sphere factors influencing DT</b>	<b>Value added by DT (in terms of competitiveness)</b>	<b>Impact on performance of DT</b>
<u>Participant 1</u>			X
<u>Participant 2</u>		X	X
<u>Participant 3</u>			X
<u>Participant 4</u>	X		X
<u>Participant 5</u>		X	
<u>Participant 6</u>	X		X
<u>Participant 7</u>	X		X
<u>Participant 8</u>	X		X
<u>Participant 9</u>	X		
<u>Participant 10</u>		X	X

**Table 9: Factors influencing the implementation of the Digital Transformation and its success**

	<b>Organizational impact of DT</b>	<b>Importance of Data</b>	<b>Importance of how to use Digital Technologies</b>	<b>Impact of readiness of companies for DT implementation</b>
<u>Participant 1</u>	X	X	X	X
<u>Participant 2</u>	X			X
<u>Participant 3</u>	X			
<u>Participant 4</u>	X			X
<u>Participant 5</u>		X	X	X
<u>Participant 6</u>	X	X	X	X
<u>Participant 7</u>	X	X		
<u>Participant 8</u>	X	X	X	X
<u>Participant 9</u>	X			X
<u>Participant 10</u>	X	X	X	X

**Table 10: Digital Transformation and value added in the B2B customer experience**

	<b>What is value proposition in the B2B customer experience</b>	<b>How digital technologies support value creation</b>
<u>Participant 1</u>	Have a seamless experience in the relationship between organizations and customers	Helping firms be present in the consultancy activity in support of the purchase
<u>Participant 2</u>	Being able to create an engaging experience	Being the foundation upon which the points of contact with customers are built
<u>Participant 3</u>	Product's connectivity that facilitates the post-selling phase	/
<u>Participant 4</u>	/	/
<u>Participant 5</u>	/	Contributing to the sharing of information between organizations and customers
<u>Participant 6</u>	B2B customers require process control	Interconnection leading to support service from remote
<u>Participant 7</u>	Have a seamless, faster and efficient experience	Digital technologies facilitate the organizational aspects, thus easing how the firm's offer is delivered
<u>Participant 8</u>	/	/

<p><u>Participant 9</u></p>	<p>For B2B customers is important to be truly engaged in the purchasing process</p>	<p>Digital technologies contribute to value proposition if a firm is able to combine its use of digital technologies with customer's use and needs</p>
<p><u>Participant 10</u></p>	<p>Customer satisfaction is the satisfaction linked to the usage of a product and the services related to the product, is about engagement</p>	<p>Help in the assistance activity, regarding the servitization of the firm's offer</p>

The main findings that we found analyzing data and recurring insights from the interviews are summarized in the next paragraphs.

First, we want to focus on which dimensions of an organization are the most impacted by the process of Digital Transformation. We found that across all the interviews' organizations the organizational aspect is affected by the evolution of digital technologies and by the implementation of the Digital Transformation tools. In particular many of the interviewees agree on how adopting sharing tools helps the organizational aspect of the business. With sharing tools are to be intended digital platforms mutual with customers, where they can place orders and make claims, and internal tools to share information between departments and make faster information sharing. Moreover, the accessibility of the information produces a single flow of knowledge, thus increasing the efficacy and efficiency of the activities. In this regard a CEO with more than 30 years of experience in the B2B industry stated:

“We are looking to examine both internal industrial processes and organizational processes, identifying areas where a greater use of digital tools can increase process efficiency or improve effectiveness.”

- Participant 2

The implementation of digital technologies is not to be considered without its difficulties and constraints. Indeed, the Digital Transformation requires delegation, autonomy, and access to information. These concepts are not always easy to be accepted by the people working in B2B organizations; the difficulty consists in accepting a change in how the business is managed, with a higher number of decisional units and more people involved in decision making. Moreover, are the digital technologies per se that sometimes are not well welcomed inside an organization, because employees are attached to traditions and don't have trust in digital evolution. In this respect a General Manager from our sample infers that:

“It is a path that some internal people cannot follow, some people cannot make this change in management model. To them, it seems that they are losing efficiency in their operations; it is a false myth that times have been extended, the system goes much faster if decisions are made in a distributed manner.”

- Participant 6

It seems that the Digital Transformation process is not just a matter of production process, machines, and data. In the B2B context, the introduction of digital technologies is impacting the organizational side of companies, forcing them to rethink their structures. To support this idea, the Marketing Director of a multinational company declared:

“Lateral organization or companies that work by network or team, are much more difficult to accept than vertical organization.”

- Participant 9

Second, with a better focus to the aim of this study, we found how the measure and the level of customer satisfaction are enhanced by digital technologies. Especially insights from the interviews point to the idea that the customer experience has been overwhelmed by digital technologies in the B2B context, for example the CEO of a B2B consultancy company said that:

“Digital technologies didn't just impact the customer journey or the customer experience, they really disrupted them.”

- Participant 7

Among all participants of our interviews emerged the idea that are the initial phases of the customer journey the ones that most undergo the impact of digital technologies. The awareness and consideration phases are enhanced by digital tools. In these stages a customer for the first time enters in contact with the offer of the firm and is when the sharing of information begins. The success of the first phases of the customer journey impacts the whole customer experience, thus the right use of digital technologies is critical. Two contributions from our sample can contribute to these assumptions:

“The use of connectivity tools facilitated the sharing of information with clients and made the customer experience seamless.”

- Participant 4

“The digitalization of the purchasing process is the new normal, what is important is to learn how to engage with customers.”

- Participant 9

Another concept related to the enhanced customer experience thanks to digital technologies is the level of engagement. Our interviewees recognized that digital tools could boost customer engagement, in particular:

“Digital technologies brought customers and firms closer, delivering better level of engagement and contributing to the awareness and consideration phases.”

- Participant 4

Moreover, insights from the interviews point out to the fact that connectivity and automation aided by the Digital Transformation improve both the level of measure of customer satisfaction and the support service of firms. Particularly, data collection allows to gather technical information and data about usage that in turn help a better understanding of customers. Indeed, as emerged from the interviews:

“Data about usage can be combined to access the level of customer satisfaction.”

- Participant 7

The third finding extract from the analysis of the interviews is that the competitiveness and performance of B2B organizations are improved using digital technologies. This is true whether companies understand which the right digital tools are to adopt, in terms of their business activities and even more in relation with what customers need and demand. Is not enough to follow the trend of adopting digital technologies, what is critical is to learn how in the customer-firm relationship these technologies can have an impact and improve the relationship itself. With this regard, we can consider the contribution of the General Manger of a B2B company:

“The Digital Transformation allowed companies to maintain a closer and faster management control of the company's vital parameters that directly affect the commercial budget.”

- Participant 4

To this matter, eight over ten interviewees agreed upon the idea that the Digital Transformation impacts the firm's performance; and five over ten stated that the success of a Digital Transformation strategy is related to the implementation of the right tools and their correct use. Indeed:

“You need to know how to use digital tools. Adopting the tool doesn't guarantee you the best performance, you need someone to ask the right questions and gather information from the data. Without tools, you have a competitive disadvantage, but the tool alone does not guarantee you an advantage.”

- Participant 10

What we can infer from our interviews is that digital technologies can be a strategic tool. They can increase process efficiency or improve effectiveness. This is especially true if we consider the phenomenon of interconnectivity, that in the B2B context is related to the interconnection of machineries. To this regard a Manager of a Multinational Corporation affirmed that:

“A prime example is having a machine that is sold with a service connection. At the B2B level that means you don't have a slowdown in production.”

- Participant 3

Finally, from the interviews emerged the idea that digital technologies support the value proposition offered by a firm. Specifically, this is real regarding the value perceived by customers in the level of service related to the firm's offer. Insights from the interviewees support the belief that digital servitization is helping companies to remain competitive and is enabling value creation. In particular:

“To satisfy the customers in relation to the type of information and assistance they demand, tools like digital sharing platforms were implemented.”

- Participant 6

“The connectivity between the company and the customers improved the support service of the company.”

- Participant 3



**Table 11: Main findings of this study**

<b>Key aspects analyzed</b>	<b>Findings</b>
Dimensions of the firm impacted by the Digital Transformation	Digital sharing tools to improve the organizational activities, both internally and with customers. Digital technologies enable efficiency in how information is shared, thus boosting efficacy; moreover, they require delegation and autonomy, that in turn enforce a change in the management model.
Customer related aspects embedded with digital technologies	Digital technologies improve the way of measuring customer satisfaction and the level of satisfaction itself. Regarding the customer journey: the awareness and consideration have been disrupted by the implementation of the Digital Transformation tools, that enable the sharing of information and enhance customers engagement; it is critical to understand which are the right tools, considering both the firm's offer and the customers' needs and level of adoption of digital technologies.

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How the Digital Transformation  
enhance performance and  
competitiveness

Digital technologies impact the customer-firm relationship, bringing closer customers to organizations and making easier the control of vital parameters of the firm. This translates in better performances and in a competitive advantage for B2B organizations. Digital technologies are to be considered as a strategic tool.

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Value proposition supported by digital  
technologies

Value's perception in terms of the service offered together with the firm's proposition is enhanced by digital technologies. This concept translates into the phenomenon of digital servitization, that is shaping the B2B value creation process.

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# *Discussion of Data and Theoretical Implications*

Findings points out how the Digital Transformation relates to the business activity of B2B organizations, how its implementation is gaining importance in this industry and which aspects of a firm are most impacted by digital technologies. Moreover, through the data analysis from our interviewees we were able to study the relation that the adoption of a Digital Transformation strategy has with the customer sphere activities in the B2B context. In particular, data from our study point to the contribution that adopting a Digital Transformation strategy has regarding the firm's performance and competitiveness and to the value creation, through digital servitization.

In this section we aim to theorizing our findings. Theorizing is defined by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) as *"the cognitive process of discovering or manipulating abstract categories and the relationships among those categories"*. The purpose of this study is the analysis of the relationship between the Digital Transformation and the customer experience and its related activities in the B2B context. What we expected from our interviews was a grasp on how this relationship works in the B2B industries. Based on previous literature we formulated the hypothesis at the basis of this research, and thanks to the interviews and the following data analysis we can suggest some theoretical implications.

It appears that digital technologies are bringing closer organizations and customer, sellers, and buyers, making it the purchasing process seamless and more efficient. Nonetheless, is important to consider the complexity of the purchasing process in the B2B context and how the dynamics of customer engagement work. The coordination between the firm's activities and the customer's demand is fundamental and moreover is critical to acknowledge how to integrate the implementation of digital technologies inside a B2B company with its customers

availability to embrace these tools. Indeed, the risk is that technological advances may mean that buyers and suppliers end up with a collection of unique programs that do not integrate with one another, resulting in a cumbersome and frustrating buying process (Steward, 2019). In addition, while developing a B2B analytics solution, researchers should embrace the distinctive factors of B2B markets, such as complexity and length of the buying process (Lillien, 2016). With this regard, some of the interviewees point out the possibility that digital technologies can be ambiguous and sometimes their implementation is hard and requires time. We believe that there is the need for further understanding of how digital technologies really boost the firm's offer and processes, rather than complicate the processes, both internal and external.

Moreover, digital technologies are considered as a strategic tool and like any tool they should be implemented in the right way and in relation to the firm's possibility and objectives. The customer acceptance of the introduction of digital technologies in the business transaction should also be considered. At the organizational level sometimes there can be constraints too in the acceptance of a Digital Transformation strategy; from our interviewees emerged that is not just a matter of the potential to adopt digital tools, but also of how people inside the organization are willing to embrace them. About this matter, Avlonitis and Panagopoulos (2005) affirmed that at the organizational level there can be relevant obstacles or enablers for the implementation of digital technologies, thus training is important to get people to accept them.

In relation to value creation and how its influenced by the adoption of digital technologies, it seems that they contribute to the phenomenon called digital servitization. Indeed, in the B2B context the value of the service added to the firm's offer has always been recognized as fundamental. With the introduction of digital services and products, and with the digitalization of several processes in the B2B context that involve the customers, the importance of services has increased. Customers sometimes are to be guided into the embracing of digital purchasing process, and even if they are willing to adhere to the organization digital offering it can be that they need to be offered a surplus to be truly committed to it; this

translates into the concept of digital servitization. This changes the whole value proposition and disrupt the organizational dimension of B2B companies. Indeed, Digital Transformation activities leverage digital technology in re-defining an organization's value proposition and involves the emergence of a new organizational identity (Wessel et al., 2021). Further support to this implication can be found in Gillpatrick's article about the Digital Transformation of Marketing, where he stated that "*we are now in a third wave of digital disruption that affects the consumer's purchasing process and in which firms use new ways to capture consumer value, and in which only firms who adapt their business model can survive*". It is reasonable to assume that B2B companies nowadays should focus not only on the selling mechanism but also on the assistance aspect of it, in this sense the discipline of Content Marketing finds its way, Holliman and Rowley (2014) support the idea that this discipline is possibly shifting the paradox from selling to helping.



# Contributions and Practical Implications

This study contributes to the literature about the Digital Transformation process and customer experience in the B2B setting. Indeed, we investigated how some B2B organizations are dealing with the implementation of the Digital Transformation technologies, especially, through the interviews we shed light on which difficulties B2B practitioners are facing and which aspects of their business activities are the most embedded with digital technologies. We found that the management of the customer-sphere has been disrupted by the Digital Transformation, in particular the customer engagement since customers are demanding in terms of what they expect to be the digital related services offered by the firm.

Our practical suggestion is for B2B practitioners to start analyzing consumer's behavior and expectations before adopting digital technologies, to be able to choose the more suitable both in terms of the firm's activities and objective and most important the ones that integrate well with their customers. A deep understanding of the next trends in customer experience and its management in the B2B context is critical. Is not enough anymore to master digital tools, since they are becoming more numerous and accessible to everyone; to remain competitive in the business landscape B2B organizations should find ways to exploit digital technologies in order to differentiate. B2B customers need to be engaged and assisted, and digital technologies in this matter can contribute.

This research also contributes to the literature about B2B Marketing, specifically to the discipline of customer relationship and value creation. Following Tukker's research, digital servitization helps building a strong and long-lasting customer relationship that in turn means to find a way to deliver them the right value proposition. This study contributes to the idea that in the B2B context a high level of assistance related to the firm's offer is required and even more so in relation to

the digital technologies that organizations are introducing also in the management and deliver of the customer experience. Through our interviews we found that despite the common belief, the B2B industry is ready to embrace digital tools and the innovation of the purchasing process brought by the Digital Transformation.

Our practical suggestion about this matter is the urge to create awareness among B2B employees and customers. For a Digital Transformation strategy to be successful is not enough for a company to acquire the right tools and master them, but there is the urge to create an internal culture among all the departments of the firm in order to reach a shared level of understanding of the importance and possibility of the Digital Transformation. Moreover, in the B2B context we found that the speed of adoption of digital technologies is not homogeneous thus sometimes is difficult for customers to appreciate the firm's innovation in terms of digital offers and the use of digital technologies in their relationship with customers. A practical implication that emerged from this study is the need to educate customers and inform them of the possibility and advantages that the Digital Transformation brings. Firms can take the responsibility to do that, since if customers have a full understanding of the digitalization of the business activities, the purchasing process, and the customer experience, they will more easily embark with the firm's offer and value proposition. In general, there is the urge of an integration of the firm's vision and the customer's needs. Indeed, investigation is needed into how suppliers can more effectively integrate technology across a vast array of customer technology requirements (Steward, 2019).

Lastly, this study contributes to investigate how evolved B2B organizations are in adoption of digital technologies and how is going the implementation process. Certainly, for a company to be predisposed to the implementation of digital technologies, in terms of monetary possibility, human resources and prediction of future market needs, is a key advantage. Our empirical suggestion is for B2B companies to remain updated about the latest business trends and invest on their relationship with customers since it serves as a fuel for all the next business objectives and activities.



# Conclusion

This research study proposed to shed light on the current situation of the process of Digital Transformation in the B2B context and how it implies a connection with the customer experience discipline. In particular we focused on what is necessary for a Digital Transformation strategy to succeed in B2B organizations, in terms of resources, human capabilities and vision. Indeed, we have suggested that for the success of Digital Transformation in today's B2B context it is necessary to assume a customer-centric strategy, focusing on what customers need and demand. Even more so we investigate about how selecting what digital technologies to implement is a choice that should be based on the customer journey and on what kind of experience the organization wish to offer. The participants of our interviews agreed that digital technologies can be key in the initial phases of the customer journey, to increase the awareness.

Our findings point to the fact that having a deep understanding of how the purchasing process works and how it is impacted by digital technologies can help B2B organizations to implement these technologies in order to maximize the level of customer satisfaction. Moreover, digital tools through data collection help in the measure of customer satisfaction, that in turn lead to an improvement of the firm's performance. One of the themes that emerged from this analysis is that digital technologies enable the value creation in B2B organizations, since this is related to the level of services offered with the firm's products. This last finding is consistent with previous literature about digital servitization, where we found the shared thought that this discipline enables value creation and enhances the relationship with customers.

The findings of this study are in line with existent research about Digital Transformation where is suggested that for its implementation to succeed organizations should follow the direction of Customer Engagement. To some extent our findings are in contrast with previous literature in the sense that we discovered

that integration between the customers and the organization implementation of digital technologies is key to both actors involved in the B2B context. Indeed, customers will benefit from the digital offers and services of firms if they have the knowledge and capacity to embrace them; and organizations on their end could benefit from this situation since the level of customer satisfaction will grow and in turn so will the firm's performance.

This study appears to support the argument for a change in how the implementation of digital technologies is handled in B2B organizations. Indeed, is it not enough to have the resources to implement digital tools, but a further and deep understanding of how these technologies can enhance the firm's performance is fundamental. Especially is important to adopt a customer-centric view to learn how a Digital Transformation strategy can be successful and add value to the firm's offer.

This analysis has taken a broad approach to the relationship that the Digital Transformation has with the customer experience in the B2B context. Given that, one avenue for further study would be to research into the specific connection that the implementation of a specific digital tool, like Artificial Intelligence or Virtual Reality, has with the level of customer satisfaction or engagement. Moreover, it is also relevant to investigate about how the concept of value proposition is changing in the B2B context due to digital technologies.

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