Hidden Power:

Content Marketing as a part of the global strategies of Western companies in the Russian environment

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Abstract

International companies face many challenges when operating in foreign country markets, as a new environment could be absolutely opposite to the one of the home market, which the companies are used to. One of the biggest issues for a company in the foreign market is to understand how to market its product and make it more appealing to the audience.

This research is aimed at studying content marketing strategy as a new trend and a part of marketing strategy of an organization. Particularly, the main focus of this research is to investigate the process of building content marketing strategy of Western firms in the Russian environment. During the study, a few questions are illuminated, such as what steps are undertaken in order to manage a sound content marketing strategy and how the characteristics of Russian consumers influence the decision making and to what extent.

The paper studies all these issues by the qualitative approach, presenting data and insights acquired through interviews with four Western companies, operating in Russia: Burger King, Johnson & Johnson, The Coca-Cola Company and Visa Inc. The analysis of the findings is done, comparing the experience of the companies with each other, which enables the authors to extract general patterns for content marketing strategy in Russia in terms of strategy building and consumer orientation and comparing empirical data with theoretical knowledge gained after the examination of the theory.

The paper concludes giving answers to the research question and generalizing the analysis, as well as presenting the revised conceptual model. Later on, the main limitations of this study are mentioned and the suggestions for future research are stated to develop the understanding of content marketing strategy.

Keywords

Content marketing strategy, content marketing, content marketing steps, content marketing pyramid, consumer orientation, consumer features, consumer behavioural model, Western companies, Russian environment.
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1. Introduction

This chapter provides the reader with the foundation of the research conducted by the authors, giving the overview of the present work. Introducing the content marketing as a part of the global business strategy of companies, the chapter unveils the history of the phenomenon, gives the broad discussion of its definition, and shows its value in the modern business practices. Further, a research gap is defined after the analysis of current research knowledge, according to which a research question is formulated, along with the purpose of the research. Lastly, the outline of the thesis is provided to give the content of the study.

1.1 Background

Development of content marketing

For many years companies tried to promote their brands through storytelling to attract potential customers and retain their loyalty. Indeed, content creation took place long before the industrial development or the emergence of the science, when the ancient cave picture was found loosely interpreted as “six ways a spear can save you from a wild boar” (Content Marketing Institute, 2016). However, the very first published example of content marketing is considered to be Benjamin Franklin’s first Poor Richard’s Almanack in 1732. Except for offering a mixture of seasonal weather forecasts, practical household hints, puzzles, and other amusements the goal was simply to promote his printing business. Another bright example is The Edison Electric Lighting Company Bulletin published in 1882, which described the advantages of electric lighting (Engineering, 2017). However, everyone credits John Deere’s The Furrow magazine as the first genuine example of content marketing. The magazine was aimed not to advertise John Deere equipment, but to educate farmers on new technology and show them how they can make their farms more effective (ibid.).

Since then, companies have been promoting their goods through similar sources using similar methods. In 1950-s the world witnessed the magazine revolution and the rise of television, which big companies benefited from by creating thematic TV shows and magazines. Nevertheless, the modern history of this phenomenon started in 1996 when the term “content marketing” was first coined by John F. Oppedahl,
former Executive Editor of Phoenix Newspapers, Inc., on an annual meeting of
American Society for Newspaper Editors (Roundtable, 1996). This is considered to
be a starting point when content marketing was separated and became an individual
subject of the marketing strategy of a company. Therefore, there was a need for
research in this field and a group of leading custom publishers came up with the idea
of creating their own division for the purpose of organizing meetings and events,
conducting research and educating the wider marketing industry about custom
publishing (The Content Council, 2017). They created Custom Publishing Council,
later transformed to the Content Council. Now, according to the Content Marketing
Association (2017), the industry body for content marketing, content marketing is
defined as the discipline of creating quality branded content across all media
channels and platforms to deliver engaging relationships, consumer value and
measurable success for brands.

In recent years, the usage of content marketing has become popular among various
companies more than ever, as far as it keeps up with the digital, fast moving, and
information-driven world (Content Marketing, 2011). Youtube, Facebook, Instagram, Google+, Snapchat, Twitter and many more websites and e-blogs deliver
much less challenging and less resource consuming content to the customers,
attracting the audience’s attention to certain companies and retaining its loyalty
towards them (Scott, 2012). A great number of physical and logistical hurdles to
create and disseminate great content are gone.

Another global recent trend, which is reflected in content marketing, is the increase
of the importance of individuality. Being expressed in the marketing messages and
stories, which stir people’s individual beliefs, feelings, opinions and emotions,
content marketing is less focused on the cost and product details and more focused
on the customer experience (Bergeron, 2014). By utilizing content marketing, brands
cater campaigns around buying patterns and personalities.

Content marketing has proved to have a positive contribution to the competitiveness
of companies’ international marketing strategies. That is why more and more
companies integrate content marketing activities in their strategies. According to the
B2C Content Marketing Research conducted in 2017 (Content Marketing Institute,
2017), 74% of B2C Marketers have a content marketing strategy (Figure 1).
Figure 1. Percentage of B2C Marketers Who Have a Content Marketing Strategy

Source: Content Marketing Institute (2017)

In spite of the fact that as it was mentioned above, the phenomenon of content marketing has been gaining momentum since the revolution of television and the boom of magazines and newspapers in 1950, starting to be integrated in companies’ marketing strategies, the term itself started spreading only in 2011 after the first Content Marketing World conference (Cohen, 2016).

There are still many discussions about what content marketing is, what results in the existence of various definitions of this phenomenon. Pulizzi and Yoegel (2012, p.21) argue that the definition of this term can vary depending on those specialists, whom it is directed to. For example, content marketing can be defined as “a marketing process to attract and retain customers by consistently creating and curating valuable and relevant content in order to change or enhance a consumer behavior, to drive profitable customer action”, focusing more on the effect this phenomenon has on consumers. Orienting on the functions of the companies, Jay Baer (2016, p.1) suggests that content marketing is “a device used by companies to educate, inform or entertain customers or prospects by creating attention or causing behavior that results in leads, sales or advocacy”. Differentiating content marketing from the advertising and social media communication content-marketers emphasize that content marketing is “the art and science of regularly sharing valuable information with target audience that aligns with and reinforces brand. It is communicating without selling, a give-and-you-shall receive approach to generate interest, attract
prospects, and build trust” (Harad, 2013, p.19). Justifying this definition, Blanchard (2011) states that content marketing is about “engaging consumers with the stuff they really want, in a way that serves your brand’s purposes and ideals, rather than just trying to jam your logo into their periphery. <...> It is helpfully providing an experience they want, instead of trying to distract them from the one they came for.” (Cohen, p.257, 2016). Generalizing, content marketing is considered as the creation and communication of the ideas and messages, a mindset, storytelling, to achieve the goals and perform the mission of the company without being overly promotional.

Russian environment

Being considered as a context of the present research, Russian environment represents the focus of the paper. Russia is the biggest country and one of the biggest economies in the world with more than 144 million people and more than USD 1.3 trillion GDP (Eurostat, 2016). As an emerging country, Russia is seen as a market of opportunities, where investments will be justified in the long-term perspective. Despite all the challenges, presented by the Russian government, law, or economic turbulence, it is still the largest market in Eastern Europe, which has a relatively low saturation of modern business (PwC, 2016). That is why Russia is a principal magnet for foreign investment and business presence.

Several years before the global recession in 2008, a Russian consumer class was formed, what served as an engine for growth for a few years (Verona, 2011). Western-style goods and services became popular with these Russian consumers, what made Russia a favorable environment for Western companies to be presented in and an attractive investment destination. Western companies had to respond to the growing demand quickly as the the market was becoming more saturated (Khrennikov, 2016).

The activity of Western companies on the Russian environment is of high interest as far as they represent the world with the developed economy, which is more and more targeting to the East, less developed, but which is full of opportunities for developing their global presence. (Rolfe et al., 1996).

In fact, recently, the Russian economy has been suffering the economic crisis and the living standards in the country were deteriorated by dumped crude oil price (on which the Russian economy is dependent to a large extent) and the political games,
which badly affect the economic prosperity of the country (The Economist, 2014). However, for now, Russian economy and business environment are recovering and new opportunities for Western companies are opening up (Khrennikov, 2016). Big retailers like Sweden’s IKEA Group and France’s Leroy Merlin SA have already made a decision to invest billions of dollars in building new stores and factories. The joint Russian-American enterprise Ford Sollers, in its turn, invested in the development and launching four new cars in Russia (Rapoz, 2016). According to Frank Schauff (2016), head of the European Business in Moscow, the situation of business disaster is changing now, as the ruble exchange rate has stabilized and Russian economy is forecast to return to growth soon and Russian consumers are gradually starting to emerge from hibernation after the recession. Forecaster claim that Russia is a promising market which Western companies should be in (Khrennikov, 2016).

1.2 Problem Discussion

Theoretical Problematization

Being considered as a relevant marketing trend, content marketing has been studied from different perspectives. The analysis of the literature about this domain enables to form the notion of the current research knowledge.

To begin with, experts explore content marketing and its strategies, what makes the content valuable, and consequently, what makes content marketing strategies competitive (Harad, 2013). They study content marketing metrics (Martin, 2016), develop guides to content marketing (Davis, 2013), investigate the correlation between content marketing and customer experience (Johnson, 2016) and how content marketing needs to be adapted to the environment saturated with the variety of contents (Del Rowe, 2016), analyse the experience of companies, which have successful content marketing strategies (Cramer, 2013). However, their articles look more like recommendations, inspiration, and instructions for the application by companies building their content marketing strategies.

Moreover, there is a certain number of research which limited the topic of content marketing by studying only a specific means of it. For example, Forouzandeh et al.
(2014) conducted their research concentrating on the Facebook social network, as the basis for companies to utilize their content marketing. Some articles include recent tendencies in content marketing. For instance, Joe Pulizzi (2012) discusses the transformation of content marketing. At the same time, other studies unveil new possible trends in content marketing, such as data journalism uncovered by Samuel (2015a). In the article, the author emphasizes that this form of reporting opens up new opportunities for companies willing to expand the portfolio of tools being used to implement their content marketing strategies. Broadening this topic in another paper, the author unveils how content marketers can tell better stories with data giving recommendations for specialists about the pattern of developing the content of the brand (Samuel, 2015b).

Content marketing has been studied as one of the ways social media can be used. For instance, Kumar et al. (2016) investigate the effect of firm-generated content in social media on customer behavior. The effect of three characteristics of marketing content such as valence, receptivity, and customer susceptibility was assessed and proved to be positive. However, their study focuses only on television advertising and e-mail communication as the means of distribution of companies’ content. Moreover, Saravanakumar and Sugantha Lakshmi (2012) discuss social media marketing as the way companies communicate with their customers, enhance the rate of association with the brand among customers and build brand equity. The authors compare different kinds of media according to the number of users and the perspectivity for their utilization by companies and come to the conclusion that social networks are the most promising ones as far as they have a viral effect on users.

Being connected with content marketing, viral marketing is explored along with other marketing strategies using social networks by Hartline et al. (2008). The authors explain the process of finding and attracting influential customers in social media, who can make other customers to follow their lead. Whilst, Botha and Reuneke (2013) have studied the correlation between the content of viral messages and emotions of people subject to joining the bandwagon proposed by the company. The authors focused on viral videos and concluded that emotional contagion results from the distribution of online content which generated emotional reactions in the consciousness of the viewers.
It is important to mention a widely researched field of corporate communication as far as being considered as a mode of business management (Lah et al., 2016), it is strongly related to the phenomenon of content marketing. Corporate communication is aimed at increasing the involvement in the co-creation of communicated meanings as well as spreading a common understanding through communication both internally and externally (Hübner, 2007). These are the goals shared by content marketing, which uses the same strategic tools of delivering the ideas, for example, social media (Kazaka, 2011; Vasquez and Velez, 2011). However, corporate communication is a more broad phenomenon than content marketing and includes corporate advertising and advocacy, communication with employees, government, investors and other shareholders (Argenti and Forman, 2002).

Another domain in marketing, which is correlated with content marketing, is public relations. This field is widely researched in terms of how it differs from traditional advertising (Wynne, 2016), as well as trends in public relations, for example, online public relations and its challenges (Phillips and Young, 2009). A variety of guides is provided for the public relations specialists, which contain tips for building a successful PR strategy in social media (Brown and Waddington, 2013), or in more traditional sources (Harris and Whalen, 2006). Such issues as cultural diversity influencing public relations strategy of a company have been raised by researchers (Devereux and Peirson-Smith, 2011), along with the role of public relations in the society (Halff and Gregory, 2015). Gregory and Halff (2017) examine in their study the association between public relations and sharing economy stating that public relations represent a ‘deliberatively disintermediated’ function, which generates ‘circuits of communication’ in the post-traditional economy. Nevertheless, public relations differ significantly from the content marketing. Namely, as stated previously, content marketing is about creating catchy content, which people would like to read and share unconsciously, while public relations is raising awareness of the brand and product targeting the audience through media more directly (Kim, 2015).

Moreover, different experts of Content Marketing Institute did write web articles giving useful information on what one should take into consideration when introducing content to the people of a different country (Arno, 2011). Mitchell (2014) explains the ways businesses prepare their content marketing strategy to
global environment to be competitive enough. The author introduces a plan, according to which a company first finds a professional translator with the expertise in country cultural sensitivities, humor, and even informal language, because it is necessary to make sure that the idea is clear for understanding. The next step is to assess the cultural differences between the home nation and the host nation. And finally, to find suitable ways of delivering the content as different people prefer different sources. In 2014, a founder and lead strategist at AG Integrated Marketing Strategists, Anthony Gaenzle, introduced five rules of a successful inception of alien content marketing to any country in the world. These rules described the importance of timing, targeting the right platform, rules, and regulations, cultural sensitivity and language issues. These articles present the guidance for managers, however, there is no scientific research available, which could support them. Therefore, there are neither correlations between the customer preferences in the host market and content marketing activities identified nor the patterns of building content marketing strategy in the foreign market.

*Empirical Problematization*

In the conditions of globalization, more enterprises seek for opportunities in foreign markets for their business expansion. As companies expand their international activities, they enter a number of different country markets, which lead them to adapt the strategy to each of them or standardize it. Together with the strategy developed previously for the home market they create an international strategy (Global Strategy, 2017). However, firms operate not only in the environment of opportunities, they constantly face threats. Under these circumstances, it is highly necessary to develop an appropriate international marketing strategy in order to compete with other firms while providing value to customers (Hollensen, 2016).

International marketing stands for identifying needs and wants of customers in different countries and cultures. It promotes the products, services or technologies and adjusts the utilization of firm’s resources in a certain way according to customer characteristics, competition, government policy and regulations and the broader economic, social, and political macro forces that shape the evolution of markets and their individuality (Keegan, 1999).
Content marketing strategy as a part of international marketing strategy, in fact, encompasses more than just human characteristics variables. The main challenge faced by marketers is that in order to succeed, they must know the customer concerns as well as modern societal trends in order to communicate information about their products, services or technologies adjusting to the behavioral, cultural, and many others features to enable the firm to gain competitive advantage (Bradley, 2005).

Content marketing has been gaining momentum lately as far as companies have had to integrate it into their global marketing strategies and go beyond the traditional marketing and advertising in order to attract highly sophisticated customers, who have become smarter and more intelligent. Nowadays, customers already know that they have the rights to choose what information to receive, in what kind of format this information is and whether to believe the content (Hipwell et al., 2013).

The reason why content marketing is the best long-term marketing strategy is not obvious but still worth being considered. First of all, the audience is no longer influenced by the major advertising methods. As a study of Custom Content Council indicates, more that 70 percent of the surveyed respondents stated that they prefer to get information about products from articles rather than from corporate advertisements such as commercials or product placement (Textbroker, 2017). Moreover, according to Cournoyer (2008), with the development of modern digital technologies, customers are able to look for a certain information and make a research themselves, which means that they can make better buying decisions (Cramer, 2013). Therefore, in order to deliver useful information, companies had to think over content creation strategy and make it a part of marketing strategy of the organization. Companies’ main aim is to create such content and control such message, which consumers wanted to find so that companies could lead them and nurture them down their own sales funnel (Cramer, 2013).

The reason why companies adjust to modern trends and choose a new path of attracting customers is a lower intensity of resource deployment, though it does not mean that content marketing needs few resources. As a matter of fact, the Internet-based ways of content creating are less time-consuming, way cheaper and more affordable especially for small businesses (Hungerford, 2017). That is why, many companies maintain their own blogs; publish white papers, ebooks, and infographics;
or produce videos to demonstrate their expertise. And despite it is considered to be cheap, the study by PR agency Waggener Edstrom Communications (2015) shows that 61 percent of the marketers witnessed increased sales after implementing a content marketing strategy.

As far as foreign markets are concerned, surprisingly, in the context of content marketing strategies, Russian environment has not been studied yet despite being an interesting and relevant market to conduct research on (Baltes, 2015). Developing market with high potential, which can provide companies with a great range of target groups, the Russian market is different from the others (Johanson, 2006). Although there is a research, explaining these differences and their importance in terms of international marketing strategies and marketing communication (Tsoy, 2005), there is still a need to investigate content marketing in Russian environment. Moreover, it is necessary to highlight that according to Ratsiburskaya et al. (2015), Russian consumers features are different, what creates additional interest in this research for managers of Western companies.

Research gap

The analysis of current literature suggested above enables to conclude that in spite of the fact that there is research on some aspects of content marketing and on some management and marketing domains connected with content marketing (Wong An Kee, 2015), there is still lack of scientific research based on empirical studies focusing on how companies build their marketing strategy in the foreign market, particularly in Russia, in terms of content creating and promoting the brand of the company as well as enhancing sales with no use of conventional marketing methods. Therefore, there is a research gap on content marketing strategy development in the foreign markets that is left open, in particular, in the context of Russian environment.

As it was argued before, Russian environment and Russian customers are different from ones from other countries. This causes a need for Western companies to develop a unique approach in terms of their international marketing strategy and automatically, content marketing strategy as a part of it. Therefore, it is crucial for managers to enhance the level of their knowledge concerning building competitive content marketing strategies for their companies’ activities in the Russian
environment so that they could successfully undergo all the steps during this process based on features of Russian customers.

1.3 Research Question

In view of the above-mentioned analysis of the current knowledge about the content marketing phenomenon and identified research gap, the present research will search for the answer to the following research question:

**How do Western companies build their content marketing strategies in the Russian environment?**

Therefore, in order to thoroughly discuss the ways Western companies develop their content marketing strategies in the Russian environment, the following two sub-questions need to be uncovered.

Sub-question 1: What steps are undertaken by Western companies during the process of building the content marketing strategy in the Russian environment?

Sub-question 2: How do features of Russian customers influence companies’ content marketing strategy?

The answers to these questions are supposed to make the research more profound and expand the knowledge of the investigated domain. Moreover, they will be a backbone for the study under discussion.

1.4 Purpose of the Research

The aim of this study is to investigate the process of building a content marketing strategy by Western companies in the Russian environment. In particular, to find out the steps undertaken by Western companies during this process in order to reach their customers and identify the influence of Russian customers’ features on companies’ content marketing activity.

The purpose of the research will be reached through the interviews of four Western companies conducting their business in the Russian environment and implementing their content marketing strategies there.
By underlying this strategy the research can be very effective to the study of content marketing, particularly global content marketing strategy. It can also be very useful for marketers and managers of companies which operate in the Russian environment or are intended to do so. The paper can facilitate manager decisions on strategy adjustments to the Russian environment and Russian people.

1.5 Thesis Outline

The research starts with the introduction, presenting the main concept, as well as the background following with problem discussion, research question as well as the purpose of the study. The second chapter is devoted to the theory, which builds the theoretical framework based on the academic literature for the further study. In chapter three the methodology is explained, namely, the research approach, strategy, method, the process of data collection. Following on from this, the results are reported, drawing on the findings from the data collection; leading to an analysis of the findings. The empirical data are analyzed based on the theoretical framework described in the theory chapter and the main trends and patterns are identified. Finally, the conclusion provides with the main outcomes of the research conducted as well as the framework revised according to them. Limitations of the study along with room for future research are suggested.
2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter provides the reader with a broad discussion of the process of building content marketing strategies according to the researchers. Namely, all the steps of content marketing cycle are described: understanding the audience, mapping the content, content creation, promotion, and measuring. Moreover, consumer orientation view is presented as a basis for content marketing strategy development.

2.1 Content Marketing Strategy

The Steps of Content Marketing

When it comes to describing content marketing strategy life cycle, many experts and experienced people propose different concepts and different steps. Content marketing life cycle was largely described, giving the idea of content marketing (Scoop, 2015, Chapin, 2010). However, in this research, the attention will be directed to so-called “conventional steps of successful content marketing”, which consists of Understanding the audience, Mapping the content to the sales cycle, Creating the content, Promoting, and Measuring it (Macdonald, 2015).

The first step of the strategy is to Understand the audience, or in other words, to conduct research, which enables to see the trends and patterns, which the content will utilize or will be oriented on. Basically, companies determine the current customer, find the potential customer and understand, who will find the content useful (Macdonald, 2015). After the proper data is acquired the customer profile is created, it is also known as “buyer personas” - certain people that will be more efficiently influenced by the content created. However, ideally, this step is done when the business is established since it is a part of the whole marketing strategy (Business 2 Community, 2016).

The second step is Mapping the content to the sales cycle. Marketers create content to meet the needs of the potential consumers at each stage and to help increase the interest among them (Macdonald, 2015). However, the time of launching the content should be carefully selected in order to get the most effective results from it. Content must be tailored to appeal to different groups of consumers and at different stages. For example, when the content is made before the launch of the product, it can be focused on familiarizing the audience with a certain issue, to create a demand for the
incoming product. A good case of this is Rexona, launching content campaign describing the existence of certain bacteria, to create a demand for brand new antibacterial antiperspirant (Rexona, 2017).

The third step is Creating different content that decision-makers seek to read. Content creation may be different based on what goals a company sets. For instance, content can be created to increase company’s brand awareness (ibid). The focus of the content is to promote company’s brand and make it famous among the audience. Traditional awareness content formats are blog post articles, white papers, educational webinars, and infographics (Deshpande, 2014). Content can also be aimed at helping potential customers to evaluate the brand and increase the number of marketing qualified leads (MQL), when a buyer is familiar with the brand understanding that the brand is a leader in this field, but still not ready to make a decision (Minsker, 2015). Evaluation content can be delivered through case studies, product webinars, video, and technology guides. Finally, content is created to turn a marketing qualified lead into a sales qualified lead (SQL). At this stage, the prospect is getting closer to making a decision and the content should make it easier to choose company’s product over a competitor’s one (ibid). Purchase content is delivered through implementation guides, free trials, and live demonstrations.

When sharing the content, companies provide their targeted audience with education, editorial or entertainment (Harad, 2013). Education is provided by teaching a complex concept in an easy-to-digest manner. It allows enhancing the consumers’ awareness of the phenomenon, about which they have the lack of knowledge. The content, in this case, is supposed to deliver this knowledge transforming complex practical issues into lifestyle and emotional topics. Editorials as a content mean presenting company’s own perspective. Company’s mission and its core values are presented as a message of the content in order to attract people, with whom this message will resonate, and share and promote company’s philosophy among them. Entertaining content, in its turn, acts as a source of enjoyment. Providing customers with entertaining content, companies make them associate their brand with fun and joy and keep coming back for getting more positive emotions (ibid.).

The fourth and probably the most important step is Promotion because even if a firm creates a masterpiece content, it will not touch anyone or attract someone’s attention
if it is not seen by the audience. If a blog post is published, it is shared on every social network with a blurb and an image that inspires the appropriate audience to click through to consume the content (Business 2 Community, 2016). Some researchers distinguish publishing from promotion, but in fact, publishing can only be referred to the written content and not live content such as seminars. Later on, in the subpart Content Marketing Pyramid the content formats, distribution methods and channels used for promotion of the content will be described more thoroughly.

Finally, marketers Measure and Analyse the effect, the influence that the content has on the audience. It is not hard to work on, however, not everyone measures the performance of the content and analyze its progress. The measurement can be done through elementary systems, which track the number of visitors, views, shares and keywords as well as advanced systems, which collect more sophisticated data, for example, the attitude towards a certain campaign or the impact of a certain article among the audience (Macdonald, 2015).

Content Marketing Pyramid

When creating content, marketers face the challenge of choosing its format and the way it will be delivered to the customer. Today’s business environment encompasses a great variety of means using which companies can reduce time and efforts spent on developing new content (Deshpande, 2014). In order to systematize the process of promoting the content and get the most value out of each piece of content, content marketing company Curata (2017) has introduced The Content Marketing Pyramid illustrated below (Figure 2).
The Content Marketing Pyramid

The Pyramid is defined as “development of content and related assets intended to reinforce common messages/themes through multiple content formats, distribution methods, and promotion channels across owned, earned, and paid media” (Content Marketing Pyramid, 2017, p.24). The Pyramid combines various parts of the organization as far as all of them contribute to the content marketing strategy of the company, and together, they create consumable content out of conceptual marketing themes.

The Content Marketing Pyramid contains five levels of content, each of which accounts for certain content formats distributed via multiple channels. The concept of the Pyramid is based on the process when marketers take ‘big idea’ and divide it into a structured set of actionable assets. Thereby, although each asset accomplishes its own mission, what makes a content marketing strategy more flexible, all assets are interconnected and focused on achieving a common goal (Deshpande, 2014).

The Pyramid contains five levels organized into three main parts. The first one is based on the top of the model and represents the core content of the firm embracing company’s vision, values, mission and thought leadership. Being the foundation for further content development, the organization of this level requires much investment.
and effort as far as other assets are created out of it (Refsland, 2016). At this level, content can be presented in different formats, namely: print books, eBooks, guides, and long-form video. Other levels (assets), in their turn, are intended to drive customers to this core content.

Levels 2, 3 and 4 compose the group of derivative assets, which distil major information and messages and form more concrete and confined pieces of content. They are aimed at reaching a wider audience by satisfying their needs and requirements (Ganster, 2017). However, when Level 2 and Level 3 include long formats such as long-form blog posts, presentations for webinars and infographics, podcasts respectively, Level 4 has a short format, which is produced more frequently. It can be presented in blog posts and contributed content (ibid.).

Level 5 consists of a broad network of interrelated promotional and conversational micro-content (such as social media posts, blog comments, and curated content). Such formats of content improve the ability to connect with the consumers (Content Marketing Pyramid, 2017). Although this content is created more spontaneously than derivative assets, it still reuses and repurposes the core content to reinforce key marketing messages.

The Content Marketing Pyramid not only illustrates the difference and interconnection between formats of content but also demonstrates the way the distribution phase of the content marketing development process can be organized efficiently. The Pyramid is supposed to systematically build content reuse, repurposing, and recycling into the content strategy (Frasco, 2015). According to Curata (2017), the concept of the Content Marketing Pyramid enables the company to stretch the budget and reduce project lead time, increase content efficacy, maintain alignment with marketing and corporate objectives. At the same time, it helps to reach more audience by delivering content messaging.
2.2 Consumer orientation

**Customer features**

One of the most difficult choices that multinational corporations face is deciding whether to run the same marketing campaign globally or to customize it to the local taste in different countries. In most of the marketing literature, this issue is known as standardization vs. adaptation. Despite this chapter will not describe this phenomenon directly, it gives the major attention to the problems that determine the strategic choice of the company’s marketing and that all the marketers must take into consideration. In many cases, companies develop their marketing strategy in one country and then do "disaster checking" as they launch the wrong strategy instead of examining the environment first (Clegg, 2005). As new global markets emerge, and existing markets become increasingly segmented along ethnic or subcultural lines, the need to market effectively to consumers, who have different cultural values and who respond to marketing activities at a different extent, has never been more important (Shavitt et al, 2008). Content marketing, being a part of the marketing strategy of a firm, submits to the same rules and takes into consideration the same issues. In fact, it is the content marketing strategy that must study potential consumers in order to be more efficient as content marketing’s main purpose is to communicate with people (Baer, 2016).

The tripartite construal of psychological experience has dominated consumer research for more than six decades. Based upon three features of cognition (thinking), affect (feeling), and conation (doing) this conceptualization has formed the foundation of several consumer behavior models used in marketing (Pluzinski et al., 1986).

Throughout the history of marketing, the tripartite has been one of the main subjects of study, defining the features, with Affect being the most ambiguously defined. Affect has been conceptualized variously as feeling, emotion, preference, and attitude of a person towards marketing actions. In the present framework, Affect is considered to evoke a form of experiential feeling or emotional response. In fact, Affect represents a broader assessment and it is not necessarily connected with physical or even conscious response (Pluzinski et al., 1986). Instead, some research claims that Affect primarily contains perceptual reactions to marketing and it
happens subconsciously, without customer’s awareness, meaning that it has a stronger effect on the audience because it is ungovernable (Zajonc, 1982).

Cognition, on the other hand, relates to the way a person thinks and is more aimed at conscious brain-related activities, namely: thoughts, perception, beliefs, memory and learning (Pluzinski et al., 1986). Despite this pillar is perceived as conscious even here a preconscious cognitive activity might be added.

The third feature, Conation, is possibly the easiest to understand as it is defined as purposive action. In other words, it can be characterized as “learning by doing”. Consumers are assumed to be a part of the project, actively participating and therefore creating a positive image of the brand or product, by solving a thematic issue. An example can be sports festivals, which are aimed at the physical well being of all the participants by doing different physical activities.

Cross-cultural content analysis of advertisements through this tripartite, taking into consideration that different national groups will have a different response to an advertising object, can yield valuable evidence about distinctions in cultural values. For example, American advertisements tend to be more teaching the consumers about the brand or certain product. Advertisers are focused on the advantages of the advertisement subject, based on the assumptions that the audience is more likely to get caught by learning about a product (cognition) and after that, other elements of the tripartite will start working (Ogilvy, 1985). In contrast, Japanese marketing campaigns are very different comparing to American ones, because they follow the rule that first it is necessary to “make friends” with the audience, and convince the consumers that the company understands their feelings, what represents the direction towards Affect in the tripartite (Shavitt et al, 2008). The assumption is that consumers will buy once they feel familiar with and have a sense of trust in the company (ibid).

**Russian consumer behavioral models**

Indeed, Russian consumers differ from any other national group of buying people in terms of behaviour and decision-making as well as consumer perception. A survey, made by The Nielsen Global Survey (2013) indicates several major features, that create a typical Russian consumer portrait. Above all comes rationalism, which comes out in the desire to look for everything about the object which is supposed to
be purchased on the Internet. Normally, before making a purchase a consumer visits over eight web pages to obtain as much information about the product as possible (Krasilnikova, 2013). Moreover, 63% of Russian consumers (Adindex, 2013) are reliant on somebody’s recommendation, especially when it comes to professional’s opinion (Nielsen, 2013). Russian shoppers are less susceptible to impulsive buying (more than 53 percent), and 43% of the surveyed consumers turned out to be brand loyalists as shopping is more a routine to them and only a trusted brand is linked to good emotions (ibid).

Thirty-eight percent of Russian respondents frequently notice new products on store shelves, well above the global average of 29 percent. In fact, 23 percent of the Russians indicate that product variety is the most important factor in determining where to shop. Talking about modern trends in product consumption, recently there has been a steady rise of demand for medical-oriented products such as health tracking programs or fast health checking procedures, as according to Krasilnikova (2013), Russian consumers tend to be more aware of their health condition nowadays.

2.3 Theory synthesis

In view of the analysis of the existing literature and previous research, the theoretical model is conceptualized in order to define the process of building content marketing strategy by Western companies in the Russian environment and the role of consumers in it. As it was mentioned before, the Russian consumers differ from any others, and therefore, the research of the content marketing strategy in the Russian environment requires a conceptual model, which reflects the association between consumers and content marketing.
According to Pluzinski et al. (1986), being considered as consumer features, Cognition, Affect, and Conation represent three components forming consumer behavior models, which, in their turn, predetermine the way Russian consumers
perceive and react on the marketing campaigns and projects conducted by companies. That is why it is especially essential for Western companies to study consumer behavior models when conducting their business in Russia. The conceptual model illustrates that analyzed by the content marketers, the consumer behavioral models are taken into account when the content marketing strategy for the Russian market is being built by a Western company. The companies build their content marketing strategies through all the steps of the content development, with Promotion through the content marketing Pyramid being the most important stage for the success (Curata, 2017). The necessity to consider the behavioral models of Russian consumers is explained by its influence on the content marketing activity of a Western company in this particular market. The major influence of the consumer behavioral models can be seen on the phase of creation of the content itself and on the promotion phase when the company chooses the content formats, distribution methods, and promotional channels, which are going to be used in order to reach consumers. Based on this, content marketers choose an appropriate content marketing strategy, which is supposed to enable the company and its brand to attract the attention of consumers to the content they produce. A Western company manifests its content marketing strategy in its various content marketing projects and campaigns.
3. Methodology

This chapter suggests structured and consistent methodological approach for further conduction of the empirical study. In the chapter, the choice of the research approach, method, and strategy is proven as well as case study design is presented. The process of data collection and analysis is described and the evidence of the quality of the research is provided.

3.1 Research Approach

Saunders et al. (2016) recognize three research approaches, which can be used when conducting either quantitative or qualitative research method. Namely, they suggest inductive approach, implying theory resulting from the analyzed data gained from the conducted research; deductive research approach for approving or disapproving existing theory by the outcomes of the empirical study; and abductive approach as a combination of the two above-mentioned approaches, meaning that empirical data acts both as explanation of the existing theory and a base for its modification or creation of the new one.

After the analysis of the adequate literature (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009; Hyde, 2000; Saunders et al., 2016), and its correlation with the plan of further research for the present paper, an abductive research approach was chosen.

This paper follows an abductive approach starting with the observation of a specific phenomenon, in particular, the process of building the content marketing strategies by Western companies in the Russian environment. Moreover, relating to the theory it is then discovered that there are certain patterns that must be followed so that the strategy would be competitive in the Russian market. The theory allows to prepare a set of questions and obtain empirical data to understand the issue of content marketing strategy building in practice. The abductive approach can be seen as a combination of induction and deduction since the process involves the alternate use of empirical data and theory as the research advances. Due to the limited literature on the topic, it is believed that abductive approach will be the most suitable one for the present paper since it enables to have the flexibility necessary to go back to the theory once the data have been collected and consider whether the empirical findings go in line with previously suggested theoretical findings. Therefore, the conceptual
model developed on the basis of the researched theory might be revised due to the knowledge gained during the empirical data analysis.

Inductive approach, in its turn, is not considered to be suitable for the thesis as far as it is supposed to be grounded on the empirical evidence first, in which theory is incorporated further (Saunders et al., 2016). Deductive, in its turn, often comes from the previous theoretical study with further testing the theory basing on the empirical evidence and checking if the theory is valid. However, the deductive approach does not consider further revision of the theory (Bryman and Bell, 2011), what does not fit the present research.

3.2 Research Method and Strategy

Both quantitative and qualitative methods of research, if conducted correctly, provide the study with empirical data which is necessary for broadening the explanation and understanding of the theoretical knowledge and the suggested framework. Quantitative methods are aimed at demonstrating the existing assumptions, by approving or disapproving them after the analysis of gained data, while qualitative ones are intended to investigate and provide assumptions (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009).

Qualitative research seeks for the answers to the question ‘how’, investigating the process of a certain phenomenon. On the contrary, quantitative methods are used to measure and analyze variables (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008). Therefore, in order to identify the strategy for the present work, research question, as well as sub-research questions, need to be taken into consideration. According to the analyzed research question, which was unveiled in the introduction chapter (1.3), the qualitative research is chosen as a research method for the thesis. This study requires the description of the content marketing strategy chosen by company and reasoning for the decisions they make. That is why, high level of engagement with the interviewees, trust, and depth of information, which are provided by qualitative research method, are highly important for the success of the empirical study (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008).
In particular, in view of above-mentioned facts, the employed strategy of qualitative research is case study, which will include several cases in order to illustrate more diverse picture of how Western companies build their content marketing strategies in the Russian environment, find out the reasoning for developing a certain content marketing strategy and how competitive they are. During the conduction of the case study, it is easier to take into account various variables and to look at the phenomenon in question from different perspectives, which allows to describe the process in a more profound way (Merriam, 1998). Therefore, guided by the objectives of the thesis, this empirical study will be based on descriptive case studies.

3.3 Case study design

*Selecting Case Companies in Russia*

Since the aim of the study is to investigate how Western companies build their content marketing strategy in the Russian environment, the case study suggests being represented by multinational companies, running their business in Russia. Multinational companies based in Western countries were considered as far as they are the ones, which have much experience in operating in different markets and conducting their content marketing campaigns and projects in every country of their presence (Dixon et al., 2014). As argued in the introduction chapter, the choice of the Russian environment was made because of the difference between many factors, especially the mindset of Russian consumers and Western ones. According to Ratsiburskaya et al. (2015), an ordinary Russian customer’s characteristics are perceived as a mixture of the Western and Eastern characteristics, and consequently, all companies presented in Russia, especially Western ones, have to take into consideration these characteristics when building the local content marketing strategy to have competitive advantage over the rivals. To conclude, it is worth saying that Russia as a context of the current research is very suitable as there are certain advantages and opportunities to investigate content marketing strategies of Western companies in Russian environment.
**Selection process**

The cases have been selected intentionally as the aim was to find broad and diverse content marketing practices. Several characteristics of the companies to meet the requirements were taken into consideration. First of all, the company should be considered as a Western one, in other words, it should be established in developed West European or in North American countries. Secondly, the company should be international, which means the presence in two or more countries as well as in Russia. Moreover, it was agreed to pick only big companies, or multinational companies (MNCs) as more often only MNCs can afford to be up-to-date with the modern marketing trends. Following Pettigrew’s (1990), the case selection was not limited to any particular industry, which helps to generalize to a greater extent the findings of the study by providing variation in the contextual factors. The table below provides with the list of the researched companies as well as the titles of the interviewees and the dates of the meetings.

*Table 1. Interview trail*

*Source: Own Table (based on empirical data)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BURGER KING RUS LLC.</td>
<td>Marketing Director was interviewed in Moscow 20.04.2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnson &amp; Johnson LLC.</td>
<td>Phone call took place and interview was held with the representative responsible for marketing and PR in Moscow 25.04.2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Coca-Cola Company Russia</td>
<td>An interview was held with Marketing Department representative in Moscow 4.05.2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visa Inc.</td>
<td>Marketing manager was interviewed in Moscow 07.05.2017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.4 Data Collection

*Primary Data*

Choosing from the six sources of evidence suggested by Yin (2014), namely: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant-observation, and physical artifacts, interviews are supposed to be the most suitable source for the present work. Some of the obvious strengths of the chosen way to collect data are that interviews focus directly on the case study topic and that they provide explanations along with personal views (Ibid.), which are highly relevant in this particular case as far as content marketing experience of the companies nowadays strongly depends on the experience and competence of the content marketers and strategists (Davies, 2007).

Having been conducted personally, the interviews enable researchers to obtain highly relevant information firsthand, which automatically increased the trustworthiness of the data. Moreover, when participating in the conversation, interviewees feel their involvement into the research, what raises their willingness to contribute to the study. By interviewing content-managers and content strategists, it is possible to get a wider explanation, description, and illustration of the phenomenon of content marketing in companies’ strategies.

*Secondary Data*

In the present research, the triangulation method was used, which means that not only interviews were conducted, but also the secondary data was collected from the corporate web-sites of the companies in question as well as other Internet sources. Moreover, companies’ documents and digital materials were used to validate the information as it was suggested by Patton (1999).

3.5 Interviews

As it was argued above, the empirical data for the research was collected mostly by interviews with the competent representatives of the surveyed companies, semi-structured interviews to be more specific. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) argued that the main advantage of the semi-structured interviews is the flexibility of the structure and the ability to efficiently gain and recognize information without being stick to
the format. In semi-structured interviews certain general questions are prepared, however, during the negotiations, the interviewer can change the questions, ask for more specific information and raise additional questions, that have not been prepared before, based on the previous answer (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). Therefore, it is considered that semi-structured interview is the most suitable method for getting the appropriate information in the most efficient way. As a matter of fact, the intentional content marketing field has not been fully researched, and through semi-structured interviews the interviewer gets a better understanding of this phenomena, as it enables to discuss certain elements and formulate new questions.

The interviewees of the current research are highly competent and skilled people, occupying positions in Marketing Department of the case companies and consequently, holding vast knowledge in marketing strategy run by the companies. Moreover, having many years of working experience in the marketing field, they possess not only knowledge in the Russian environment, but they are also familiar with the content marketing being performed in the origin Western country of the company as well. The interviews were held in Russian, using the common language. The reason for choosing the Russian language is to prevent any misunderstandings connected with the language. Moreover, it is believed that the cultural aspect was taken into consideration so that it would not affect the quality of the data collected, as both the researchers and the interviewees are of Russian origin. All interviews were performed during the meetings, one of which was supported by the phone call as well. The average length was 55 minutes, with the shortest one 40 minutes and the longest one 70 minutes. The interview guide and the related questions can be found in the appendix A. Next, the explanation of the operationalization is presented.

Operationalization

When conducting the interviews, it is vital to have a clear understanding of the concept and to be able to present your ideas and questions to the interviewees, in other words, it is important to take the concepts that have been developed in the theory and turn them into tangible categories (Saunders et al., 2012). For this purpose, the interview guide based on the conceptual model (Figure 3) was created to obtain relevant information on the content marketing strategy of the firm and the consumer features considered.
This requires implementing appropriate categories in the data collection instruments. All the questions of the interviews were placed in the guide according to their category with the link to the theoretical concept and subconcepts (Bryman et al., 2011).

*Table 2 Operationalization of the interview*

*Source: Own Table (based on empirical data)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major concepts</th>
<th>Subconcepts</th>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content Marketing Strategy</strong></td>
<td>C. Steps of content marketing</td>
<td>1-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Understanding the audience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Mapping to the sales cycle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Creating</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Promoting (through the Pyramid)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Measuring</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Consumer Orientation</strong></td>
<td>Consumer features</td>
<td>11-16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Affect</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Cognition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Conation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Consumer behavioural models</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Consumer feelings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Consumer emotions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Consumer reaction to content marketing activity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Transcription of the interviews

According to Kvale (2007), a sound research also requires transcripts of all the interviews. All the interviews mentioned in Table 1 were performed by the meetings, one of which was supported by the phone call as well. All the interviews were recorded by the mobile phone, which enabled to save all the important information for the written transcription. The transcription of the interviews was made to ease the analysis of the results, see the main patterns and better understand the main concepts in practice. There are no formal requirements for the transcripts (Kvale, 2007), and the written interpretations were permissive though not hang-loose.

Ethical consideration

When conducting the interviews, two interviewees wished to stay anonymous, as some of the data given during the interviews was only for private corporate use. Therefore, the names of the representatives of Johnson & Johnson and Visa Inc. are not mentioned in this research out of our respect and appreciation for the shared insights. It was also agreed to remain all the names of the case companies employees undisclosed for the better and more harmonious reading. Thus, the practices of the companies are described using the names of the companies and titles of the interviewees only.

3.6 Data analysis

In order to successfully complete the research, the collected data needs to be analysed, extracting the important information and manage the insights to find certain patterns and correspondents to the theory provided (Easton, 2010). For this reason, the data, collected from the interviews, was interpreted and analysed. As this study involved multiple cases, a ‘cross-case analysis’ was used in this research (Creswell, 2013), based on the detailed descriptions of each case. Therefore, the analysis section is divided into two main parts according to the conceptual framework. Thereafter, each of the main parts contains minor subparts, that are going to be largely described with respect to all the case companies insights. During the analysis, the main patterns and trends are found concerning building content marketing strategies by Western companies in Russian environment and consumers’
influence on this process. During the process of analysis, empirical data was integrated with the theory, in particular in the developed conceptual model.

3.7 The rigor of qualitative research

The criteria for the rigor of both qualitative and quantitative research were presented by Lincoln et al. (1985) encompassing credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. These criteria are believed to assure the reader that the research was made according to all the rules and norms of professionally conducted study.

_Credibility_

One of the main characteristics of the sound study is the ability to present the insights objectively, without any personal bias. In a qualitative study, a researcher is an indispensable part of it and there is a risk of subjectiveness, however, if a researcher is aware of any possible personal influence and state, the study can be considered credible (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

In the current study, the interviews were performed following strict criteria to be of the high quality and be efficient enough for the following operations. According to these criteria the interviews should 1) be spontaneous, rich, specific and gain relevant answers from the interviewees; 2) contain short questions but be aimed for long answers; 3) follow-up questions and clarifications on the relevant aspects of the answer; 4) be a self-reliant story that hardly requires extra explanations (Kvale, 2007). As all the findings are discussed and a lot of quotations are introduced, it is possible to deliver objective insights to the reader (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

_Transferability_

At this stage, the research is required to be transferable, which means that future studies might be built on the current one and it needs to be reliable enough to be used by others. For this reason, one of the main rules is to ensure the broadness of information extracted from different cases and sources. The current research can undoubtedly be transferable as the number of the case selection companies fits in the requirements for the qualitative research (Morrow, 2005) and the small number of cases has been offset by the broad data and exclusive insights that were gained.
Moreover, the study was built on diverse case selection companies from different industries.

**Dependability**

Another important feature of the qualitative study is dependability or the stability of data over time and over conditions. Dependability ensures the quality of the integrated processes of data collection, data analysis, and theory generation. Lincoln et al. (1989) claimed that there are two ways of dependability evaluation: stepwise replication and inquiry audit.

Stepwise replication stands for working on the data collection, findings and analysis of insights separately by working in a pair (Howard, 2016), which has been successfully made by the authors, as every step of the research was worked out by each of the authors, then negotiated and finally presented. The inquiry audit means data and relevant supporting documents being scrutinised by an external reviewer. In other words, there is a need of an objective supervisor to read the paper, assess and comment on the intermediate stages throughout of the research (Ibid.). For the current study, several reviewers have been accredited to supervise and analyse.

**Confirmability**

Qualitative research tends to assume that each researcher brings a unique perspective to the study. Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results could be confirmed or corroborated by others. There is a number of strategies for enhancing confirmability. The researcher can document the procedures for checking and rechecking the data throughout the study. Another researcher can take a "devil's advocate" role with respect to the results, and this process can be documented. The researcher can actively search for and describe and negative instances that contradict prior observations. And, after the study, one can conduct a data audit that examines the data collection and analysis procedures and makes judgements about the potential for bias or distortion (Lincoln and Guba, 1989).
4. Empirical data

This chapter continues the study with the research findings from the interviewed representatives of the organizations. Four case companies will be described according to Table 1. The description of the content marketing strategies follows the theory plan, providing insights about current content marketing projects and future plans, the antecedents and the nature of certain content marketing decisions, as well as the customer features and customer behavioral models, which content marketing is built on.

4.1 BURGER KING RUS LLC.

Burger King is an American global fast food restaurant chain. The company was established in 1954 by Keith J. Kramer and Matthew Burns and today is the second largest fast food company in the world with total assets accounted for US $ 18.4 billion and about 35,000 employees working in 100 countries throughout the world (Burger King, 2016). Burger King is well-known across borders for its hamburger called Whopper, which became company’s signature and one of the most popular hamburgers in the world (Burger King, 2016). Historically, Burger King has been working on a franchise model, varying the manner depending on the region, with some regional franchises, known as master franchises, responsible for selling franchise sub-licenses on the company's behalf. One example is Burger King Rus LLC., which was founded in 2010 by signing an agreement for the Joint Venture between Burger King and VTB Capital as well as Shoko LLC. and obtaining master franchise “to create a leader in Russian fast food industry” (Marketing Director, interview, 20th April 2017). Despite Burger King Rus LLC. is a relatively new player in the industry, it is already 3rd largest fast food chain in Russia, falling behind KFC and Mcdonald’s (Franchising Info, 2016) and perhaps one of the most interesting cases to describe as Burger King is well-known in Russia for its “evil” marketing that is often contradictory, albeit very catchy. The current case research was made to present content marketing of Burger King Rus LLC.
Content marketing of Burger King Rus LLC.

To start with, it is worth repeating that Burger King Rus LLC. works on the master franchise term. This almost often means decentralization from the head company and high level of independence of firm’s operations and marketing operations in particular. “Burger King Rus LLC. is obliged to follow the global positioning of the brand, while all the regional marketing strategy planning and executing are made solely independent” (Marketing Director, interview, 20th April 2017). However, there is not a great number of things that Marketing Department can do in order to promote the brand and increase the sales, as company’s annual marketing budget is eight times less comparing to one in Mcdonald’s Rus. “For the past seven years we have done a great job, and despite our marketing budget is not that rich, we have recently measured that we managed to increase the brand recognition from 25 to 90 percent” (Marketing Director, interview, 20th April 2017). In fact, corporate marketing strategy appreciates all the low-cost marketing formats such as situational and viral marketing as well as content that attracts consumers’ attention without giant expenditures on advertisements. Company’s marketing strategy used to be focused on stressing that they have the best and the biggest burgers that other fast food companies could not afford to offer, however, in the past four years the focus was made on cheap and tasty everyday food.

Along with the marketing as a whole, the company has been using content marketing methods to promote the brand and increase the number of customers in the restaurants. “We simply try to catch the attention of the potential customers, trying to entertain them with our content, at the same time adjusting the content to their needs and modern trends and fads” (Marketing Director, interview, 20th April 2017). To follow the trends emerging from nowhere, the Marketing Department employs a group of specialists who use special instruments for monitoring society trends. That was explained as “newsjacking”, which is the art and science of injecting your ideas into a breaking news story so that you and your ideas would get noticed. For example, in November 2016, Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev recommended that coffee Americano should be renamed as Russiano for patriotic reasons (Sinelschikova, 2016). “Within 24 hours, inspired by his absurd speech, our marketers wrote a funny article jokingly supporting the Prime Minister for patriotism and at the same time praising Russiano as a new concept. Within next 48 hours, we
introduced coffee Russiano in our restaurants” (Marketing Director, interview, 20th April 2017). However, this was an exceptional case, when certain content marketing article was presented before the launch of the product. Due to the reason, that consumers will immediately go for the promoted product and will be unsatisfied if it is not yet launched, the company prefers to do promotion after the product is presented in the restaurants.

Today the most important thing in Burger King Rus LLC. marketing campaigns is the fact that the hamburgers cutlets are cooked on the fire, and this feature is worked on in the corporate content marketing strategy. “Surprisingly, it is not taken for granted by some people that if a cutlet is made on fire the taste is better, and we do our best to deliver to the audience that a traditionally cooked meat gains specific flavour and taste that cannot be replicated cooking on an electric stove” (Marketing Director, interview, 20th April 2017). In future plans, the marketing strategy’s main topic will be presented by taste-oriented content.

When answering about the main content marketing formats, the importance of the social media and especially digital media was claimed. The American Burger King, that is much more powerful in the domestic market, has decent resources comparing to its rivals and can afford big and money-intensive marketing campaigns, promoting the brand with the use of traditional sources like television. Russian franchise, in contrast, is very limited in marketing spending, so the main direction of the marketing and content marketing, in particular is the Internet. Twitter account, Instagram, Facebook and corporate site are being run to deliver content to the audience. Local social network VKontakte is also hugely used as nowadays it is the biggest platform and the most popular website on the Russian Internet (Baran et al., 2014). Unfortunately, except for these formats, there are no ways to deliver the content marketing to the audience for Burger King Rus LLC.

Consumer orientation

Burger King Rus LLC. is a typical business-to-customer organization and therefore, it must be oriented on attracting potential customers as well as retaining the loyalty of the old ones. For these reasons, domestic Marketing Department of the firm has created a vision of its Russian buying persona. “Many factors have been taken into consideration: first of all, people buying fast food in Russia are of the younger
generation, below 35 years old. Elder people’s perception of hamburgers and fries is not positive as they grew up with the mindset that fast food is automatically unhealthy, whereas younger people perceive it as affordable and time-saving, what is more important for them” (Marketing Director, interview, 20th April 2017). The content marketing is adjusted to the younger people, who cannot be affected by traditional marketing formats and seek for amusement in the content they face. “This is another huge difference between Russian and US market, where people of all ages consume fast food and not see it as something extraordinary unhealthy, moreover, in Western countries fast food companies try to show that they are concerned about the customers health, creating a good perception of brand among the audience, focusing on socially important and environmental issues” (Marketing Director, interview, 20th April 2017). Unfortunately, Russian audience is less concerned about environmental issues (Henry et al., 2008), so the content marketing principles aimed at the same values would be less efficient in the Russian context. Burger King LLC. simply targets its content marketing at younger people in order to make them smile and create emotions in people’s minds, as far as sometimes Russian consumers of the targeted age group look even for provocative content. “When I look at the overseas experience of Burger King I always try to measure what projects or campaigns might be useful in Russia and surprisingly I have found that Russia is very much similar to Brazil in terms of customer perception and customers reaction on certain marketing operations. Unfortunately, I cannot explain that” (Marketing Director, interview, 20th April 2017).

4.2 Johnson & Johnson

Johnson & Johnson (J&J) is an American corporation established in 1886 as a producer of surgical dressings. Gradually, the corporation has expanded its portfolio and formed three divisions, namely, the division of consumer goods, the division of pharmaceutical products, and the division of medical devices. Nowadays, J&J encompasses 250 companies in 57 countries all over the world, with total assets of US$ 133,41 billion and 125,000 people employed (Johnson’n’Johnson, 2017). The company is famous for its great investments in the development of medical technologies, advanced methods of treatment, scientific research in the field of
medical treatment quality, and development of medical education, the company’s sponsoring campaigns and charity projects.

Being a Russian subsidiary of J&J corporation, J&J LLC. is on the market since 1992 (ibid.). The company conducts its economic activity independently and is legally independent. It has the right to form its strategy, including its marketing and content marketing strategy, if it does not contradict the direction of the parent company, its mission and values.

*Content marketing strategy of J&J LLC.*

The content of the company as well as the core ideas of its content marketing is produced by its parent company. J&J LLC. applies the adaptation of the global content and develops local content for consumer goods as well as for pharmaceutical products, which exist both on the global market and exclusively in Russia (Marketer, interview, 25th April 2017).

According to the interviewed representative of the company working in the marketing department, J&J LLC. carries out different content marketing campaigns and projects, which are related to its core activity and goods produced by the company. The launching of the content is often occasioned with the launching of a new product in order to create the potential consumers’ awareness of it. However, sometimes, the company relates its new content marketing project to the product that has existed for a while so as to maintain the interest of the audience to it.

Most of the content marketing campaigns can be characterized by its educational orientation, which is a competitive advantage of J&J LLC.’s content marketing strategy in Russia. For instance, the content marketing project related to the Johnson’s baby brand of the company has a few directions, which are aimed at facilitation of parents’ life. In particular, in terms of this project, the company provides people with a variety of video content devoted to the baby treatment. There are video lessons about how to bathe babies, a guide for the first ten days since baby’s birth including all challenges young parents can face, from diaper changing to feeding, massage or temperature measurement. Moreover, by video content, J&J LLC. “promote the bedtime ritual which could not only facilitate parents’ lives but also help to raise a child with the awareness of how important this ritual is”, says
Along with it, the company has launched a formula enabling to forecast the possible height of a baby.

However, apart from the educational focus, the content of some brands and content marketing campaigns related to them are aimed at improving some people’s personal characteristics as self-confidence, ambitions, willpower, and determination. For example, relating to the feminine care product line OB, the company carried out a campaign, which suggested Russian women participate in the course aiming at enhancing their self-confidence and becoming more empowered and accepting themselves as they are. 40,000 women of different age took part in this course, which lasted 5 weeks and included meetings with psychologists, fitness bloggers, celebrities, and stylists. Moreover, relating to Le Petit Marseillais body wash brand, the company conducted seminars and courses to increase Russian women’s awareness of fashion industry and latest fashion trends.

Today, one of the most impressive content marketing campaign is ‘Quit Smoking’ related to the Nicorette brand encompassing a range of products helping quit smoking, and one of the most innovative products the audience is interested in - Nicorette spray. Under this campaign, a reality show was started, where a few people were trying to quit smoking under doctors’ supervision in order to achieve their personal goals at the end (for example, take part in the marathon, hike in the mountains). The main message was to help people get over themselves and do something they would be proud of.

According to the representative of J&J LLC., the formats of content used by Russian subsidiary do not differ from the ones used by the corporation in other countries. The company is considered to lag behind the trend of the Internet formats and still is adherent to television formats more. In spite of the fact that the company is trying to overtake by using video content uploaded on company’s web-page on the Youtube channel, its official web-site and by conducting seminars in cooperation with famous bloggers and ambassadors, reality shows and other TV programs still prevail. It is worth mentioning, that the only difference of formats used in Russia is the availability of the opportunity to contact an expert or a doctor right via the private chat on the company’s web-site if any questions arise. This option is very important in Russia because of specific features of Russian customers.
Consumer orientation

In their content marketing activity, J&J LLC. Russia relies on distinctive features of Russian customers, their established patterns of behavior and beliefs. In particular, according to company’s representative, “parents in Russia are meticulous about everything connected with their baby, they want to know all the information about the way a baby should be treated in details and about the quality of any goods for a baby, they are fixated on the safety of their babies and perfect cleanliness around them. Whereas, European and American parents are more democratic and let a baby grow in more natural conditions paying attention to the comfort of a baby mostly”. Moreover, the company found out that Russian consumers are more dependent on the experts’, pharmacists’, and doctors’ opinion, feedback and recommendations, even gained distantly, as far as state health care system does not provide people with favorable conditions to go to the consultations often.

In some cases, Russian consumers have a lack of knowledge and need to be educated. For instance, although 40% of the population of Russia smoke, 60% of which would like to quit (Ne-kurim, 2017), they do not use any additional treatment to provide craving relief to help them quit. This is explained by the fact, that people do not know how this treatment works and how important the medication support is during this process. Furthermore, contrary to Europe and the USA, the Russian government does not provide people trying to quit smoking with state support, consisting in reimbursing the costs of ancillary drugs, although they cost more than cigarettes.

Russian women as a target group for some of the content marketing projects can be generally characterized as not self-confident enough and unsound. “Russian women are imprisoned by the stereotypes dictated by the society: it is said that if she is not married at the age of 30, she is an old maid; if she has not made a mind-blowing career, she is unsuccessful; if she does not have children, she is careerist and hapless woman. That is why it is highly necessary to change the situation”, explains the interviewee.
4.3 The Coca-Cola Russia

The Coca-Cola Company is a multinational beverage corporation founded in the USA in 1892. Nowadays, conducting a global business on a local scale, the corporation owns over 500 brands in more than 200 countries and considers to be one of the most famous companies worldwide, with total assets, which account for US $87,270, and with 123,200 employees throughout the world (Coca-Cola Company, 2017). The company’s programs concerning sustainable development, innovations, and sponsorship are considered to be a benchmark for many corporations.

Russia is one of the youngest and most promising markets captured by the Coca-Cola Company, entered in 1988. The company has gained huge success in pretty short time in this market. Today, more than 400 beverages are produced and sold under company’s trademark in Russia (ibid.). As a leader in the production of beverages, Coca-Cola’s total investments in Russian economy account for 4 billion US dollars. Consolidating companies Coca-Cola and Coca-Cola HBC Russia, The Coca-Cola Russia provides over 10,000 workplaces within itself and about 60,000 workplaces in related industries (ibid.).

Content marketing strategy of The Coca-Cola Russia

Being a multinational corporation, The Coca-Cola Company conducts its business in lots of countries, however, in each of them this business is local, and Russia is not an exception. The localization of the business activity applies to the products, which are produced and sold in Russia, and company’s marketing strategy including content marketing strategy. Just as the assortment of products is strongly dependent on the region of presence, particularly, Russia, the content developed by the company is produced for this particular country. As claimed by one of the directors of The Coca-Cola Russia, “there is no unified content marketing strategy for all countries”.

In terms of content marketing, the main aim of The Coca-Cola Russia is to engage its consumers into the content of magic, bright and cheerful world of Coca-Cola. For this reason, the company does not associate their content marketing projects with the launching of a new product and its content marketing activity is permanent.
The company performs different content marketing campaigns and projects. For instance, one of the most important recent decision was made in 2014, when The Coca-Cola Russia replaced its standard corporate web-site by a fully-fledged web-portal Coca-Cola Journey. This web-portal provides its readers not only with information about the company itself, launching new products or promotions but also with editorial, entertaining and educating information, not directly connected with the brand, which makes the content highly valuable. For example, this web-portal contains “interviews with popular musicians and bloggers, news about recent trends in music, latest gadgets and devices, and recipes for the preparation of various delicious dishes” (Director, interview, 4th May 2017).

One of the most well-known content marketing projects of The Coca-Cola Russia is ecological flashmob “Sort with us” (which in the Russian language is a wordplay and means “share with us” and “sort with us” at the same time). The project is educational, although it entertains people at the same time. Within this project, The Coca-Cola Russia explains why and how people should sort the garbage and where they can hand over garbage for recycling. There are various creative tasks suggested for people so they could have fun when making videos and art-objects and upload it in social media, and develop their eco-friendly habits. The company organizes seminars with students and citizens of big cities in order to educate them in terms of treating the world and nature in the right way and trying to save it by all means.

Another content marketing campaign being conducted by The Coca-Cola Russia is the project “In motion”, which started in 2014 occasioned with the Olympic games taking place in Sochi, Russia. Within the constraints of this program, the company promotes the sport and active lifestyle among Russian citizens. The program suggests the company’s participation in major sport events in Russia, the introduction of digital technologies, and the engagement of the experts in public health, science and sports to implement a long-term strategy, which is supposed to influence the physical activity of people. An advisory board was organized consisting of the representatives of scientific institutes, public health service, politics, sportsmen for the support of the project. Moreover, a website dedicated to the project was launched as a source of motivating and educating information, experience, and different tools for integrating an active way of life into the ordinary everyday reality.

By uploading tutorial videos on this source, company’s official website and youtube
channel. The Coca-Cola Russia not only explains the advantages of doing sports but also teaches how to do them. In collaboration with famous bloggers and world champions in different kinds of sport eight online schools were opened, namely, the schools of skiing, snowboarding, skating, dancing, swimming as well as yoga school, street workout school, football school and fitness school. Along with its online activity, the company started a triumphal journey of its pavilion Coca-Cola Park “In motion” through the cities of Russia. The pavilion contained the exposition presenting an amazing world of sport, interactive sports entertainment as well as master classes and seminars by professional sportsmen and fitness instructors took place and was aimed at inspiring people to start paying more attention to their health. Furthermore, scientific and educational projects were started to contribute to the development of new methods and programs for an active and healthy lifestyle (in particular, the adaptation of the American program ‘Exercise is Medicine’ to the program of medical universities and educational-entertaining program ‘Be active!’ for Russian schools.

Regarding content formats used by the company, the representative of the company emphasizes that “nowadays, The Coca-Cola Russia uses the same content formats in all the markets, where it conducts its business”. The company widely uses the Internet and promotes its content through search services, social networks, official web-portal of the company containing the blog, which is optimized according to the search queries, and virus marketing. “The major difference of Russian market from any other market is that local social networks, namely, VKontakte and Odnoklassniki, are of great popularity” (Director, interview, 4th May 2017), what is taken into the account as well. Concerning the stand-alone projects mentioned above, the company organizes seminars, meetings with experts and famous people, along with social movements.

Consumer orientation

According to the representative of The Coca-Cola Russia, the company constantly analyses the audience’s interest in the information provided by the company online. By using Google Analytics, they “gain information about the number of people who read the content the company publishes on the Internet, how much time they spend on the website, as well as the demographic indicators” (Director, interview, 4th May
Moreover, it is often suggested to the website visitors to complete a short questionnaire in order to have the direct contact with them and get the feedback about their impression.

Taking into account the taste preferences of Russian consumers, The Coca-Cola Russia produces the content based on the needs and requirements of Russian consumers, resulting from their individual features (Director, interview, 4th May 2017). As far as the preferences are changing and reaction on the published material differs over time, the content and its format are being constantly edited and adapted to the new interests of the target group. For example, recently “so-called ‘long-reads’, which are huge materials unveiling a topic in detail have become extremely popular among Russian consumers”. With the popularization of the Internet in Russia, the company started to actively use social networks to have direct dialogue with users and answer all their questions if any arise.

More than that, knowing that Russian customers tend to base their attitude towards the content on the opinion of people, who they know and who they could trust, The Coca-Cola Russia actively involves Russian celebrities, sportsmen and public men in their content marketing campaigns to attract Russian consumers. For example, a top-model and founder of the charity organization ‘Naked Hearts’ Natalia Vodianova was engaged in the ‘In motion’ project by “taking part in the conferences about the importance of physical education at schools and in the social movement supporting Paralympians” (Director, interview, 4th May 2017). Furthermore, in collaboration with the charity foundation of Elena Isinbaeva, an Olympic champion, The Coca-Cola Russia has opened sports playgrounds in a number of foster houses in Russia and open-air workout spaces throughout the whole country.

It is worth mentioning, that all the campaigns being conducted by the company “touch upon the modern issues Russian society faces” (Director, interview, 4th May 2017). A bright example can be the program ‘Sort with us’. Comparing to the Europeans, Russian people are still not used to sorting their garbage, what complicates the recycling process of household waste (Lipatova, 2013). According to the manager of The Coca-Cola Russia, “there is a great need for developing the culture of domestic waste sorting among the Russians”, and that is the main reason why the company is focusing its content marketing strategy on this issue.
4.4 Visa Inc.

Visa Inc. is an American multinational financial services corporation headquartered in Foster City, California, United States. It facilitates electronic funds transfers throughout the world, most commonly through Visa-branded credit cards and debit cards. Though it does not itself issue cards, the company cooperates with partner banks throughout the world providing financial institutions with Visa-branded payment products that they then use to offer credit, debit, prepaid and cash-access programs to their customers (Visa, 2017). Visa is the world's second largest card payment organization (debit and credit cards combined), after being surpassed by Chinese UnionPay in 2015. The company’s capitalisation was assessed at $168 billion with more than 11,300 people employed. Indeed, Visa is one of the most important organizations in the world because it is a global financial system, encompassing more than 200 countries and over a third of all the electronic transactions made by people and organizations (Visa, 2017). The company established its presence in the Russian market in 1988, signing an agreement with the biggest state-owned bank in the country - Sberbank. Since then, the development of Visa Inc. has been rising gradually, as Russian market is one of the biggest of Visa CEMEA region (Central and Eastern Europe, Middle East and Africa), with the operational volume in Russian market accounted for 48% of the whole region or $220 billion.

Content marketing of Visa Inc. in Russia

“*The company has a very developed content marketing system, and being one of the major players in the financial services industry we create modern trends, that are followed by others*” (Marketing manager, interview, 7th May 2017). In Russia, Visa Inc. has several content marketing projects oriented on solving different problems among the Russian consumers and Visa-labeled card holders. Though there is no strict classification of these projects, they can be roughly divided into 1) Increasing financial literacy content, 2) Children-oriented content, 3) Money saving content, 4) New technologies usage content. “*First of all, we should see the modern trends and issues that concern the audience more*” (Marketing manager, interview, 7th May 2017). For this reason, Visa Inc. observes numerous surveys as Moody’s Analytics or GEAR report (Visa, 2017), and in addition, the company has sufficient resources to
conduct its own research projects (Visa Travel Intentions Study, Wireless Payments in Russia, Russian payroll cards study, Visa Affluent Index Russia) in cooperation with consultancy organizations like MAGRAM MR and 4Sight Consultancy. “The information about the Russian consumers and the financial market itself is vital for our marketing operations, as we need to constantly adjust our marketing strategy to the Russian realia” (Marketing manager, interview, 7th May 2017).

Indeed, Visa Inc. has a broad content marketing strategy, with some of the significant projects to be mentioned. One of them is Financial Literacy Week, which is aimed at highlighting the importance of financial literacy and teach the Russians how to establish and maintain healthy financial habits (FLW, 2017). During the week, professionals give lectures on how to correctly manage your money, where to invest and how to save funds effectively. “Indeed, the project was appreciated by all the participants and highly valued as it was mind-opening for some people and helped them to solve finance-oriented issues” (Marketing manager, interview, 7th May 2017). Moreover, in cooperation with Ministry of Finance and several banks, Visa Inc. works on teaching students and scholars financial literacy, with special financial books, which were published for children’s and teenagers’ use. Except for raising financial literacy, the company is concerned about giving the audience the ability to assimilate new technologies and products and be familiar with them. One of the Visa Inc, new technology enables to pay the bills through wireless payment by cards or mobile phones without physical contact. “The audience was very curious about this breakthrough and we decided that we should devote our efforts to creating content about this technology in detail and therefore promote it” (Marketing manager, interview, 7th May 2017).

Concerning the formats through which the content marketing is delivered to the consumers, it is worth mentioning that there is a variety of those ways. First, on the corporate site, a blog can be found (though only on Russian site) including numerous articles, aimed at solving financial problems and giving suggestions about rational wealth management (Visa, 2017). The company also runs Twitter, Facebook, Youtube and VKontakte pages, surprisingly containing more content marketing articles that any other information. As it was mentioned before, Financial Literacy Week plays a significant role, and its main format is lectures and masterclasses as well as published books for scholars and children.
Consumer orientation

“We conduct our marketing surveys and track the major problems, that people face with our products and services. Russian market differs from Western markets, and we need to meet consumer demand for certain information and meet their expectations” (Marketing manager, interview, 7th May 2017). There was a demand for the projects like Financial Literacy Week, to be held in Russia, as it was estimated that the level of financial literacy in Russia is 38%, lower than in such countries as Mongolia, Zimbabwe and Turkmenistan and at the same level as Cameroon, Madagascar and Togo (S&P, 2014). “In fact, many people are very suspicious of everything that relates to banking or financial system, so we need to break all the bad stereotypes and make people be more savvy about these things” (Marketing manager, interview, 7th May 2017). Moreover, there is a strong need for efficient wealth management-related content projects as, according to Visa Inc. independent survey, more than a half of the respondents could not manage their spendings properly (Visa, 2017).

Taking into consideration another feature of Russian buyers, which is the desire to buy new products and to get familiar with new techniques, it is worth mentioning that Visa Inc. marketers also put a lot of efforts to deliver new information about know-how. It was measured that more than three-fourths of Russian consumers (76%), in a recent Nielsen online survey report, are interested in trying new products or services. They keep their eyes open for everything new. Thirty-eight percent of Russian respondents frequently notice new products, well above the global average of 29 percent (Nielsen, 2013). “This data was a good stimulus for us to promote wireless payments and draw people’s attentions to them” (Marketing manager, interview, 7th May 2017).
5. Analysis

In this chapter, the collected empirical data is analysed based on the theoretical framework. The cross-case analysis is conducted to compare the way Western companies undergo the steps of building their content marketing strategies in the Russian environment. Here, two main sections are provided: content marketing analysis and consumer orientation analysis, each of them is divided into subsections according to the theory background and the trends found during the empirical work.

5.1 Content marketing analysis

According to Macdonald (2015), content marketing is a continuous cycle, the conventional steps of which are Understanding the audience, Mapping the content to the sales cycle, Creating the content, Promoting and Measuring. Further, each of the steps will be provided with cross-case analysis, meaning that the research will compare the efforts that are done in a certain step of content marketing strategy.

Understanding the audience

Understanding the audience helps to answer certain questions. For example, how much do Russian people already know about the topic? what do they think about my topic? what are their goals? In order to answer these questions, it is essential to do a research on the Russian consumers. This step probably relates more to consumer orientation section as it studies the patterns and trends of the audience, however, Macdonald (2015) claimed that the methods and instruments, as well as resources employed, are the indispensable part of content marketing strategy. Understanding the initial development and progression of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours is essential for the development of effective, targeted strategies (Wiebe, 2003).

Each of the researched companies has resources and expertise to study the Russian audience and determine the current customer, find the potential customer and understand, who will find the content useful. However, there are certain differences in the way the companies approach this. Burger King Rus, Coca-Cola Russia, and Johnson & Johnson are more reliant on their own abilities and almost all the audience-oriented research is made without any external influence, as the companies employ specialists to do so. In Burger King Rus LLC. employees surf the Internet
and mark out current fads (newsjacking), whereas in The Coca-Cola Russia people are more concerned about the environmental issues and sports trends.

In contrast, Visa Inc. works towards processing the data and finding its buyer persona in cooperation with consultancy agencies, though it has resources to do it by itself. By local consultancy agency, the company is supplied with the specific studies of the industry in general and the consumer as a part of it in particular, as it was claimed by Xie et al. (2015) that cooperation brings value to the information acquired and prevents potential bias. Visa Inc. stands out with the facilities, enabling it to conduct thorough research of the Russian financial market as well as Russian consumer trends in spendings and savings.

Among all the companies discussed above, one company, namely, Burger King Rus LLC. showed deficiencies in the way of understanding the audience. For example, it is considered that the lack of knowledge and expertise of the management level, which resulted from a lower marketing budget, has considerably affected the ability of the company to develop a sound content marketing. The managers lack in having relationships with other actors to boost the performance of the firm in studying the Russian consumers.

Understanding the audience was found to be influencing on these companies. For example, the knowledge of the industry and people that are key to the performance of J&J LLC., who has huge market experience, with operating in the Russian market for 25 years and witnessing the transformation of the consumer mindset. It is conceived that the knowledge and expertise of the company are influential for the success of the organization, confirming what the literature affirms, that the level of market expertise plays a key role in company’s success (Sternad et al., 2013).

**Mapping the content to the sales cycle**

Indeed, the appropriate time of introducing content to the audience is not the least and could be as beneficial as the quality of content introduced to people (Macdonald, 2015). The cross-case analysis enables to present the period of the sales cycle, when the companies introduce the content marketing, and shows the importance of the efficient timing of the promotion of the product itself or the company in general.
Both Burger King Rus LLC. and J&J LLC. stated that the content marketing comes along with introducing a new product, as the inter-organizational processes are very complicated because of the size of the company and decentralization of management. These marketing campaigns directed towards new products, that are not introduced to the customer at the proper time, could have a negative effect on the reputation and the sales. Nevertheless, in Russian realia, it seems more efficient to introduce the content long before the launch of the product, as the majority of Russian consumers appreciate innovations (Nielsen, 2013), and this could raise agiotage among the public and therefore, create better demand. Under these circumstances, the strategy of post-production content marketing showed to be less effective (Linn, 2015).

The Coca-Cola Russia and Visa Inc., in contrast, do not introduce new products very often and consequently, the content marketing is not linked to the product emergence. Instead, the main advantage of the companies in terms of content marketing, supported by Watson (2015), is that they are independent of appropriate timing of content marketing, taking into consideration that the content projects of Visa Inc. and The Coca-Cola Russia are less product-oriented and more consumers’ problem-oriented.

Creating the content

The theory says that when creating a content companies choose if the message suggested to the audience is of educational, editorial or entertaining nature (Harad, 2013). The empirical data gathered during the interviews demonstrated that the decision made by companies is based on their core activities, the image they are willing to create in consumers’ minds, as well as the phase of the life cycle, occupied by them in Russia. The phase of the lifecycle is strongly connected with the resources they possess and are ready to spend on their content marketing. In particular, being the youngest company among all the researched ones, Burger King Rus LLC. is aimed at creating very catchy content on the Internet with minimum costs as far as it does not have enough capabilities to implement amplitudinous content marketing campaigns. Whereas, other analyzed companies have already made a lodgement relatively long ago. Therefore, they have more opportunities and resources for undertaking large-format content marketing campaigns, such as The Coca-Cola’s “Sort with us” and “In motion”, J&J’s “Quit Smoking” and the project
for enhancing women’s self-confidence, and Visa’s projects championing for financial awareness of the population.

The core activity of a company is directly connected with the image of the brand it wishes to develop among their target group (Ghodeswar, 2008). For example, as a young people-oriented company selling fast food, Burger King Rus LLC. attracts its customers by offering them entertainment. Simple and viral jokes, newsjacking, and provocations make the audience smile and tell them: ‘We are who you are!’, creating the image of a team-mate, friend, coeval (Reed, 2010). Producing the goods for people’s health as Johnson & Johnson or providing with financial services as Visa Inc., causes the necessity to build a trustworthy and reliable image, what encourages companies to focus on educational content. The Coca-Cola Russia, in its turn, combines educational, editorial, and entertaining messages in its content marketing activity by differentiating their initiatives and create the image, which would interest the largest part of Russian consumers.

According to the empirical findings, there is no doubt that all the companies in question focus on the consumer preferences and needs, the information about which is gained by them on the first step, Understanding the audience. In particular, companies identify the niche, which could be occupied by them in accordance with their aims and capabilities and which would be contributing and interesting for the audience.

Having compared the approaches of the companies to the process of creating the message of the content, it was found out that educational content is more resource-consuming and requires a company to possess more capabilities than entertaining or editorial ones. However, when creating the content most of the companies try to bring together different types of content in order to meet the expectations of as many groups of consumers as possible.

*Promoting*

As argued in the theoretical framework chapter, promotion is considered to be one of the most challenging steps of the content marketing cycle as far as even the appropriate and thoroughly created content will not assure the company of competitive content marketing if content formats, distribution methods, and
promotional channels do not correspond with the audience’s expectations and preferences (Business 2 Community, 2016).

All the Western companies interviewed, with the only exception of J&J LLC., viewed the Internet and especially social media as the most usable channel for the distribution of their content. However, even J&J LLC. concede that they are trying to join the bandwagon of using online formats as one of the main promotion methods. Although the company started its web-chat and started uploading video content on web-pages, it is still adherent to implementing major projects with real-life contact with consumers as well as translating them in the form of reality shows via television. It can be concluded that J&J LLC. have built the Content Marketing Pyramid of the formats they use touching upon all its levels, however, these levels are not developed to the same extent as the company uses the Internet formats less than the other ones.

Meanwhile, the promotion Pyramid of The Coca-Cola Russia can be considered as equally developed on all the levels as far as the company promotes its content using a broad range of content marketing formats, what, according to Curata (2017), can jointly reinforce their common message. Long-form and short-form content, social media posts, seminars and social development projects enable the company to reach its diverse consumers providing them with more or less the same message (company’s vision of today’s world) via various channels at the same time (Content Marketing Pyramid, 2017). This helps to convert a wider audience to The Coca-Cola Russia’s culture and engage them in the company’s world. According to Curata (2017), the active use of all the assets of Content Marketing Pyramid ensures of effective and competitive content marketing. Therefore, The Coca-Cola Russia’s content marketing strategy can be considered as a competitive one.

The same level of content marketing format evolution as The Coca-Cola Russia’s can be observed in the activity of Visa Inc. However, as the company is working on the improvement of the financial intelligence of Russian population within its content marketing strategy and its main goal is to deliver knowledge, the promotion methods, comparing to those of other companies, are more represented by long-content, books and seminars, although other levels are not ignored by the company.
The company, which has a very different content promotion approach is Burger King Rus LLC. The company bases its decision to use mostly social media sources on the lack of capabilities, in particular, lack of budget for conducting real-life campaigns, and the youth as a target group of the company. Therefore, translating Burger King Rus LLC.’s promotion of the content, it can be seen that the company uses only short-form blog posts and contributed content along with social media posts and curated content in order to drive customers to its core content.

Summarizing the above-mentioned findings and inferences, it can be stated that the message of the content has a great influence on its format, distribution channels, and promotion methods, as well as the targeted audience, which can tend to absorb only certain formats from certain sources. Along with it, capabilities possessed by the companies define the methods they can afford to use for content promotion.

Measuring

All in all, every customer is a visitor of a relevant content marketing article or a video, moreover, he can physically participate meetings or seminars, devoted to the content marketing. In this case, the final stage of content marketing strategy comes with the measurement, which means collecting the data and analysing the effect, the influence that the content has on the audience (Chapin, 2010). With the modern systems, it has become less challenging to track the number of people viewing certain internet page or watching a certain video.

Each of the respondents claimed to always keep their eyes on the ball, and measure how well the certain content performed with the Russian audience and what the outcome of it is. Except for the basic instruments for data collection, such as tracking system of the number of viewers, web site visitors, reposts and hashtags on different social networks, which are done by every researched company (Franzen-Castle et al., 2012), Burger King Rus LLC. always tracks the effects of their marketing campaigns on a decent level, the company is familiar with brand awareness figures and what is more, it can easily see whether their marketing has gone well or not by the number of clients in the restaurants.

In contrast, J&J LLC. is not considered to be the model to emulate in terms of efficient measuring, as there is no evidence found to credit the marketing department for doing a sound measurement work, except for gathering information from simple
open sources described above. What is more, talking about Visa Inc., few efforts are done to analyse the effect of their campaigns. As it was proved in the research of Cha et al. (2010), it is not possible to calculate the effect on one project on the whole population of the country, for example, the effect of Financial Literacy Week on Russian consumers as a whole. Unlike Visa Inc., The Coca-Cola Russia was found to use advanced measuring systems, including Google tools to facilitate the measurement the content marketing success.

Overall, it is clear, that companies are not sufficiently measuring the effect of content marketing on Russian consumers and cannot be precise in the creation of their forthcoming content marketing.

5.2 Consumer orientation analysis

*Consumer features*

According to Pluzinski (1986), marketing actions can touch the audience on different levels. He presented a tripartite of consumer features, with Affect representing the sub-conscious level, encompassing emotions, feelings; Cognition, which, in its turn, is conscious, relating to the way a person thinks and represents its memory and learning; and Conation, which is purposive action or the way the person is attracted by doing freewill activities (ibid).

The cross-case analysis of the Western companies will enable the reader to understand the main features of Russian consumers, which create certain consumer behavioural models. They are, in their turn, the main characteristics marketers aim at when thinking of and creating a successful content marketing strategy.

As it was mentioned before, Burger King Rus LLC. attracts its customers by creating entertaining content that would evoke good emotions from the audience and perceive the brand as a friend. According to Pluzinski (1986), this is Affect, which is targeted at sub-conscious features potential and current customers. Visa Inc., in contrast, has been seen to put more efforts at educating the audience, mentioning the Financial Literacy Week, wealth-management tips and spendings suggestions. The company’s content marketing tends to be more teaching the consumers, based on the
assumptions that the audience is more likely to get caught by learning, which, in it turn, is Cognition.

The Coca-Cola Russia and J&J LLC. are probably the most sophisticated in the terms of targeting certain consumer features. In general, it might seem that the content marketing of these companies is also educational (Cognition), as for example J&J LLC. tries to teach its audience by many product related activities (giving practical pieces of advice on how to bathe your child, stressing the importance of bedtime ritual), as well as The Coca-Cola Russia holding seminars and writing articles devoted to the healthy lifestyle.

However, the content marketing of these two companies is more than just education, with all the features (Affect, Cognition, Conation) which are targeted by The Coca-Cola Russia and only Cognition and Conation by J&J LLC. This makes them one of the brightest examples of content marketing in Russia. They both organize special content marketing projects, that were aimed at consumer participating, or their purposive actions towards a certain thematic issue, which is also known as Conation. The best example of this is J&J LLC.’s campaign “Quit Smoking” and The Coca-Cola Russia’s “Sort with us”, where the audience is supposed to actively participate, being a part of this project. Moreover, content marketing of The Coca-Cola Russia engages its consumers into the content of magic, bright and cheerful world of The Coca-Cola Russia creating good emotions in people’s minds, what, in relation to the theory by Pluzinski (1986), represents the direction of the content marketing strategy towards Affect.

**Russian consumer behavioral models**

Theory suggests that Russian consumers have distinctive features, which differentiate them from consumers from other countries (Johanson, 2006). However, the analysis of the empirical data demonstrates that most of the statements about Russian consumer behavioral models provided in the theory by Nielsen Global Survey (2013), Krasilnikova (2013), Adindex (2013) were reflected in the practices of the researched companies.

In particular, the fact, that Russian consumers rely on the recommendations of people they can trust, who they consider to be experts in a certain field goes in line with the data provided by Nielsen (2013). Based on this behavioral model, both J&J LLC. and
The Coca-Cola Russia organize some of their content marketing projects. For example, J&J LLC. actively engages professional medical experts in its program related to the Johnson’s baby brand and pharmaceutical goods so that they could consult people via the web-site. The company involves celebrities, bloggers, and sportsmen in its campaigns devoted to quitting smoking, and fighting against women’s low self-esteem, as advisers and professionals in their fields, who could conciliate participants of the projects as well as other audience and build the bridge of trust among the company’s content marketing and consumers. The Coca-Cola Russia follows the same strategy in terms of engagement of ‘reliable people’ in its projects as J&J LLC. The company collaborates with various public people, whose image coincides with the message provided in the content of the campaign. As for Visa Inc., in spite of the fact that the company does not resort to the cooperation with popular people, it provides its target groups with the opportunity to attend lectures and seminars of highly educated and trustworthy people in the financial sphere. The examples of these companies can demonstrate a trend, approving the above-mentioned theoretical statement. The only company, which does not follow this consumer behavioral model is Burger King Rus LLC., which does not conduct any projects and campaigns where they could use the images of well-known people due to the lack of resources. However, the company involves celebrities in its traditional advertising campaigns.

As the theory suggests, Russian consumers are fond of new products (Nielsen, 2013), the proof was found in the cases of Visa Inc., The Coca-Cola Russia, and J&J LLC. In particular, Visa Inc. actively delivers new information about know-how connected with the financial sphere, for example, promotion of wireless payment. The Coca-Cola Russia uploads information about the launch of new gadgets and devices on the digital market on its portal, while J&J relates its content marketing projects to the innovative products, for instance, its program ‘Quit smoking’ is related to an absolutely innovative spray from smoking.

An interesting tendency was noticed: three out of four companies focus their content marketing campaigns on the social issues in Russia, identified by them. For instance, J&J champions for lives of the Russians without smoking. By its campaign ‘Quit smoking’, the company shows how important it is to take care of one’s health, lead a healthy lifestyle and do sports. This idea is shared by The Coca-Cola Russia as well
with its ‘In motion’ program devoted to encouraging Russian citizens to live actively. These cases show that companies follow the consumer behavioral trend stated by Krasilnikova (2013) saying that the Russians tend to become more attentive to their health. At the same time, the companies contribute to developing this trend by their content marketing projects.

The other examples of raising Russian social issues in their content marketing is championing against low level of self-esteem, inferiority complex of Russian women by J&J LLC.; low level of financial literacy and inability to manage one’s spending properly by Visa Inc.; and the problem of culture of domestic waste sorting by The Coca-Cola Russia. Therefore, it can be seen that three researched companies not only aim at delivering their content to their targeted audience but also try to work on the social issues of the whole country and help the population to improve the way they live and advance the country on the whole.

As for Burger King Rus LLC., its content marketing strategy differs from the ones of the other researched companies as it was already mentioned. In particular, due to the lack of resources, different target group, different aim and message of the content, the company does not conduct such social programs within their content marketing strategy. That is why the company orients itself on other Russian consumer behavioral models. Particularly, the company identified that their target audience represented by the young generation of people below 35 years old, actively using the Internet, tend to look for aggressive and provocative content, what was not identified by the theory.
6. Conclusion

This chapter concludes the research by mainly answering the research question, providing a revised conceptual model. Further on, the theoretical, as well as empirical implications, are discussed followed by the limitations of the paper. The chapter finally suggests the limitations and future research directions.

6.1 Answer to the research question

Based on the problem discussion and identified research gap, the following research question was set:

**How do Western companies build their content marketing strategies in the Russian environment?**

Later on, the research question and sub-questioned related to it were answered on the basis of the theoretical knowledge and a conceptual model was created (Figure 3). However, the interviews conducted with the case companies representatives allowed to obtain relevant data and answer the sub-research questions more accurately.

Sub RQ1: **What steps are undertaken by Western companies during the process of building the content marketing strategy in the Russian environment?**

The empirical findings approved the theory, that the Wester companies go through all the steps of building content marketing strategy in Russian environment. This means that they first collect and process relevant information and big data about the Russian audience, as it is done by Burger King Rus LLC., J&J LLC., The Coca-Cola Russia and Visa Inc. The companies claim that understanding of the audience is the crucial element in their content marketing strategy in Russia. Secondly, the companies choose a suitable time for introducing the content marketing in order to achieve the maximum effect of it, though it was not seen crucial for every company, as The Coca-Cola Russia and Visa Inc. create a lot of content, which is not directly linked to their products. Thirdly, all of the case companies create the content in the form of articles, books or the whole projects, based on the goals that they set. These goals are found to be of more educational nature, and most case companies encompass a combination of approaches (educational+entertaining+editorial), except for Burger King Rus LLC., which produces only entertaining content. Further on, they promote the created content through the Content Marketing Pyramid, which
means finding suitable channels for distributing the content. There, a surprisingly
decent number of live projects held for the Russian audience was found. However, it
is obvious that the main efforts are made to promote the content through the Internet.
Finally, the last step is measuring the effect of the content marketing, though it is
argued that the companies are doing it very poorly, as only The Coca-Cola Russia
uses advanced tools for identification the effectiveness of the content marketing and
can track the effect to have a good basis for future operations.

Sub RQ2: How do features of Russian customers influence the process of building
companies’ content marketing strategy?

The analysis of the empirical findings has demonstrated that customers and their
features play a vital role in the process of building content marketing strategies by
Western companies on the Russian market. Basing on the experience of the
researched companies, it was found out that when building content marketing, the
companies choose which features, namely, Affect, Cognition or Conation, the
content will deal with. As the findings have shown, the most developed content
marketing strategies deal with all these features, what provides them with more
opportunities to be competitive. However, it was identified that companies base their
approach for reaching the audience through content marketing, on their aims:
whether they want to build educational, editorial or entertaining content. The most
widespread approach to Russian customers appeared to be educational, in other
words, most of the researched companies deal with such customer feature as
Cognition.

According to the analysis, Russian consumer behavioral models need to be taken into
consideration by Western companies operating in Russian environment as far as they
define the trends, following which the companies will assure the competitiveness of
their content marketing activities. A few Russian consumer behavioral models were
identified during the analysis of gained data. Firstly, Russian consumers rely on the
opinion of the experts in a particular field and people, who they trust, to a great
extent. Secondly, Russian consumers are fond of innovations, try to keep abreast of
development and keep their eyes on new information and new products. Thirdly,
Russian consumers are becoming more worried about their health.
The answers to the sub-research questions supported by both theoretical knowledge and the analysis of the empirical findings enabled to reach the main purpose of the research, namely, to answer the main research question and investigate how Western companies build their content marketing strategies in the Russian environment. Therefore, the following revised conceptual model (Figure 4) is created, based on the combination of the theoretical and empirical analysis of the process.

Figure 4 Revised Conceptual Model

Source: Own Figure (based on literature review and empirical data)
During the process of conducting the empirical research it was approved that as it was stated in the theory (Pluzinski et al., 1986), Russian customer features form the customer behavioral models, which have a great influence on the content marketing strategies built by Western companies for the Russian environment. However, combining this idea with the content marketing cycle, suggested in the theory (Macdonald, 2015), it was found out that Western companies’ content marketing strategy is directly influenced by the customer behavioral models only on the first step of content marketing cycle, when marketers gather the necessary data about their audience’s behavior and try to understand them as much as possible. After this step, only already collected information can be used by a company, according to which other steps of the cycle are conducted. Therefore, it is concluded that it is the Understanding the audience step, which content Creation, as well as its Promotion, directly depend on. This is shown by the arrows pointing from Understanding the audience box to Creation and Promotion ones. As the last step of the cycle, Measuring, in its turn, means going back to the customers and collecting the results of the implementation of company’s content marketing strategy and is shown by the arrow pointing from Measuring to Consumer orientation block (Figure 4).

The need to transform the Conceptual Model created on the basis of the theory results from the above-mentioned findings concerning the correlation between consumer features and content marketing strategy and, in particular, the steps of content marketing cycle. All in all, this thesis is filling the knowledge gap of building the content marketing strategy by Western companies in the Russian environment, which is considered to be promising and worth entering (Baltes, 2015).

6.2 Theoretical implication

In conditions of the lack of research on the content marketing strategy building (Harad, 2013; Forouzandeh et al., 2014; Davis, 2013), the current research is seen as a contribution to the existing knowledge. In particular, this study has found out the steps of content building undergone by Western companies in the Russian environment and identified the influence of Russian customers features on companies’ content marketing, what has helped to investigate the whole process of building content marketing strategy of Western companies in the Russian
environment. The consumer orientation of the Western companies building their content marketing strategy for the Russian environment has been studied in the paper, what represents a significant contribution to the theoretical knowledge in the field of international content marketing, which was not studied before. The major characteristics of Russian consumers were found, forming behavioural models and making Russian consumers different and authentic from any other national groups and societies. Based on the current research the knowledge of the content marketing strategy can be further developed in future scientific articles, giving a better understanding of content marketing as a part of global marketing strategy of an organization.

6.3 Managerial implication

The research can be of a great use for the managers of the Western organizations that are considering going to Russian market or have already established the business in this country. Indeed, marketers are constantly trying to enhance the marketing strategy and the present paper will give them a sound empirical research, based on the experience of four multinational companies, that set a tone in content marketing strategy. Here, it can be found, what the main steps of building the content marketing strategy are, what is done successfully and what aspects should be revised by these companies.

Basing on the experience of the case companies, the marketers will be able to adopt the content marketing practices in order to make the marketing strategy as a whole more efficient and successful. Moreover, the present study gives a formulation of main Russian consumer behavioural models, that the content marketing should be targeted at in order to be competitive. Therefore, marketers can have a closer look at Russian customer concerns as well as modern social trends in order to successfully communicate information about the products, services or technologies adjusting to the behavioral, cultural, and many others features to enable the firm to gain competitive advantage.
6.4 Limitations

One of the limitations of the study refers to the fact this paper is focused on the process of building the content marketing strategy in the Russian environment only. Although the choice was supported, as far as Russian environment is one of those, on which no research was conducted before, the findings cannot be used in the other developing countries or on the developed ones. In addition, the number of the case companies is also an important limitation, as the findings, unfortunately, cannot be generalized, basing on the experience of four case companies.

Moreover, the research is limited by studying the practices of Western companies, in particular, founded in the USA, which was an unintentional occurrence. These companies might have different approaches to building content marketing strategies in foreign markets from companies based in Asia, for instance. Furthermore, all the researched companies are multinational corporations, which means that content marketing practice of SMEs was not taken into consideration.

Basing on these limitations, the directions for further research, which is supposed to be beneficial, are suggested below.

6.5 Suggestions for future research

Studying content marketing from the different perspectives is vital for understanding this phenomenon thoroughly. Therefore, several directions can be suggested for the potential research to give more knowledge in this field.

First of all, the content marketing of Western companies can be described in conditions of different countries, regions, cultures and economies of different maturity level, as far as the empirical findings gathered in the Russian environment might be different even from the countries with the similar culture, such as Belarus or Ukraine.

Secondly, there is an opportunity to study the role of content marketing strategy in the success of the company, providing the data demonstrating whether the strategy brings benefits to the company and is worth implementing.

Thirdly, it would be a research of a high value if it presents content marketing from the consumer perspective, which means that the success of the content marketing
strategy needs to be studied among the audience, demonstrating the reasons why particular audience perceives content marketing activities of companies in a certain way and considers them to be successful.

Finally, another research could be done, which would be mirror-like to the current one. Specifically, the process of building content marketing strategies by Russian companies in a foreign environment would be a research of a great value, complementing the knowledge on content marketing in terms of internationalized companies.
7. References

Literature


Last access: [Accessed 4 Apr. 2017].


**Interviews**


Appendix

Interview guide: English

Content Marketing Strategy

1. Does your company conduct content marketing activity?

2. To what extent does your company depend on its parent company in terms of content marketing strategy?

3. Is the content marketing strategy of the company in Russia different from the strategy in the country of origin?

4. What campaigns and projects does your company carry out within its content marketing strategy?

5. When do you launch your content marketing campaign?
   * before launching the product;
   * at the same time;
   * after launching the product?

If the respondent states, that the company adapts its content marketing strategy to the Russian market:

6. Why did the company decide to adapt its strategy to the Russian market?

7. What exactly are the changes? Were the changes made in
   * the content itself
   * the format of the content
   * the mode of its distribution?

8. What formats of the content do you use in the Russian market? Are they different from those in the country of origin? What is the exact difference between them?

9. What tools do you use to attract Russian consumer? Are they different from those in the country of origin? What is the exact difference between them?
If the respondent states, that the company does not adapt its content marketing strategy to the Russian market:

10. Why did the company decide not to change the strategy? Is the reason behind the similarity of the features of consumers and their perception of content? Or in the features of the content itself?

Consumer orientation

11. How do you conduct the analysis of the audience?

12. What methods do use to identify the features of the consumers?

13. How can you characterize your typical Russian consumer?

14. What features of the Russian consumer are mostly relevant for building your content marketing strategy?

15. What are the differences between your typical Russian consumer and the one from the company’s country of origin?

16. What role did consumers play in the decision to adapt/not to adapt your content marketing strategy to the Russian market?